



FREESTATE ELECTRIC  
COOPERATIVE, INC.

# The Outlet

## FREESTATE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

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**Mark Wulfkuhle**  
Lawrence

### STAFF

**Christopher Parr**  
CEO

## DISTRICT OFFICES

### MCLOUTH OFFICE

P.O. Box 70  
McLouth, KS 66054-0070

### TOPEKA OFFICE

1100 S.W. Auburn Road  
Topeka, KS 66615

### OFFICE HOURS

Monday-Thursday  
7 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

## NOTICE

FreeState has contracted with GMS to do a GIS Audit. For more information, visit <https://freestate.pub/GIS>.

## Looking Forward With Big Decisions

Have you ever been faced with a decision that required you to look into the future 30 years? FreeState Electric Cooperative has. And we're ready to tell you about that decision.

When FreeState consolidated in 2017, one of the first questions was, "what are you going to do with two buildings?" The answer — to continue operating as we had prior to consolidation, which we've done for the past eight years.

Looking forward, however we need to make some adjustments.

Safety and service are priorities at your cooperative. We start each day with the thought that everyone is going home the same way they came in. And we're going to make sure our members get the first-class service they deserve. Because that's what we do.

Trustees and leadership at the cooperative have been mulling this question over for the past five years, and now it's time to act.

A year ago, trustees and leaders sat down and jotted down goals for our future at FreeState. One of those goals involved our facilities and how they were serving both employees and members. When we tackled this goal there were three key considerations for making decisions.

- ▶ Least impactful to members by ensuring minimal disruption to service, maintaining accessibility to payment options and communicating clearly about any operational changes.
- ▶ Most economical for members by ensuring

financial stewardship, leveraging cash flow and utilizing a construction work plan.

- ▶ Least disruptive and most beneficial for staff and members while enhancing efficiency, satisfaction and safety.

Trustees and leadership were faced with a big decision. How do we build a cooperative for 30 years from now? We engaged a third-party to help us sort through information and scenarios to achieve our goals. It took several months of consideration to arrive at the decision to make the Topeka office the cooperative headquarters and the McLouth office our operations center, which would no longer be open to the public.

Our feature story on Page 12B goes into more detail about how we arrived at this decision and how it will impact our members.

We understand that this change will bring a mix of emotions, and that is something we are all dealing with, but at the end of the day we have to do what is best for the cooperative and the future of powering our members.

We hope that you will understand the needs we have on an operational level and how modifying what we currently have (rather than building new) is the best way forward for our employees, members and the financial health of the cooperative.



Chris Parr

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# New Horizons: Same Skyline

FreeState begins a five-phase renovation project making the Topeka office into the cooperative headquarters and utilizing the McLouth office as our operations center.

The time has come for a major decision about the future of FreeState facilities in Topeka and McLouth.

Electric cooperatives across the country are choosing to either build new administration facilities or make significant renovations to modernize existing facilities due to not only growth, but a changing landscape for workplaces focused on efficiency and safety. Renovation of current spaces makes the most financial sense. Construction will provide the space necessary to support growth and efficiency long into the future.

FreeState has fielded questions about operating two facilities since 2019. Leadership and the board have taken a closer look at facilities after evaluating our needs, adding specialized positions and recognizing changes in the energy industry and our growth potential. As the cooperative expands, challenges are:

- ▶ Repairing and maintaining aging facilities with outdated equipment and workspaces that hinder efficiency.
- ▶ Improving physical safety of employees and facilities.
- ▶ Supporting modern workflows, accommodating specialized equipment and designing improved environments for employees and guests.
- ▶ Providing greater service resilience as member expectations transform and as energy needs become more diverse.

The existing cooperative facilities were constructed in 1996 (Topeka) and 1976 (McLouth) and have served the membership of both the

legacy cooperatives (Kaw Valley and Leavenworth-Jefferson) and FreeState well. However, the need for enhanced security, technology and safety means the two buildings no longer meet the cooperative's needs in their current configuration.

Renovations and the realignment of administrative services will provide a comprehensive upgrade for members and employees.

"Simply put," said Chris Parr, CEO. "We have outgrown our operational spaces. We can find efficiencies and long-term savings by making some adjustments to how we do business that should carry us well into the future."

"Our line crews are staying right where they are because that makes sense from an operations perspective," Parr said. "Our field staff just need more space."

All administrative positions will move to the Topeka office, which will become the cooperative's headquarters and the McLouth building will become an operations center. Members will no longer have access to the McLouth office as of June 1, 2026.

While leadership did not have facilities as an urgent priority, that shifted when issues came up with the buildings. For instance, a tornado warning during the 2024 annual meeting highlighted the need for a larger storm shelter with improved accessibility. There have also been issues with water infiltration, space constraints, and energy deficiencies in both offices. The operations and warehouse functions are spread across multiple undersized

buildings, causing delays in locating and loading equipment, as well as potential safety hazards.

"Our facilities are aging, and we were looking at some major repairs that made us take a closer look at facilities overall," Parr said. "We were at a crossroads, in a way. Do we invest in repairs to two buildings that we know will not meet the needs in the future, or do we invest in something different that will?"

"We understand that this change will bring a mix of emotions," said Parr. "At the end of the day we have to do what is best for the cooperative and the future of powering our members."

Parr said the leadership team and board went to the drawing board and brought in a consultant that specialized in cooperative facilities to evaluate and determine what would be needed in the next 30 years. That process took about 10 months and produced a variety of options.

"We looked at multiple scenarios, and some of those — we knew immediately would not work," Parr said. "We knew a brand-new facility was not feasible because of the cost and the impact it would have to our entire workforce and our members."

Instead, Parr said, the board and leadership looked at options that had less negative impact.

"We wanted to make sure we had the least disruption possible to our teams, and our members," said Parr. "We looked at a few different options for our administrative teams and McLouth did not have the space we needed to house our entire admin staff and field staff. Our district line and right-of-way crews, however, were exactly where they needed to be considering the response time needed and expected by members."

Both district warehouse spaces are at

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capacity and need reconfigured for more efficient workflow, loading and delivery of materials.

On the office side, McLouth did not have the space to accommodate all administrative functions. In Topeka there was space, but the configuration did not meet the needs for safety, efficiency and workflows.

“Topeka had the space, but the layout was not set up for larger teams like our member services team,” Parr said. “The current setup also showed underutilized spaces in our basement, and current lobby.”

“However, with some renovation we could make it work within the current footprint,” said Parr.

The board made the final decision to invest in renovations using a phased approach. Removing administrative tasks from McLouth will allow the operations department the space they need to improve efficiency, storage and safety.

The office in Topeka will undergo a full renovation inside with just a few subtle changes to the outside appearance of the building. Some changes members may see in Topeka are the discontinuation of the drive-up window and a smaller lobby area.

### WORKFLOW EFFICIENCY

The comprehensive renovation focuses on improving facilities for employees with reconfigured workspaces and improved restroom and break room facilities. In Topeka, the design includes a multi-purpose room for activities such as board meetings, member events and employee training.

“We will be able to move our board meetings back to the cooperative office,” said Board President Jeanine Murphy. “For the past eight years we have had a rotation or have convened at neutral sites. This has worked out, but we are ready for more permanence and a space that better serves our needs.”

The board of trustees have set a goal of keeping the work within or adjacent to FreeState territory. Local general contractor, Kendall Construction, will manage the project with Topeka-based HTK Architects.

“We believe that, with the approach we selected, we can execute this project in a more viable manner,” said Murphy. “The time to do any construction is now, because we also know that costs will continue to rise.”

The cooperative will be able to leverage construction work plans for most of this project, which puts less financial pressure on the cooperative overall.

“We know we have to do something to make sure we are set up for the future, and it makes sense to do renovations concurrent with necessary repairs,” Murphy added.

## RENOVATION TIMELINE

*During the renovations, the cooperative will be providing updates periodically in Kansas Country Living magazine. There will also be updates on our website at [www.freestate.coop/renovate](http://www.freestate.coop/renovate).*

### THURSDAY, OCT. 9, 2025

Drive-up window will permanently close.

### THURSDAY, OCT. 30, 2025

The Topeka office will close to the public and temporarily move to the Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (KEC) office located at 7332 S.W. 21st Street in Topeka.

Topeka office hours at KEC will be Monday-Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. FreeState’s member services representatives will still be available by phone Monday-Thursday from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

The McLouth office will remain open to the public until May 28, 2026, with business hours of Monday-Thursday, 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

### THURSDAY, MAY 28, 2026

The McLouth office will permanently close to the public.

## PHASED APPROACH TO RENOVATION

The project will be executed in several phases over the next three to five years to manage costs.

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#### ► PHASE 1 — TOPEKA OPERATIONS AND INVENTORY

**(WAREHOUSE):** Create space in the warehouse for field staff and reconfigure to simplify delivering and loading materials.

#### ► PHASE 2 — TOPEKA OFFICE RENOVATION: Full-office renovation.

This phase will also include upgrades for ADA compliance and for security and physical safety of our people and the facility.

#### ► PHASE 3 — TOPEKA RIGHT-OF-WAY AND FLEET FACILITY:

Updates to hazardous material management as well as construction of adjacent facilities for fleet and material storage.

#### ► PHASE 4 — MECHANIC BAY: Expanding the mechanic bay to create workflow efficiencies, improved safety and climate-controlled storage area to protect and increase the longevity of equipment.

#### ► PHASE 5 — MCLOUTH RENOVATION: Operational and warehousing enhancements, and creation of mechanical bay to increase efficiency.

Other improvements aim to enhance physical safety, provide storage for materials and fleet items, and create dedicated access for the delivery of operations materials and equipment.



## Sharing Success With a Record-Breaking Donation



Financial contributions are a powerful way to provide community support and FreeState Electric Cooperative handed over a \$32,540 check made out to the **CAPPER FOUNDATION** on Wednesday, Aug. 13.

It was the largest gift the local rural electric cooperative has given since partnering with CoBank's Sharing Success Program. FreeState's employees and trustees rallied during the month of June to raise a record breaking \$17,540. That amount was paired with a \$15,000 matching grant from CoBank's Sharing Success program to make an even bigger impact.

The funding provided to the Capper Foundation will support the creation and setup of the Caitlyn Halsey Empowerment Center (CHEC). The center aims to provide employment training, skill-building and job placement opportunities for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Topeka and Shawnee County.

"What makes this so special is that every cent raised comes from the pockets of our employees and trustees," said Chris Parr, CEO. "And, to have 100% participation from our people is something I'm so very proud of."

"The Capper Foundation shares the values of FreeState, and that's to make life better for those they serve," said Parr. "I can't say enough about our employees and trustees here at FreeState; they have knocked it out of the park again."

FreeState is driven by cooperative principles that include a mission of making a difference through various initiatives and community support programs. Employee and trustee generosity is a testament to this dedication. Since 2016, employees and trustees have given \$185,000 to various organizations in the cooperative's service territory.

"I think when we can do things for others in this capacity

it goes beyond just a donation," said Jeanine Murphy, board president. "It's the ability to make a big impact with people coming together to not only support a great organization, but also just bring awareness of the Caitlyn Halsey Empowerment Center. We want everybody to know about the difference it makes in the lives of so many."

The cooperative trustees felt the CHEC was an initiative they could get behind.

Located in Topeka, the CHEC will serve as a central hub for individualized workforce development, job coaching and wraparound support for adults with disabilities who aspire to gain and maintain meaningful employment. The center will offer customized job training and skill-building workshops, technology stations for resume writing, job searches and interview preparation, employer recruitment events, job fairs and one-on-one coaching with Empowerment Center staff. It will also provide a supportive environment for building soft skills and professional confidence.

"It's heartwarming," Edie Smith, vice president of development and marketing for the Capper Foundation, said of the support provided by FreeState. "The center will provide opportunities that typically have not been there before."

"If there is training, assistance and placement in employment in the workforce, along with coaching that supports them, it's really the recipe for success."

The investment FreeState employees and trustees have made in the Capper Foundation will ensure that individuals with disabilities have a place to learn, grow and thrive in the workplace for years to come.

For more information about the CoBank Sharing Success program, please visit [www.freestate.pub/CoBank25](http://www.freestate.pub/CoBank25).