

A photograph of the Seward County Courthouse, a grand neoclassical building with a prominent red dome and white columns. The image is partially obscured by a large yellow circle that frames the text.

**SEWARD COUNTY CHAMBER &
DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP**

**LEGISLATIVE
PRIORITY AGENDA**

2023/2024



The advocacy role of the Seward County Chamber & Development Partnership (SCCDP) centers around three key components: educating its members, building relationships, and making Seward County more politically relevant as a strong, regional business community. To accomplish a successful advocacy program, SCCDP has developed this Legislative Priority Agenda that focuses on the support and fulfillment of the Seward County Vision Statement 2035.

As Seward County's sole economic development corporation, SCCDP acts as the voice for local business and is committed to ensuring a favorable economic, legal, and regulatory climate for the Seward County business community. Our advocacy mission is to publicly support policies that will protect our member business needs and facilitate economic growth and development in our region and state.

At all levels of government, well-intentioned initiatives can have unintended consequences. Without input from the local business community, these initiatives could adversely impact the ability of businesses to stay healthy, generate jobs, and contribute to the overall quality of life in Seward County. However, when business leaders communicate with their elected officials, better public policies result.

SCCDP'S LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS

The SCCDP is an advocate for business and promotes free enterprise. It is therefore a priority to support the Seward County business community by assisting in the cutting of red tape and removing excessive restrictions. Annually, the SCCDP Board of Directors approves the Legislative Priority Agenda as presented here. Throughout the year, based on surveys, polls, and through the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Nebraska Economic Developers Association legislative agendas, the Board may make issue-based resolutions on legislation, policies, referenda, and issues that may not be contained within this Agenda. The SCCDP will be proactive on issues of concern to its membership base, including the below topics listed in alphabetical order:

AGRICULTURE

Seward County is a proud collection of rural communities rooted in rich, agricultural history. Agriculture, agribusiness, livestock, and value-added agriculture producers all contribute to sustaining strong economic development and job creation across Seward County. To ensure the long-term viability of our economy's agricultural sector, it is important for leaders at the local, state, and federal levels of government to retain, develop, and adopt regulations that put Nebraska farmers and ranchers first.

BUDGET & TAXES

The SCCDP advocates for a culture of fiscal responsibility, equitable taxation that promotes and fosters a fair tax climate, and sound budgeting that will make Seward County a smart place to do business.

- SCCDP encourages structural reform of the tax system to reduce the reliance on property taxes to fund education and governmental entities.
- SCCDP advocates that the State of Nebraska must continue to have a truly balanced budget that relies on realistic revenue projections, pay all bills in a timely manner, and use accounting standards and practices that are transparent and straightforward.
- SCCDP will advocate for tax incentives that enable economic growth.
- SCCDP supports legislation that allows Seward County to be economically competitive with other communities and states.

CHILDCARE

Affordable, available, high-quality childcare is a critical component of fostering a thriving workforce and healthy community. The SCCDP is proactive in supporting the care, education, and healthy development of young children and encourages employers and business leaders to invest in and develop partnerships with local childcare programs. The SCCDP works with elected officials, business and industry leaders, educators, parents, and community stakeholders to advance effective, innovative early childhood policies and solutions.

- SCCDP supports legislation that expands access to high-quality programs and services for infants and toddlers in Seward County.
- SCCDP supports legislation that strengthens the early childhood workforce through talent recruitment and retention strategies, as well as access to resources and programs for ongoing professional development.
- SCCDP supports legislation that encourages the viability of childcare programs as important participants in Nebraska's business landscape.

CONNECTIVITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Connectivity has become one of the most important factors of economic success in the 21st century. Whether that be a community's proximity to state and federal roadways or a business' access to reliable and high-speed Internet, connectivity spurs economic growth. Therefore, the SCCDP supports improvements to our region's transportation and technological infrastructure, including the Interstate and State highway systems, railroads, airports, and broadband infrastructure.

- SCCDP supports sustainable funding sources for infrastructure improvements that are equitable throughout Nebraska.
- SCCDP supports the expansion of broadband connectivity to all communities and rural areas across Seward County.
- SCCDP supports policies that advance the development of the technological infrastructure needed for a modern community and believes fiber is the gold standard for a broadband backbone.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The regional economy is driven by the success of local businesses. Successful businesses produce the tax revenues that help Seward County provide the quality-of-life amenities and services needed to attract and retain citizens. Seward County must be a vibrant place to do business. Similarly, the region must focus on providing first-class customer service to be friendly to business and worthy of business investment. The SCCDP supports economic development policies and initiatives that will make our region's businesses stronger, encourage business investment, and improve productivity.

- SCCDP advocates for balanced local, state, and federal business regulations that align with social and economic realities.
- SCCDP believes that proposed legislation, regulations, and permitting processes must be viewed from the perspective of the small business owner and should consider the intended and unintended impacts of those proposals, especially in terms of the cost of doing business.
- SCCDP supports creating an environment that fosters an entrepreneurial spirit for small and emerging businesses.
- SCCDP encourages enhancing infrastructure to increase business efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and self-sufficiency.
- SCCDP supports continued collaboration between regional workforce development service areas to better serve businesses throughout the region.
- SCCDP supports strong regional economic development collaboration and encourages public and private entities to financially support such regional efforts.

EDUCATION & CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Education is an integral part of economic growth and development. Good schools create a desirable community, attracting new families and opportunities. Therefore, adequate funding for Seward County's schools is imperative. Public and private education should provide a well-educated workforce that will attract new employers and retain and expand existing businesses. Business and education are intertwined; therefore, SCCDP encourages business involvement in all aspects of public and private education.

- SCCDP supports the development of programs that address talent pipeline development and meet brain drain reduction goals across Seward County.
- SCCDP encourages strengthening the education system by developing a revised, comprehensive K-12 funding formula that will address critical issues including, but not limited to, the following: teacher shortages, school outcomes, graduation rates, dropout rates, reading levels, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and career readiness.
- SCCDP promotes access to high-quality, life-long career development for Seward County's residents.
- SCCDP supports efforts to create quality programs and services that will increase entrepreneurial activities.
- SCCDP will continue advocating for state and federal programs that directly support the missions and goals of higher education institutions in Seward County.
- SCCDP will continue to promote strong and well-networked partnerships between the business community, higher educational institutions, and local public and private schools.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Every person who works in Seward County should have the option to live in Seward County. The SCCDP fully supports a consistent local, state, and federal regulatory environment that promotes the safe and quality construction of income-appropriate housing, with special attention to workforce housing. This includes the implementation and growth of all available economic development tools and incentives where gaps exist that inhibit housing development. The SCCDP will advocate for and encourage the retention of the following programs including, but not limited to, the following:

- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund (NAHTF)
- National Housing Trust Fund (HTF)
- HOME Investment Partnerships Fund (HOME)
- Rural Workforce Housing Fund (RWHF)

The SCCDP also supports programs that create opportunities for first-time home buyers, encourage homeowners to rehabilitate existing housing units, and incentivize the construction of workforce housing units.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Government, at every level, should be efficient and responsive to the needs of its businesses and residents. The SCCDP strongly supports increased collaboration and sharing of resources between local units of government to improve the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery to taxpayers and businesses. The SCCDP will advocate for policies that encourage the development of public-private and public-public partnerships.

MAINTAINING A HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

Seward County is ready for growth. Its location and access to transportation hubs and educational institutions, as well as its placemaking/economic development mindset, are all on target for quality growth. However, growth must not impact the high quality of life for which communities across Seward County are known.

- SCCDP will advocate for proper preparation for growth including planning for the timely construction of infrastructure improvements that will accommodate the county's anticipated growth.
- SCCDP recognizes that Seward County's quality of life is directly supported by the economic health and continued operation of a robust local economy, the tourism industry, the arts, public facilities, and civic and cultural organizations.

WELCOMING COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Seward County is a desirable place to live, work, and play. Seward County communities and its people have always been characterized by friendliness, contentment, and a welcoming attitude. These attributes should be a driving force in the attraction of a diverse array of visitors and prospective residents. The SCCDP supports all efforts to make Seward County a more welcoming place for people from all walks of life.