

**PREPARING FOR CHANGE:  
THE WICHITA-SEDGWICK COUNTY  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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For:  
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and the  
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City Council

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# Preface

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1988, a series of contentious debates took place before the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC) and the Wichita City Council regarding the proposed placement of a discount department store near several fashionable single-family subdivisions. The "Wal-Mart case" came to symbolize the perception held by many people, including those on both sides of that particular issue, that the community was "unplanned," and development decisions were being made in a vacuum. The 10-year old land use plan was out-of-date and seemed irrelevant to this kind of land use conflict.

In response, the City Council requested that the 1978 plan be updated. With assistance from four citizen technical and advisory committees, the MAPC has developed *Preparing For Change: The Wichita-Sedgwick County Comprehensive Plan*. *Preparing For Change* provides a rational basis and legal foundation for more wisely guiding land use activities in order to protect the public health, safety and welfare. The plan also promotes the efficient expenditure of public funds for community facilities and services to meet the future needs of the city and county.

*Preparing For Change* contains six distinct elements:

1. Existing conditions, trends and projections
2. Key land use planning issues
3. Area Treatment Classification
4. Wichita Land Use Guide and County Development Guide
5. Goals, Objectives and Strategies
6. Public facility needs analysis

## EXISTING CONDITIONS, TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

During the planning process, twenty-two separate technical reports, covering all aspects of community development - e.g. population growth, environmental constraints, emergency services, transportation, land use, parkland, wastewater and water treatment, and community appearance - were produced. These reports analyzed existing conditions and trends, projected future growth demands, and assessed the ability of current facilities and services to meet those demands. The most significant trends identified by the technical reports are:

1. Population trends and projections. From 1980 to 1990, Wichita's population increased from 279,835 to 304,011, while Sedgwick County's population increased from 367,088 to 403,662. If this growth continues at similar rates in the future, by 2010, Sedgwick County's population will increase by 57,204. Wichita can be expected to capture approximately 41,000 of the Sedgwick County total, for a 2010 population of 345,162.

The central area of Wichita has lost over 11,000 people, approximately 6 percent, during the 1980s, and can be expected to continue losing population through the 1990s. In contrast, the city's perimeter areas have increased in population by some 35,000. This trend is expected to continue during the planning period, although changes in public policy could slow or reverse the exodus from the central area.

2. Land use demand and supply. The projected population increase for Wichita translates into a need for approximately 18 square miles of land for urban growth. Not all of the projected growth needs to be, or should be, beyond the current city limits, as there are approximately 16 square miles of vacant land within the city limits today, and nearly 12,000 vacant houses. Commercial and industrial vacancy rates are also high, particularly in the central area of the city. Not all of these vacant properties, however, are "marketable" or available for development. Therefore, in addition to encouraging infill development, we should expect the plan to provide for continued outward expansion.

After determining how *much* developed land will be needed, the next step is to evaluate *where* the most logical areas are to urbanize. This evaluation requires an analysis of market trends, as well as analyzing where public facilities and services already exist, where those facilities and services are already planned, and where it makes the most economic and environmental sense to extend needed services.

## KEY ISSUES

After detailed analysis of trends and projections, the following key planning issues and concepts were identified and incorporated into the plan:

1. Central area reinvestment. As indicated above in the population trends and projections section, new development at Wichita's perimeter has been outpacing the city's population growth. This new development has required significant investment in new roads, water and sewer lines, fire stations, and other public facilities. Wichita's population density, in fact, has decreased by about 50% from that of the 1950s, when the city contained about 5,000 people per square mile. Generally, because the need for many public services is based upon recognized service area or response time (response time for fire trucks, distance to parks and libraries), the lower the density of housing, the more expensive the cost of services.

The loss of population and businesses from the older parts of the city has resulted in erosion of property values, disinvestment, and physical decline. Since the termination of the federal urban renewal program in the 1970s, Wichita has not comprehensively addressed its declining inner city. While the purpose of the current core area initiative to revitalize the downtown area is laudable, its ultimate success will depend in part on avoiding the syndrome common to many other cities, whose downtowns have become islands surrounded by increasing blight.

2. Timed urban growth. The previous plan for the county only considered the long term (twenty plus years) horizon for growth, thus providing only limited value for establishing capital for a shorter horizon that better corresponds to the capital improvement program (CIP) horizon. Growth areas can be delineated in a tiered fashion, indicating which areas are most suitable for growth immediately, based on the objective of minimizing public costs for new infrastructure, and areas which should be reserved for growth at a later time.

3. Preservation of agricultural land. Eighty percent of the land in Sedgwick County is categorized as "prime" agricultural land. That means the land is judged to be especially suited for the production of food, feed or pastureland. The county ranks high in several categories of agricultural production among Kansas counties. In fact the county ranks 4th overall among Kansas counties for total agricultural production. If future urbanization could be more compact than the trend of the past three decades, less of this resource will be lost.

The incremental development of large lot (1 to 10 acres) suburban subdivisions served by private water and sewer in unincorporated areas of the county is consuming agricultural land at a higher rate than urbanization. Scattered large lot development results in the loss of agricultural production, loss of country atmosphere, and as expectations among these residents rise, additional expense to provide public services.

4. "Connected places". Earlier land use policies established zoning for a wide range of commercial uses at all four corners of all arterial intersections at the edge of the city. Much of this zoning occurred well in advance of the availability of public services and lacked a customer base to support development. That zoning pattern did not respond easily to the fundamental shifts in retail marketing that have occurred since the 1950s. Instead of the central business district and the neighborhood grocery store, we now have supermarkets which sell pharmaceuticals and hardware and process your film and provide banking services, strip commercial corridors, discount department stores, and convenience stores with gas pump islands. It is the hazardness of location and the mediocrity of design of these commercial uses along our major streets which, perhaps more than any other feature, contributes to the sense of the community as being "unplanned."

In recent years, in other parts of the country, there has been a growing movement in new developments to recapture some of the positive features of older towns and cities. This movement, known as "neotraditionalism," stems from the psychological need for more of a sense of "place", of community, than is typically found in post-World War II development patterns. The market acceptance of this new-old style of development has yet to be proven, and the plan is not intended to force this style on local developers. However, some of the principles of neotraditionalism - higher densities, finer mix of uses, more attention to pedestrian convenience - can and should be encouraged. Wichita is not blessed with strong natural features, or a multitude of historic or architecturally significant neighborhoods, that provide a strong sense of community identity in other cities. But we can make a greater effort to create real "places," and a more coherent urban form, by more careful attention to the location and design of key land uses, and by linking these areas to the rest of the community with a system of trails for pedestrians and bicyclists.

5. Additional Water Supply. Cheney Lake and the Equus Beds are Wichita's major sources of water. Currently a search is being made for additional water supply to be on-line by the year 2002 in order to meet projected maximum day demand. An adequate and reliable supply of water is essential for growth and prosperity.

6. Intergovernmental Cooperation. The success of many of the plan's recommendations depend upon continued and improved cooperation between all the governing and taxing entities - Sedgwick County, all twenty city councils, township boards and all unified school district boards of education. Greater cooperation between these entities has the potential to provide enhanced services and meet critical needs.

7. Taxes. Future tax policies should recognize that Wichita-Sedgwick County now competes in a global economy. To the extent the local taxing entities can influence tax policies, they should promote a fair and balanced tax structure. One approach could involve the establishment of a task force to examine the effects of the current system on economic development efforts.

#### AREA TREATMENT CLASSIFICATION

After combining population trends and projections with key planning issues, a simplified "model" of the community was created. This model depicts, in map form, the general physical and economic condition of, and prospects for, distinct portions of metropolitan Wichita. It also indicates the appropriate types of public policy treatment for different types of neighborhoods in order for them to remain, or become, viable segments of the total community.

The classification of neighborhoods is based on a number of **factors-e.g.** change in housing units, change in population, vacancy rates, owner occupancy, median property value - which indicate what kinds of trends are occurring throughout the city. The "Area Treatment Classification" indicates, in a general way, which areas are stable, which ones are in transition, and which ones are in decline. Based on this analysis, potential treatment strategies are proposed. These treatment strategies indicate, in a general way, what type of activities might be most appropriate to address problems in each of the classified areas.

Eight different classifications were identified and mapped as a result of the analysis:

1. Conservation. These are areas which have structurally sound housing, exhibit a stable population and enjoy an adequate level of reinvestment. In short, conservation areas are seen as desirable places to live. As self-sufficient areas, few treatment strategies would be needed beyond routine maintenance and code enforcement activities. City wide efforts to reduce crime and improve confidence in the school system are also critical to the continued viability of these areas. Examples of conservation areas include: Tallgrass, College Hill, Westlink, and **Amarado** Estates.

2. Revitalization. Areas in this category are experiencing some decline, but good market and development opportunities still exist. The objective of treatment actions in these areas **would be** to stabilize the area and increase its attractiveness to private investors. Examples of revitalization areas are: Midtown, neighborhoods near Friends University, and East High.

3. Re-Establishment. Severely deteriorated is the way to describe re-establishment areas. Market conditions have changed enough in these areas so that little reinvestment is occurring, people are moving out faster than those moving in, and in some cases, land uses are in transition from their original use to other uses. Solutions for these areas will require attention to not only physical problems, but also social and economic concerns. Examples include: Planeview, Hilltop, **McAdams**, and other neighborhoods on the near northeast side of the city.

4. New Growth. The goal of this category is to identify an adequate amount of land to accommodate anticipated growth through the year 2001. New Growth areas include: undeveloped areas in the lower portion of the four Mile Creek basin east of Wichita, the area west of the City's current city limits, and many vacant parcels in all quadrants inside the City limits. The boundaries in this category should be viewed in a flexible manner which is responsive to changing market demands.

5. Urban Reserve. Areas designated as Urban Reserve are those areas beyond New Growth areas which are not expected to be needed for urbanization until after the year 2001. These areas should be protected from premature suburban density development which would make later urban density development difficult or impossible. Urban Reserves include the areas: west of 151st Street West and 135th Street West north of West **Kellogg**, north of 37th Street North between I-135 and Oliver, and north of 13th Street North east of the city limits.

6. Suburban. This classification recognizes that a segment of the population desires to live in a semi-rural setting at a density lower than urban levels. The plan designates areas which are near to Wichita but unsuited for urban densities, and which have already seen some development of this type, as most suitable for suburban development. Areas designated for suburban development include: the area east of **McConnell** Air Force Base, the area between Maize and Wichita, the area north of 29th Street North between 119th Street North and Ridge Road, and the **Riverview** area, north of Wichita.

7. Agricultural. The classification is designed to protect prime agricultural land from premature and unnecessary conversion to other uses. Agricultural and agriculturally related uses are recommended in this area, along with residential uses on 20 acre lots (lots of 2-5 acres are permitted today). Multi-lot developments with lots smaller than 20 acres generally should be discouraged in these areas, unless platted as part of a cluster development which preserves a majority of the development as open space. The Agricultural designation would apply to all of the unincorporated county not designated or other land uses as part of adopted comprehensive plan maps.

8. Resource Preservation. This category recognizes two types of community resources which deserve special protection **and/or** enhancement. The first of these include "built areas" - social, historic or cultural assets which set this community apart from any other (e.g. Old Town, Fairview-Park Place Historic District or the Topeka-Emporia Historic District). The second type of resource recognizes undeveloped environmentally sensitive areas deserving special treatment so they can be incorporated into future development without losing the characteristics we cherish. In Wichita-Sedgwick County, these resources are primarily the floodplains located along rivers and creeks, spent sandpits, hedgerows and man-made parks and open spaces.

Nonresidential land use concentrations, containing uses such as office and industrial parks, shopping malls, hospitals and universities, are mapped as a separate category.

Small City Future Growth areas are also identified separately. This classification indicates anticipated growth areas for the small cities over the next twenty years, without attempting to distinguish two separate growth "rings" as was done for Wichita.

It should be noted that the geographical boundaries for these classifications were developed primarily with census tract level data, resulting in broad generalizations. Within any of the areas depicted by these classifications, smaller areas may exist which could be categorized differently. Future, more detailed planning studies will identify such areas.

Included with the "Area Treatment Classification" map is an "Implementation Tools" matrix. The "Classification" matrix outlines the most appropriate programs and actions which could be implemented to address issues facing each one of the classified areas. For example, the matrix suggests that housing and credit counseling and special home repair programs should be targeted primarily to residents of "revitalization" and "re-establishment" areas.

## WICHITA LAND USE GUIDE

The "Area Treatment Classification" map depicts demographic, economic and housing conditions as they exist within Wichita - e.g. Conservation, Revitalization and Re-Establishment - and a desired future pattern of growth - e.g. New Growth, Urban Reserve, Suburban and Agricultural. These existing conditions and desired future patterns of growth, however, are generalized depictions of existing and desired conditions. In contrast, the "Wichita Land Use Guide" contains a map which depicts more detailed recommendations on desired land use arrangement. The land use map is based on existing zoning, current land use patterns, environmental constraints, current and projected sewer and water service areas and capacities. Also used in the development of the map were the key planning issues, population trends and projections.

The land use map contains a boundary line which divides "New Growth" areas - which are appropriate for urbanization between now and the year 2001 - from "Urban Reserves" - areas appropriate for urbanization between the years 2002 and 2010.

"Suburban" areas are designated for large lot development around the city, but where urban services are not anticipated to be extended within the time frame of this plan.

"Agricultural" areas lie beyond the lands which are projected to be needed to meet urban and suburban growth demands over the next twenty years. However, market forces and availability of land may influence the need for conversion of some of this land to other uses earlier than anticipated.

The "Wichita Land Use Guide" contains twelve other designations indicating desired land use patterns. These designations include residential, public/institutional, park and open space, transportation, commercial, office, industrial, small city growth areas, and future commercial centers.

The "Wichita Land Use Guide" anticipates that new residential development will continue to be predominately low density in character, and will continue primarily to the west, the northeast, and east of the current city limits. More limited residential activity is also anticipated in north and south Wichita. Infill and redevelopment within the existing city limits should be strongly encouraged, so that not all the areas identified on the map will necessarily be developed by 2010.

Large-scale office activity is encouraged to locate in Wichita's core area, while smaller, more neighborhood-oriented offices are generally expected to use existing vacant offices or parcels already zoned for office or commercial use.

Commercial uses within the city limits are generally expected to develop in areas already zoned for commercial activity. Commercial uses in undeveloped areas which are expected to urbanize over the next twenty years are proposed to be located in "planned centers" of different sizes at arterial intersections.

New industrial development is encouraged to occur in, or adjacent to, existing industrial parks or utilize existing industrially zoned land. But additional areas for new industrial use are shown in undeveloped areas to the north, west, and southeast of the city limits.

"Small City Future Growth" areas were identified on this map for second and third class cities close to Wichita, based on input from local officials, population projections, and utility service areas.

"Location Guidelines" were developed to provide an objective rationale for establishing land use patterns on the "Wichita Land Use Guide," and to aid in evaluating future zoning and subdivision requests. These guidelines are based upon traditional land use relationships, design principles, and the need to maintain compatibility between the urban and natural environment.

## SEDGWICK COUNTY DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

Although more generalized than the "Wichita Land Use Guide," the "Sedgwick County Development Guide" depicts the same principles of desiring to promote efficient urban growth and protection of agricultural land for the entire county.

To promote efficient growth, each small city has an identified "future growth" area, similar to Wichita's, based on growth projections, infrastructure availability and plans, and other factors. New development which is not an expansion of an existing use, is not agriculturally oriented or is not resource-based, should generally be encouraged to locate in one of the county's nineteen cities or adjacent to a city in their "future growth" area. The unincorporated rural portions of the county, outside designated "Future Growth" or "Suburban" areas, should be restricted predominately to agricultural uses.

## GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Goal, objective and strategy statements provide three critical functions. Goal statements establish the end point; they define the purpose, they are descriptions of what we want for ourselves, our families, and our community. It is said that successful people are "goal oriented." The same is true of communities, those that have recognizable common goals

lay the foundation for achieving the kind of community this plan envisions. This plan contains twelve goal statements, which deal with land use, transportation, public facilities and services, education, recreation and culture, the environment, and housing and neighborhoods.

If goal statements identify what we want to achieve, then objective statements provide the measuring stick by which to evaluate an action or activity. Does the proposed activity or action contribute to accomplishing a stated goal? The plan contains 31 objective statements.

While objective statements provide the measuring stick, strategy statements indicate possible courses of action to achieve stated goals. Strategies included in this plan run the gamut from considering "accessory apartments" in single-family neighborhoods, to increasing the minimum lot size requirement in rural areas, to considering new revenue sources to help pay the costs of extending infrastructure at the edges of the city, to designing arterial streets with landscaped medians. This plan contains 196 strategy statements.

To help ensure that there is some accountability for implementing strategy statements, each strategy statement has been assigned an organization or agency which would have primary or secondary responsibility for implementation. These "strategy assignments," located in the Appendices, provide a way to measure activity and organizational responsibility.

#### PUBLIC FACILITY NEEDS

As a community grows and expands, so does the need and demand for public services. The final section of the new plan identifies public facility and service needs which: (a) are already committed in either the city's or county's "Capital Improvement Program" (CIP); (b) are not listed in a current CIP, but may be required within the time period covered by adopted CIPs (1992-2001) due to projected growth patterns; or (c) are not anticipated to be needed until the years 2002-2010 (a time horizon much *further* in the future than shown in adopted CIPs).

#### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

"Preparing For Change" is a comprehensive plan based on comments from residents of Wichita and Sedgwick County. This plan was developed with the assistance of four citizen committees composed of over 100 people from Wichita, Sedgwick County, the 19 small cities, school administrators and township trustees. Eighteen presentations were made to Wichita's Citizen Participation Organizations. A 12-page newspaper insert, detailing development opportunities, constraints and considerations, was delivered to 150,000 households. Audio-visual presentations, which summarize the plan's proposals, have been made to many civic and business organizations.

#### CONCLUSION

While *Preparing For Change* is a new document, many of the concepts proposed are not new. Efficient growth by coordinating new development with the provision of public services, preservation of prime agricultural land, encouraging different types of planned

commercial centers, and emphasizing the need for a vibrant downtown are contained in the previous comprehensive plan.

However, *Preparing For Change* is different. In addition to the goal and objective statements, *Preparing For Change* contains a long and specific list of implementation strategies. Unlike the previous effort, this new plan couples land use recommendations with long range public facility needs, and it suggests a systematic approach to community development which gears different treatment policies to the various types of neighborhoods that are found in the community. Also, the plan suggests more careful timing of future growth, through the use of "new growth" and "urban reserve" boundaries, and it confines the locations for new suburban density development, thus preserving more of our prime agricultural areas.

This plan's recommendations are intended to be flexible; used as a guide, rather than a script to decision making. Development decisions must remain responsive to the needs of changing market demands, and respectful of private property rights. Decisions should take into consideration such factors as investment-backed expectations of the property owner, and the effect of the proposed use on neighboring properties and on community facilities.

It is not the intent of this plan to prohibit new development from occurring on the urban fringe in favor of infill and redevelopment of Wichita's downtown and older neighborhoods. Both new growth at the edges and inner city reinvestment are needed to maintain a strong community.

Efforts to continue involvement of citizens in the planning process are critical to the maintenance of an effective plan which can retain community-wide support. Future evaluations of this plan and the development of future amendments should include opportunities for public input. It is anticipated that this plan will be evaluated annually, with major updates every five years. These evaluations should include a community survey. In addition to the survey, private and public sector organizations, such as those originally involved in the development of the plan, should participate in future evaluations.

This plan is intended to help guide the thousands of public and private development decisions that will be made in Wichita and Sedgwick County over the next several years; decisions which will shape the form and character of the community and affect its ability to compete and prosper in the next century. The plan can lie neglected on a shelf to remind us of our vain pursuits and high ideals that were never meant to be, or it can be used, amended and updated as a guide for where we want this community to be in 20 years. A plan is only as good as the commitment - of elected and appointed officials, private sector leaders, and citizens at large - to carry it into reality.