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### **KLT-City of Lawrence Partnership, First of Its Kind in Kansas**

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The 1994, City of Lawrence Parks and Recreation comprehensive plan included the action statement "to preserve natural corridors and purchase land in preparation for the future growth of the city." The idea behind the statement was that it is more affordable to purchase land ahead of development and a more successful tactic than working to provide neighborhood parks after developers had completed housing projects.

Prior to the publishing of that plan, Parks and Recreation staff were already exploring opportunities to acquire land in northwest Lawrence. In 1992, contact was made with owners of land south of and adjacent to Bob and Betty Lichtwardt's property; no sale occurred then.

The April, 1994, initial discussions with the Lichtwardts yielded a proposed donation with restrictions that the city had not previously experienced. Because the restrictions--in the form of a conservation easement to be held by the Kansas Land Trust--limited the land use and types of facilities permitted, city staff were concerned that creating a usable space would be difficult.

In the summer of 1994, Parks and Recreation Department Director Fred DeVictor revisited the land south of the Lichtwardts' property. That parcel had been sold to a developer who, ultimately in 1999, sold 23 acres to the city. This purchase meant that amenities--such as a parking lot, restroom, and shelter--could be made accessible to visitors to a wilderness park on the Lichtwardts' land.

Bob and Betty Lichtwardt then brought to the city's attention that the property west of theirs was available to purchase. Still before the Lichtwardts' donation was formalized, the city purchased those 20 acres-- with no restrictions-- which would add to the area preserved as open space and for recreational opportunities.

In late 2001, the city was approached by Francis Kelly and Cheri Varvil with an opportunity to purchase land of theirs-- with restrictions--west of the 20 acres just purchased. Once again motivated by the Lichtwardts' expressed intentions of eventually donating their land, the city agreed to purchase 14 acres of Francis and Cheri's land, with a conservation easement to be held by KLT. The sale to the city closed in April, 2002.

Meanwhile, Bob and Betty Lichtwardt donated a conservation easement on 37 of their wooded acres to KLT in December, 2001; at a meeting in December, the Lawrence City Commission voted unanimously to accept the Lichtwardts' offer to give their 40 acres to the city for a future park; and the transaction was finished in early 2002.

The result of the combined purchases and the Lichtwardts' donation is 97 contiguous acres of green space in one of the key paths of the community's growth. "The city has benefited greatly from Bob and Betty Lichtwardt's generous donation," commented Fred DeVictor. "Their desire to preserve their natural corridor coupled with insight on the surrounding property will benefit the growing community."

Fred continued: "Preparing for the future by working with property owners today is one of the most successful tasks that a parks and recreation department can accomplish. The value in having open space once an area is developed is recognized when you see families visit a park, and when the community uses the public space to enjoy themselves."

The Lichtwardts' gift of land and the land purchases have helped fulfill the city's initiative to preserve open space; however the concept of owning land with limitations is new for the city. The opportunity to work with the Kansas Land Trust to preserve the area has created a new partnership between the city and KLT--and the first instances in the State of Kansas of a nonprofit organization holding conservation easements on government land.

KLT's Board of Directors president donna luckey said, "The Lichtwardt and the Kelly/Varvil easements represent an important step for KLT. By working with the City of Lawrence and its Parks and Recreation Department, we hope to demonstrate how public-private partnerships can successfully protect our natural heritage."

The possibility of that city-KLT relationship proved invaluable in helping balance landowners' desires to preserve the natural characteristics of the land with the city's need to provide for park visitors.