

INTRODUCTION

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Marion County, as with most rural counties in Kansas, face an uncertain future as populations slowly decline. Non-urban counties throughout the Midwest are struggling to maintain populations, maintain their tax base for the services they provide, and develop new economic opportunities, and Marion County is little different. The County's proximity to larger communities, such as Wichita, Topeka, Salina, McPherson, and Newton, appears to support the idea as younger populations move away for educational or employment reasons, they are not returning as permanent residents.

All of these aspects make for an uncertain future for Marion County despite its existing citizens having a deep attachment to their community. The plan is designed to build on past successes to create a basis on which to regrow the County through a program of actions and concepts aiming to advance the economy of the County, improve the lives of its residents, and attempt to stem the gradual eroding of its population base.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be the most visible part of the planning process for a community, setting the direction for the future growth and development of the community.

This direction is developed through the Marion County Planning Commission, the Marion County Board of County Commissioners, as well as the actions of all the incorporated cities in the county. These efforts begin with their commitment to engage the local citizens in the planning process. This is a noble endeavor, but is one that can be difficult to effectively accomplish. However, the rewards of a successful participatory planning process can be felt within the community for years.

Human nature tends to focus on the present situation rather than take a structured look to the future. Citizen input and involvement are often shrouded in an atmosphere of perceived crisis. As a result, communities have a tendency to be reactionary rather than proactive in their decision-making process. The comprehensive planning process should provide the foundation for developing a proactive plan and vision for the community.

To allow planning to work for the community, it is important to understand what is involved in the planning process. The planning process can be summarized as:

- Analysis of existing conditions and characteristics
- Application of accepted planning principles
- Development of goals and objectives for the future
- Creation of policies to guide future decisions and actions

Because the Comprehensive Plan gives a long-range perspective for directing the future course of a community, it is beneficial to understand the plan's interrelationships. A lack of knowledge of the historical, sociological, economic, environmental, and psychological roots of a community can result in uninformed decisions based on perceptions which can have negative effects on the community. A clear understanding of existing conditions within Marion County, coupled with a carefully structured set of goals and objectives, serve as the framework for the Comprehensive Plan.

From this planning framework, policies for directing future land use and development decisions can be developed. Implementation of the plan might include such things as revising Zoning and Subdivision Regulations, expanding or modifying the code enforcement program, enhancing existing assistance programs and services, or establishing entirely new programs and services. All of these implementation actions would be intended to carry out the goals and objectives and implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan.

REASONS FOR ADOPTING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

This plan is to be used by both public officials in guiding decisions dealing with proposed land use changes, funding of public programs and services, and investments in public facilities. Private citizens should rely upon the plan to guide private investments, offer some security in those investments, and build upon the assets of the community for the benefit of all. In particular, decisions such as where to locate new housing projects; determining the best location for new commercial and industrial developments; deciding which road improvements foster additional private investment in the community; and identifying where annexations might be in the best interests of the city, can all be guided by the plan. By following the policies and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan it is possible to more efficiently control the cost of providing public services to the citizens of Marion County.

While the final Comprehensive Plan will contain specific goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations for future action, it must be understood that the Comprehensive Plan is just a guide document based on existing conditions and current understandings of the trends and directions of public and private investments. These conditions, along with local concerns, priorities, and attitudes will change over the course of time and must be reviewed and incorporated into the plan on a periodic basis.

Per Kansas statute, the plan must be reviewed annually by the Planning Commission. An annual comprehensive update is not necessary, rather the plan should be reviewed annually to identify accomplishments and yearly goals. To ensure that the plan remains current to vision of the community, the County should not wait more than five to seven years to perform a full update.

Change may not occur as fast in Marion County as it has in the recent past, but the pace at which change does occur, coupled with the impacts of regional and/or national trends, can be felt in Marion County much faster than once was the case. A commitment by the County to make a strong planning program a major part of the local government process is vitally important in allowing the County to be responsive to change when it occurs. Such an effort, coupled with an active and informed Planning Commission, will allow this plan to remain a dynamic document that will consistently reflect local attitudes and concerns, and serve the County well into the future.

LEGAL BASIS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is authorized by state law K.S.A. 12-74, et .seq., and allows cities and counties to engage in Comprehensive Planning as a means to set the direction for the future growth and development of the community. In particular, statutes state the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan, or an update thereto, is the responsibility of the Planning Commission, who shall: "...make or cause to be made comprehensive surveys and studies of past and present conditions and trends relating to land use, population and building intensity, public facilities, transportation and transportation facilities, economic conditions, natural resources and may include any other element deemed necessary to the comprehensive plan."

The statutes further state the proposed plan shall show the Planning Commission's "...recommendations for the development or redevelopment of the territory including: (a) The general location, extent and relationship of the use of land for agriculture, residence, business, industry, recreation, education, public buildings and other community facilities, major utility facilities both public and private and any other use deemed necessary; (b) population and building intensity standards and restrictions and the application of the same; (c) public facilities including transportation facilities of all types whether publicly or privately owned which relate to the transportation of persons or goods; (d) public improvement programming based upon a determination of relative urgency; (e) the major sources and expenditure of public revenue including long range financial plans for the financing of public facilities and capital improvements, based upon a projection of the economic and fiscal activity of the community, both public and private; (f) utilization and conservation of natural resources; and (g) any other element deemed necessary to the proper development or redevelopment of the area."

To the extent relevant, this update to the Comprehensive Plan for Marion County seeks to address the above items.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

As a policy guide, the Comprehensive Plan has no regulatory authority, thus relying on a variety of implementation tools to carry out its intent. The two most recognized tools are Zoning Regulations and Subdivision Regulations. These are often supplemented by other “land development related” codes and regulations, such as locally adopted Building Codes, Property Standards Codes, Sanitation Codes, and other similar local standards.

The Comprehensive Plan will also be implemented on an incremental basis over time as landowners and developers approach the County with development proposals and rezoning applications. These proposals and applications should be considered in relation to the goals, objectives and policies articulated within this plan. If consistent with the plan, the decisions of the County are presumed to be reasonable, but this does not preclude a decision different from the findings of the plan on a specific development proposal or application.

More detailed actions concerning implementation of this updated plan are found elsewhere within the plan itself.

FIGURE 1: MARION COUNTY AERIAL MAP

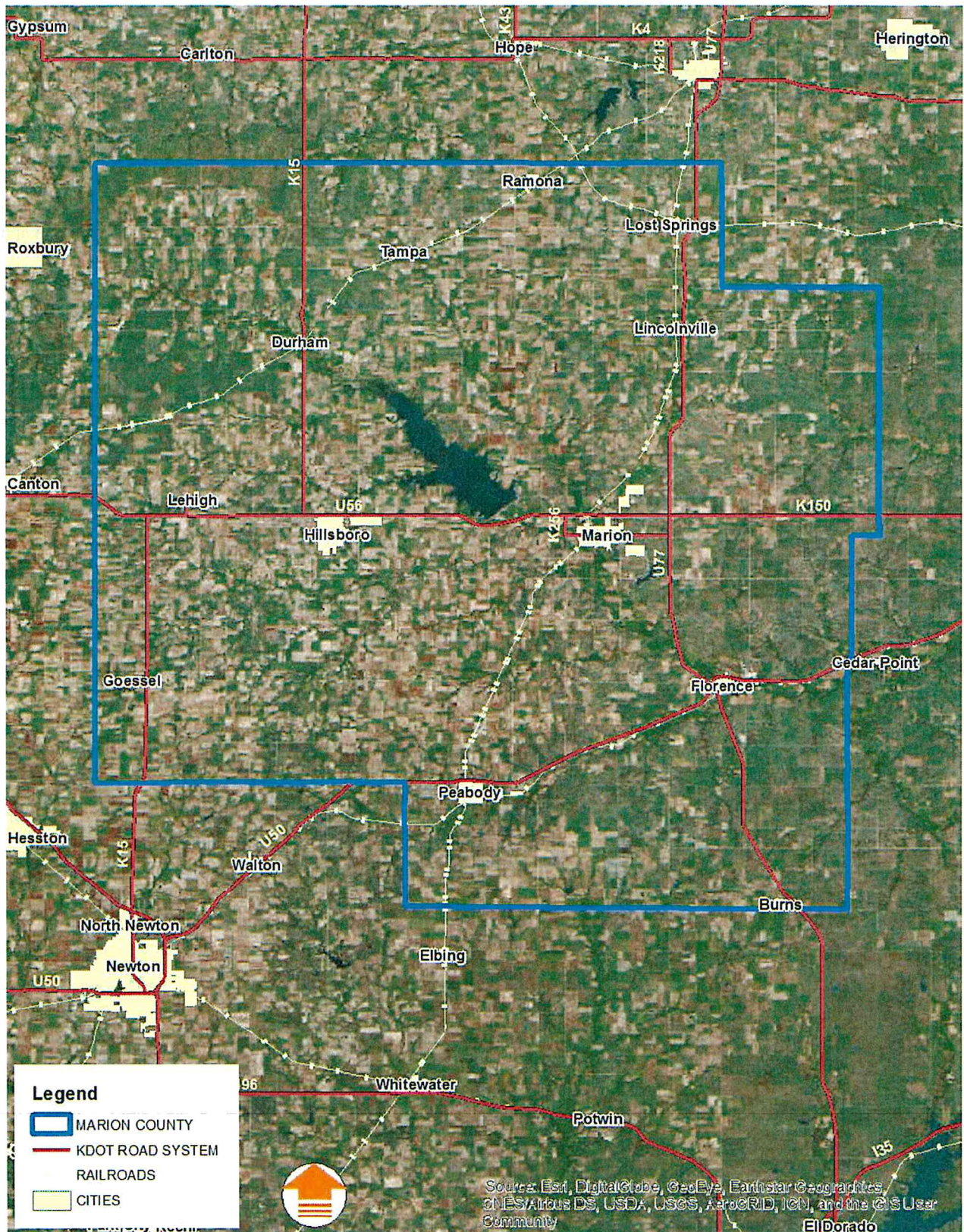
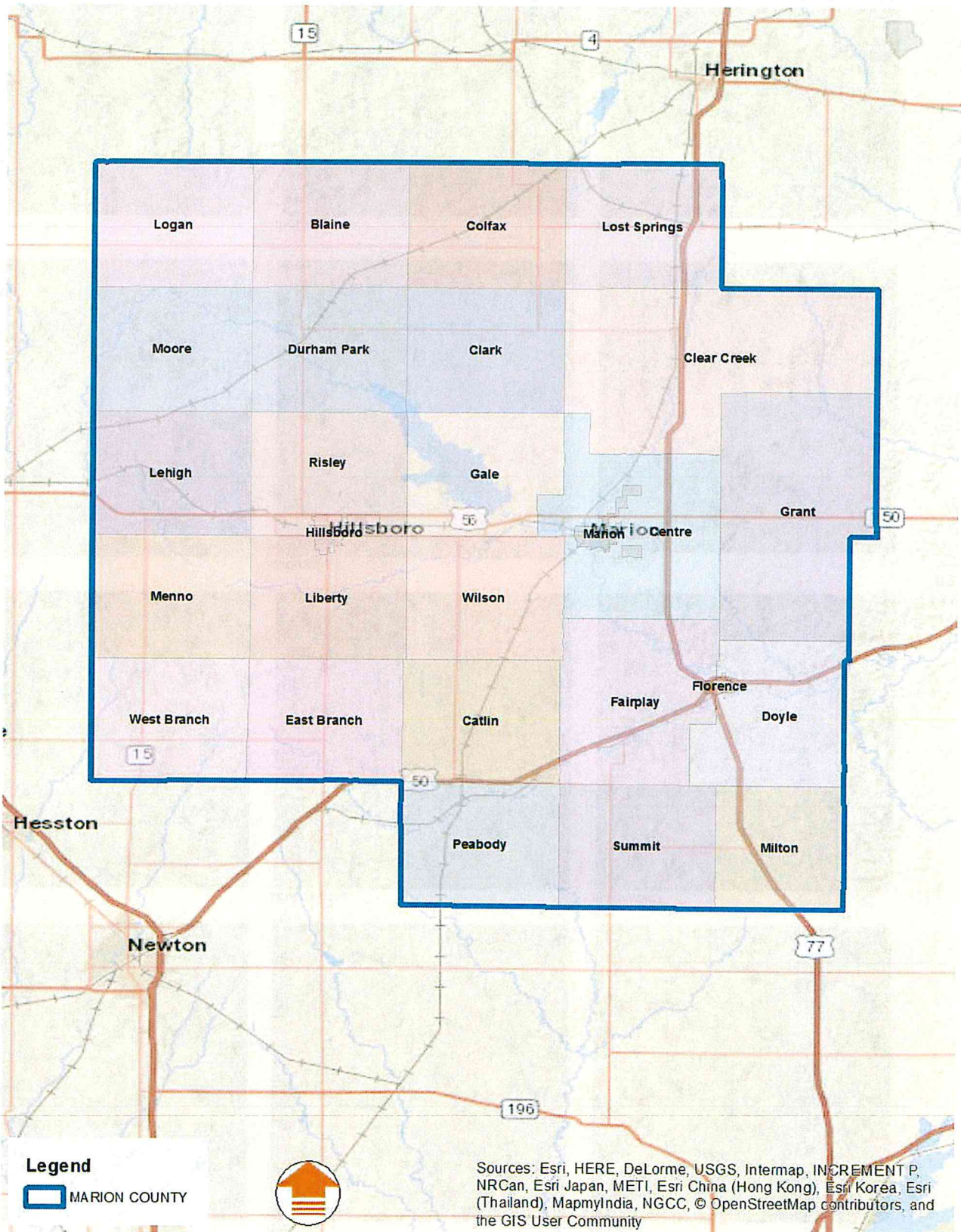


FIGURE 2: MARION COUNTY TOWNSHIP MAP





Burns



Durham



Florence



Goessel



Hillsboro



Lehigh



Lincolnville



Lost Springs



Marion



Peabody



Ramona



Tampa

FIGURE 3: SURROUNDING COUNTIES MAP

