



# CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

This Knox County Comprehensive Plan is an update to the original plan completed in 1972. The original study included the communities of Bloomfield, Creighton, Crofton, Niobrara, Wausa, and Verdigre. The planning scope was to include the area up to one mile from the respective corporate limits of each of the six specified communities. Separate documentation, including zoning and subdivision ordinances, was provided for the county and each of the six specified communities.

This update to the original Comprehensive Plan does not include any of the original six communities; since many of them have gone on to create their own Comprehensive Plans. However, this plan will encompass the communities of Bazile Mills, Verdel, and Winnetoon. Knox County will administer all zoning relating to these three communities including within the community and the one-mile jurisdiction.

## LOCATION

Knox County is located in the northeastern part of Nebraska, comprising a land area of 1,108 square miles, or 709,120 acres. Bordering counties include Cedar to the east, Pierce and Antelope to the south and Holt and Boyd to the west. Highway 12 runs east and west through Crofton, Lindy, Niobrara, and Verdel; Highway 84 runs east and west between Verdigre and Center and through Bloomfield; Highway 14 runs north and south through Verdigre; Highway 59 runs east and west through Creighton; and Highway 121 runs north and south through Wausa and Crofton. Knox County has numerous metropolitan areas within driving distance – Yankton is northeast in South Dakota; Sioux City is east in Iowa; and Norfolk is the southeast in Nebraska.

The mean low temperature of 11°F occurs in January and the mean high temperature of 89°F occurs during the month of July. The topography of the county varies greatly from gently rolling to steep hills, and also has areas of nearly level to gently undulating land. There are also many sources of water in the county with numerous creeks and rivers flowing throughout.

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## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND FOR KNOX COUNTY

In 1789, Jean Babtiste Monier began exploring the area that is now Knox County which was then home to the Ponca Indians. Monier petitioned the Spanish Governor of New Orleans, the Baron de Corondelet, for the exclusive rights to trade with the Ponca. Corondelet granted the right for a four-year period of time beginning in September of 1793.

In 1804 the Lewis and Clark expedition, under the orders of President Thomas Jefferson, began to explore the western country which was recently acquired from France. The expedition ran through Knox County.

In 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska Act outlined the territory of Nebraska and allowed for settlement by the migrating pioneers from the East. French fur-traders, Mormons, explorers, and members of the L'eau-qui-Court were the first settlers to the area. Originally named L'eau-qui-Court, the area was later renamed Knox County in April of 1873 in honor of General Henry Knox, a Revolutionary War veteran and Secretary of War in President George Washington's cabinet. The first territorial election was held in August of 1873.

With the expansion of the railroads came an increase in population in the Knox County area with the largest population increases occurring in the early 1870's through the 1910's. Knox County has 30 townships and eleven incorporated communities.

- Bazile Mills - is situated on Bazile Creek, about three miles north of Creighton. The first settler was Samuel D. Brooks, who located his claim where the town and mill now are.
- Bloomfield – was created as a result of a huge “sale of lots” auction in October of 1890. The site was well chosen, not only because of its geographically strategic location, but also because of its natural beauty and resources.
- Center – Due to voters being unhappy with the county seat in Niobrara, voters went through five ballots before this geographic midpoint was chosen. The literal “center” of Knox County, the town was created to end the 40-year dispute over where the county seat should be. The actual

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village of Center was platted in 1901 and incorporated in 1904.

- Creighton – was developed in 1871 and in 1874 a charter was obtained to plat the north side of what is now Main Street.
- Crofton – lured by the prospect of a railroad connecting Yankton and Norfolk, pioneers flocked to the area that is now Crofton. In 1894 the railroad venture went bankrupt and the town was left at a standstill. A new railroad was proposed in 1906 extending to Hartington and within a year the town of Crofton was incorporated.
- Niobrara – the history of this town can be traced back to 1856 when a group of men marked their claim on the banks of the Missouri River with a log garrison. The company was called Leau-qui-court. When Knox County was formed in 1877, Niobrara was named the county seat.
- Santee – after being blamed for the “great Minnesota massacre” in 1862, the Sioux Indian tribe was banished to the northwestern plains in Dakota Territory. In 1866, President Lincoln withdrew 115,000 acres of land from the market in Nebraska territory to provide the Santee with a “more suitable home.” The remaining 1,350 members of the Santee nation went to settle there.
- Verdel – originally built several miles west of its present location. When the Chicago and North Western Railroads began surveying the area in 1901-02, the railroad needed more “trackage” space than what Verdel’s original location allowed, so the town was moved to Indian land.
- Verdigre – platted in July of 1887 by George Quimby. The railroad came to town in the early 1900’s bringing much growth to the community. By the 1910 Census, the town had a population of around 400.
- Wausa - More than a century ago, Swedish farmer Theodore Thorson journeyed from Scandia Grove, Minnesota, seeking a good location to raise livestock. The luxuriant grass inspired him to return the following spring and rent 200 acres for a sheep farm. Other Swedes soon followed and the town of Thorson was born. In 1885, the citizens renamed Wausa after the celebrated king of Sweden, Gustavus I Vasa, changing the spelling to Wausa to protect the Swedish pronunciation.
- Winnetoon – in 1891, Postmaster John Culberton, established a post office in a store that he called “Winnetoon.” The following year, Seth Jones



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founded the town using the same name and Winnetoon was officially incorporated in 1900.

## GOVERNMENT AND JURISDICTION

The governing body of Knox County is the Board of Supervisors, made up of seven elected members. These members are elected by popular vote for alternating four-year terms. The board meets the second and last Thursdays of every month.

The Board of Supervisors governs within its territorial jurisdiction, which entails all unincorporated portions of the county up to the extraterritorial jurisdictions of the incorporated communities as authorized by Section 17-001 of the Nebraska Revised Statutes (amended 1943). As communities annex land into their corporate limits, their extraterritorial jurisdiction also grows accordingly.

Knox County's jurisdiction entails all unincorporated portions of the county up to the extraterritorial jurisdictions of the ten incorporated communities, except for the communities of Bazile Mills, Verdel, and Winnetoon, which the County will oversee.

## THE PURPOSE AND PROCESS OF COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

A comprehensive development plan has three fundamental purposes:

- Present a unified vision for a community, derived from the desires of its citizens.

Planning is a means of preparing for the future while giving consideration to all aspects of life in the community and county in order to solve problems, promote physical growth and development, and satisfy social and economic needs, as determined by citizen input.

- Define the conceptual strategies needed to fulfill that vision.

Planning provides the framework for guiding the decision-making of the community or county in its physical, social, and economic growth.



It also identifies short-range needs and long-term goals and outlines specific recommendations which should be implemented in order to obtain those objectives.

- Provide the legal basis for land-use regulation such as zoning and subdivision control.

Planning is a means of establishing community-wide and county-wide policies that serve as the basis for making zoning laws. The State of Nebraska does not allow communities or counties to adopt zoning and subdivision ordinances without first adopting a comprehensive development plan. This requirement derives from the premise that land-use decisions should not be arbitrary, but should follow a reasonable and standard concept of growth. Because of its importance in the zoning process, a comprehensive plan should be reviewed on a regular basis and amended as necessary to ensure that it remains current. The Knox County Comprehensive Plan will provide the ongoing legal basis for the County's authority to regulate land-use and development.

The first phase of the planning process includes the collection of data in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the existing community or county. The Knox County plan is the result of the joint efforts of the planning commission, county residents, and the Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District, a regional community development and planning agency. Input about various aspects of the plan has been accumulated through public town hall and input meetings, and interviews with local community leaders, officials, and public facility managers, such as school superintendents, police and fire chiefs, and city engineers and supervisors.

The second phase of the planning process includes analyzing the data in order to forecast what the future may hold for the planning area, and then using that information to develop general goals and objectives, and establish policies and specific guidelines for improving conditions and guiding future growth.



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Once the plan has been adopted, the implementation phase begins, whereby the policies and guidelines outlined in the plan are used to carry out its recommendations and goals.

## ELEMENTS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Nebraska state statutes require that certain elements be contained in a comprehensive development plan and that the plan should accommodate anticipated long-range future growth. A comprehensive development plan must contain, at a minimum:

**A Land-use Element** which designates the proposed general distribution, general location, and extent of the uses of land for agriculture, housing, commerce, industry, recreation, education, public buildings and grounds, open spaces, and other categories of public and private use of land;

**A Transportation Element** focusing on the general location, character, and extent of existing and proposed major streets, roads, and highways, and railroad, air, and other transportation routes and facilities; and

**A Facilities Element** detailing the general location, type, capacity, and area served of existing and projected or needed community/county facilities including recreation facilities, schools, libraries, other public buildings, and public utilities and services.

The elements contained in this plan include:

**A socio-economic profile** – conditions and trends of the community’s people, economy/employment, housing, and fiscal status,

**A facilities profile** – existing and future needs and evaluation of the community/county’s ability to serve present residents and support growth,

**A land-use profile** – existing land-use patterns and projections of residential, commercial, and industrial developments needed,

**A transportation profile** – existing and future transportation routes, patterns

and linking, and

**A plan implementation and goals section** – draws together the analysis and policies in the plan into a program for implementation, including an action agenda and a method for plan review and maintenance.

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND ZONING ORDINANCES

When setting standards for zoning application, amendment, or subdivision regulation, many factors should be considered, for example:

### 1. Existing Conditions

- existing street/road layout and design
- utilities layout
- topographic conditions
- suitability of the property or lot to the intended use
- character of the neighborhood or area
- zoning and uses of nearby properties

### 2. Conformance

- with established principles or current community/county policies
- in agreement with the growth objectives outlined in the Future Land Use section of the plan compliance to the overall policies in the Comprehensive Development Plan

### 3. Effects of Change

- on major thoroughfares