

50TH ANNIVERSARY FACELIFT

The High Rise Celebrates their Golden Anniversary with a \$16M Renovation

The High Rise has been a part of the Great Bend, Kansas skyline since the building's construction in 1972. The building was originally built to accommodate the growing number of senior citizens in the Great Bend area.

"The High Rise has seen a lot of wear in the last 50 years and was in need of a renovation," says Lynn Fleming, Executive Director of the Great Bend Housing Authority. "We are excited for the upgrades that have been made and we are anxiously anticipating the final completion of the building later this summer. This is a great way to celebrate our golden anniversary."

The High Rise's first groundbreaking was held November 23rd, 1970 and the project was completed in the first few weeks of 1972. Originally costing \$1.8 million dollars to construct, the 12-story High Rise was home to people 62 and older with a few 2-bedroom units, but primarily one-bedroom and studio apartments. In April 2021, the Great Bend Housing

Authority broke ground on what would begin a \$16 million dollar renovation project, upgrading the whole building and converting most of the studio units into 1-bedroom units targeting individuals 55 years of age and older.

"We've opened up many of the walls between two studio apartments to make them into 1-bedroom units since those are more commonly requested," says Fleming. "We have also updated the age requirements for our building, focusing on seniors 55+. Other age groups can also apply, but at least 80% of our building will be reserved for senior housing."

In the months leading up to the renovation beginning, units were not being leased after people moved out, so that occupancy would be under 50% when construction began. Tenants were only living on the bottom 4 floors while construction took place on the top half of the building. "Once Phase One was complete

in January, we began the process of moving tenants up to the new units on the top floors," Fleming says. "After everyone was moved, construction began on the lower levels as Phase Two got started."

Hutton Construction, a Kansas-based general contractor, is leading the renovation. Since a massive multi-phase renovation like this is different than new construction, the GBHA staff has relied heavily on Hutton's expertise. "We have been so impressed with Hutton's team and the efficiencies and experience they've brought to this project," Fleming commented. "For example, they set up a 'workshop' of sorts on the top floor, which allowed them to pre-cut all of the various framing components they would need throughout the building. They also helped make recommendations on how to handle situations that arose during construction, and have been key in keeping things moving ahead on schedule."

The improvements being

made include each unit getting brand new cabinets and countertops, new appliances, new bathrooms, new light fixtures, new doors and trim, new flooring, and more. Upgrades were also made to the building common areas such as new paint, upgraded light fixtures and flooring, and a more open office and reception area. Behind the walls and ceilings, new electrical, plumbing, and duct work will also ensure the safety and functionality of the building for decades to come. "It's the little things that will really make a difference to the way the building feels for our tenants," Fleming says. "Not only will everything look and smell like new, but the upgrades we're making are practical as well. For example, the units used to have miniature appliances, but now will feature full sized refrigerators and ranges. They will also each have a unit doorbell, which they didn't have before."

Maintenance will also be much easier after the renovations are complete. Prior to the project being undertaken, any water leaks or plumbing issues would require an entire corner of the building being turned off for maintenance, occasionally requiring

the whole building's water supply to be temporarily turned off. Now, each unit has its own shut-off so no other tenants will be affected when one unit needs work done.

The High Rise Apartments is a pet-friendly, non-smoking, secured building located in downtown Great Bend within walking distance to many restaurants and local businesses. The stunning views of the city are a common perk of living there, but tenants also enjoy other amenities as well. A shared Great Room is available for tenants to use when entertaining family and friends on the 12th floor. Staff are full time and available on-site during the week for easy access and communication. Tenants also enjoy the community aspect of living in an apartment building, with friends and neighbors close by.

"Probably the biggest perk of living in the High Rise Apartments is that we are the most affordable senior living option in the area," Fleming added. "Not only is our rent based on income, but we also include all the utilities so tenants just make one flat payment each month and it's much easier to budget around. For people on a fixed

income, this is really important."

While the High Rise Apartments draws a lot of attention to the Great Bend Housing Authority, it's only one of the two programs operated by the organization. GBHA also operates a Section 8, tenant-based low-income housing assistance program, providing rent assistance for tenants that are leasing privately owned housing with other landlords in town. Both programs have waiting lists, and both require paperwork for income verification and reference checks. Operating the two housing programs are a total of four full-time employees handling tenant relations, operations, maintenance, security, and groundskeeping. The staff is overseen by a volunteer Board of Commissioners.

Applications are still being accepted for the newly renovated High Rise Apartments, and more information about the Great Bend Housing Authority can be found at www.gbhaks.com. The GBHA office is located inside the High Rise and is open five days per week at 1101 Kansas Avenue. For more information, contact GBHA at 620-793-7761.

