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## **Downtown KCK gets boost from new homes**

By: Mark Wiebe

A blighted medical building landscaped with overgrown weeds.

That *used* to be what was in the 600 block of Nebraska Avenue in Kansas City, Kan. The block now boasts 58 units of two-story townhomes, landscaped with newly laid sod.

On Friday, civic leaders gathered to celebrate the opening of what developers and city officials call downtown's first new multifamily development in 30 years.

Mayor Carol Marinovich, speaking for the Unified Government of Wyandotte County, praised the project for "taking a blighted area...and turning into something that's going to provide good housing."

New housing and new residents, she said, are key to sparking redevelopment: "This is such a positive addition to the downtown area."

Called Turtle Hill Townhomes, the development features two-bedroom and three-bedroom rental units, each with 1 ½ bathrooms. Two units are accessible for disabled persons.

With rents ranging from \$500 to \$635, the development is designed to appeal to those with moderate incomes.

Developers say they're committed to making sure the town homes attract residents who will take care of the property. Applicants must submit to a screening process that includes criminal background checks, a review of employment history and visits to applicants' homes to see how they care for their property.

"If an applicant passes that kind of screening, that's the kind of tenant we want, regardless of their income level," said John Harvey, executive director of city Vision Ministries, a nonprofit organization that developed the town homes in partnership with Bank of America.

The project also received help from the Unified Government, which has approved a deal allowing property taxes generated by the development to pay for \$697,000 worth of infrastructure improvements, including new sewers and sidewalks.

City Vision Ministries was founded in 1992 by three ministers committed to revitalizing urban core neighborhoods in Kansas City, Kan., mostly in the northeast. Harvey, one of those pastors, later became the organization's director.

City Vision already has orchestrated the \$4.7 million redevelopment of the Turtle Hill Neighborhood, just north of the townhomes. That project gave the area more than 50 new and renovated homes.

City Vision also plans to convert the old Kansas City, Kan., City Hall building at Sixth Street and Ann Avenue into more than 40 lofts apartments.

Harvey said the interest shown in the town homes – to date, leases have been signed for 18 units – demonstrates that there's a growing market for downtown housing.

“This is becoming a ver alive, attractive community, he said. “We're seeing there are a lot of other folks who believe that downtown KCK is a great place to live.”