

Without a permit, "unpermitted fees" could start at \$5,000 for a new home or dwelling.

Other unpermitted fees could include \$225 for a sign, \$1,800 for a kennel or \$6,000 for a conditional use permit-wireless structure. Other fees tied to the county's zoning regulations could also be added.

Permits are required for good-sized chicken coops, she-sheds, kennels, wireless towers or other structures in the zoning regulations.

If, however, the home

Planning commission members also looked at unpermitted fees in other areas of the state and nation.

"Ninety-nine point nine percent of the people in the county know and understand that you need to get a permit to build something in the county," Hargis said in a recent interview.

The fee structure is aimed at the one-tenth of 1 percent that do not follow the rule, he said.

Hargis is retired from a 30-year career

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side children who have experienced abuse and neglect, and to advocate for these children as they navigate the foster care system. The money raised will go directly toward recruiting and training CASA volunteers, as well as providing enrichment activities for the children involved.

With \$8,000 raised by over 30 donations, Bright Beginnings Child Development Center reached half of their goal for replacing play equipment at their center. At Bright Beginnings, a ministry out of Seward United Methodist Church, children are given the space to learn, grow, and play in a Christian environ-

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STEPHANIE CROSTON/SCI

Lynley Koranda, 2, watches her bubbles float away during a family fun night April 29 at Living Word Lutheran Church. The event was sponsored by Sixpence, CASA and Hope Crisis Center.



DOUG CARROLL/SCI

The Force is strong

Ed McLaughlin of Seward pretends to battle Darth Vader as his daughter Clara, age 11, and son Derek, 8, look on prior to the showing of "Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith" at the Rivoli on April 30. Read more about the Star Wars visitors at www.sewardindependent.com.

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN
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When you invest in a teacher, you invest in a child's future – and the future of a community.

That is the driving motivation behind Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Education Workforce (KNEW), a first-of-its-kind

initiative to increase the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators in Nebraska.

The University of Nebraska at Kearney, Nebraska Extension and Communities for Kids are leading the program together, and Seward County is one of 15 counties participating. The program launched in October and is supported by a \$2 million grant from the United

States Department of Education sponsored by Sen. Deb Fischer.

Seward County Chamber and Development Partnership President and CEO Jonathan Jank said Seward County is honored to have been asked to participate in the initiative. The county's membership to Communities for Kids and its

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KNEW

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focus on workforce development and early childhood education were major factors in its selection.

Based on the input of members, high-quality child care was named a key priority for the chamber's most recent strategic plan, Jank said.

High-quality early childhood education is linked with better health, higher productivity in society and more, SCCDP Vice President and Director of Community Affairs Jacob Jennings, who leads the chamber's child care efforts, said.

"High-quality early learning experiences are the foundation for lifelong success," Philip Lai, associate professor at the UNK College of Education and a KNEW initiative leader, said. "By growing the number of skilled educators in Nebraska, we're making a direct investment in children, families and the future of our communities."

Additionally, a report from the non-profit Voices for Children in Nebraska found that 84 of Nebraska's 93 counties do not have enough spots in licensed child care facilities to meet the demand.

A survey from Nebraska Extension and We Care for Kids found that almost

a third of parents with children ages 5 and younger left the workforce because they could not find affordable child care. Initiatives like KNEW can help combat this.

Jank attended a meeting of 30 individuals from participating KNEW counties in March. He said he is confident that if everyone in the state works together by sharing their experiences and successes, the outcome will be positive every time.

"These individuals are sort of like our point person with the communities," Lai said. "They play a big role attending meetings and essentially informing us of what's going on out there in those 15 rural communities in Nebraska. They really are like the champions of their communities and highlighting what they need and what is working."

To make an impact, the KNEW initiative will craft innovative solutions, build local capacity and strengthen professional development opportunities for childhood professionals. UNK will also research the best practices for recruiting and retaining educators through KNEW. Lai said he is looking forward to getting hands-on with Nebraska communities and organizations.

"I think a lot of times, in academia or higher education, we're sort of disconnected with the communities," Lai said. "This is actually a chance to work with the communities."

As part of KNEW, Nebraska Extension is leading 16 hours of professional development for educators in participating counties. Educators are required to participate in professional development, so providing it at no cost can help reduce operating costs for them or their organizations. The educators will be paid for their time, and the development will go from May to December.

Lai said there will be 100 spots open the first year and 100 spots open the second year. UNK asked communities to find at least three local providers to participate, and Seward found 12.

"I think that's just a testament that our local childcare providers are really high-quality, and they care about the work they're doing," Jennings said. "They want to be professionals themselves and grow in their career."

They will have eight hours of professional development online that is centered on emotional wellness and conducting supportive conversations with others and another eight hours of

reflective consultation.

Emily Manning, one of the Extension educators who will lead reflective consultation groups, said a lot of emotional labor goes into being an educator and caring for children. Supporting educators' well-beings not only helps them but also helps retain high-quality teachers and combat the industry's high turnover rate.

"We want educators to feel well and feel good about what they do," she said. "I want them to feel excited to go to work, and I don't want anyone to be experiencing burnout or compassion fatigue in their role."

Manning said this initiative helps give children the tools and skills they need to be successful adults while also helping them have a quality childhood. She said investing in professional development in educators is investing in high-quality experiences for young children in the area.

"I think we're just really lucky in Seward County to have so many people who care about education, who care about the well-being of educators and who care about the children," Manning said. "I think that's kind of unique, or at a higher level maybe, than in other communities, and I just feel really proud."

Zoning

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as a state groundwater geologist, has written about the Dakota Aquifer that runs under the eastern third of Seward County, and moved to the area southeast of Garland 28

The eastern third of the county lies over the Dakota Aquifer, which Hargis said is a fragile and limited aquifer that is shallower than the Ogallala Aquifer to the west and does not easily recharge

Agriculture 1 (A-1), four houses in Transitional Agriculture 1 (TA-1), and eight houses in Residential 1 (R-1). A-1 and TA-1 lots require five acres per home, as noted on the department's website.

Prior to the implementation has worked on the fee schedule for several months, Hargis said it is "not a done deal."

The Planning Commission will conduct a public hearing on the proposal at its regular May meeting at 7 p.m. Monday, May 10, at

commission could amend or approve the plan as is to bring it before the commissioners for formal adoption.

Seward County Commission Chair Misty Ahmic said in the time since Marissa Pfile became the

comprehensive zoning regulations is expected to be in front of the Seward County commissioners as soon as June but will also require review by the Seward County attorney's office. The county was at this same point with