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# Kearney Tomorrow 2050 | Community Vision Summary

## ◆ Top Community Strengths

Participants across all sessions consistently praised Kearney for being:

- **Safe, Family-Oriented, and Supportive**  
A small-town feel with a large-city impact. Residents take care of each other, and there's a strong sense of community and pride.
- **Education & Healthcare Hub**  
Excellent schools, UNK and CCC, and multiple healthcare providers contribute to Kearney's role as a regional center for education and medical services.
- **Collaborative Leadership Culture**  
Kearney thrives on partnerships—whether between churches, nonprofits, schools, or civic leaders. There's a community-first mentality that builds trust and fuels innovation.
- **Generous & Philanthropic**  
A strong culture of giving and volunteerism powers much of the community's success, with support for tax initiatives and community-wide projects.
- **Recreation & Outdoor Amenities**  
Parks, hike and bike trails, and splash pads were highlighted frequently. There's excitement around new amenities like the Sportsplex and the Creative District downtown.
- **Tourism & Arts**  
The Kearney Community Theatre, local festivals, museums, and arts initiatives help define the city's vibrant cultural identity.

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## ◆ Key Challenges and Areas for Growth

The sessions and responses revealed several pressing issues that the community feels should be addressed:

### Housing

- Affordable and diverse housing options are limited—especially for young professionals, healthcare workers, and seniors.
- Creative solutions like micro-lofts, tiny home communities, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) were suggested.

### Childcare

- Limited options for extended hours (12-hour shifts), long waitlists, and staffing shortages have made childcare a critical concern.

- Employer-supported childcare and multi-generational models were discussed.

### **Transportation & Walkability**

- Lack of public transportation, especially at night or on weekends, is a barrier—particularly for individuals without vehicles or those needing handicap accessibility.
- More pedestrian-safe crossings, bike lanes, and even “blue zone” infrastructure (walkable, healthy design) were advocated for.
- Strategic traffic improvements, especially along 2nd Avenue and near schools, were also raised.

### **Workforce & Economic Opportunity**

- Retaining UNK graduates and young talent is a challenge due to limited high-paying jobs and housing.
- There’s interest in positioning Kearney as a hub for innovation, tech, and entrepreneurship, including business incubators and startup capital.

### **Downtown & North Side Growth**

- Calls for enhancing downtown with rooftop bars, boutique hotels, art alleyways, and an expanded farmers market.
- The north side needs revitalization—restaurants, indoor entertainment, and a breakfast café were among specific ideas.

### **Flights & Regional Connectivity**

- Better flight routes (particularly east and south), including reinstating the Chicago connection, were strongly requested.
- Some expressed bold long-term ideas like high-speed trains or autonomous transit systems.

### **Communication & Access to Services**

- More visibility for nonprofits and support systems is needed, along with multi-lingual service offerings.
- Ideas included a centralized Advocacy Center and stronger UNK-community volunteer networks.

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## ◆ **Big Ideas & “Magic Wand” Concepts**

When asked what they'd create if anything were possible, participants shared bold and creative visions:

- Outdoor Waterpark or Inflatable Lake Destination
- Expanded and Reimagined Viaero Center for top-tier concerts, events, and sports

- Drive-in Movie Theater or Outdoor Amphitheater
  - Kearney Riverwalk or "Freedom Trail" Walking Tour
  - Local News Station or Campus-Community Media Partnership
  - Large Retail & Dining Additions – “The Big 3” (Costco, Chick-fil-A, Olive Garden)
  - Mural Walk, Light Installations, and Instagrammable Landmarks to enhance tourism appeal
  - Technology & Research Campus – modeled after Rapid City’s “Outdoor Campus West”
  - Tour of Kearney Passport Program to promote local tourism and discovery
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## ◆ Emerging Themes to Guide Kearney’s Future

### Innovation & Education Hub

- Leverage UNK partnerships
- Invest in tech-based workforce and entrepreneurial ecosystems
- Support research in agriculture, healthcare, and sustainability

### Hospitality, Tourism, Sports, and Entertainment Growth

- Activate the north side and downtown
- Attract events and visitors through unique venues and festivals
- Make Kearney a year-round destination

### Housing Growth & Development

- Strategically address the shortage of affordable and diverse housing
- Create zoning solutions and incentives to stimulate development

### Walkability, Safety & Visual Appeal

- Improve curb appeal citywide
- Rethink traffic flow and pedestrian safety
- Expand and connect trails and public spaces

### Community-First Leadership

- **Ensure equity and inclusion guide decisions**
  - **Prioritize integrity, transparency, and holistic well-being over personal interests**
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## **Next Steps**

**With these ideas and themes now gathered, the path forward includes:**

- **Refining priorities into short- and long-term strategies**
  - **Engaging more voices, especially youth and underserved populations**
  - **Aligning partnerships between city, education, nonprofits, and business sectors**
  - **Moving from ideas into action**
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