

Vision 20/20- Cowley County Community Strategic Plan 2010 Renewal

Introduction

In 2005, hundreds of Cowley County residents spent the year asking and answering questions about our community:

What do you love about Cowley County? How can we best preserve that? What do you dislike about Cowley County? What are you willing to do to fix it? What do you want Cowley County to be like for our children? For our grandchildren?

Right away, these questions and answers demonstrated that even though this county has its share of challenges, most of our people are optimistic about the days and years ahead. As we continue to implement the ideas set out 5 years ago, we still hold the core values of our community close – our shared heritage, attachment to community, acknowledgement of our challenges and optimism for our future.

Maintaining clear contact throughout each Vision 20/20 team has subsequently become a part of the Cowley First organization. The themes our community widely agrees upon have become the main points of our plan and the topics of discussion in every setting. Throughout the last five years, it has been our goal to achieve some goals and make significant changes to other parts of this detailed plan. We have learned what could be done better and what does not apply any longer to this area.

In 2009, we live in a rapidly changing world. From economics to environmental challenges, the world view of this community is much different then it was five years ago and it likely will never be what it once was. With fallout in the economy and a continued shift from manufacturing to service, Vision 20/20 is charged with helping the community stabilize and determine what it is they expect from a community in the 21st Century.

Cowley First has adopted the following community vision as a collective expression of the goals for the year 2020, and as an update to the original community plan for mobilizing the people and resources to claim that vision and make it real.

Cowley County Community Vision

From the soothing charm of the Flint Hills to the buzz of commerce and culture in our towns and cities, Cowley County boasts abundant life and attraction. We are rural and small town, but not small in thought and action. We value closeness and connectedness. We see economic and cultural possibilities spreading all across our corner of the Great American Prairie. Education, music, and the arts enrich our lives – lives bound by family, community, and a commitment to opportunity and inclusion. Together, we commit our time and talent to this shared vision for the future of Cowley County:

- **Cowley County is a safe and drug-free place to live, rear children, work and play.**

Neighborhoods, businesses, schools, and law enforcement work together to maintain public safety and keep crime rates low. Parents know their children are safe in schools, neighborhoods, parks and other public spaces. Effective drug and alcohol prevention and treatment programs are readily available. The health and safety of our residents, especially families with children is our top priority.

- **We boast a strong economy with good jobs, lively downtowns and a modern transportation infrastructure to support us.**

Cowley County offers well-paying industrial, manufacturing, and service jobs. We work together to create or seize new business opportunities throughout our region. Our business districts, especially downtowns, are bustling with shops, restaurants, entertainment venues, and service enterprises. We have fully developed the transportation and information networks that support our continued economic growth and development. We nourish our entrepreneurial culture. We actively support agri-tourism in our rural communities. At Strother Field and our other business and industrial areas, we promote the continued success of our existing businesses. Risk-taking entrepreneurs are the life-blood of our vibrant, adaptable, and diversified economy. We enthusiastically welcome and encourage new businesses that contribute to our quality of life.

- **We accomplish many of our goals through creative, forward-thinking public-private partnerships.**

Cooperative planning and investment bring together the many fertile ideas that our business community, our local government leaders, and our other public and private partners have to offer. These partnerships spur progress in many areas. We offer activities for teens and other young people. We address the problems created by poverty, and work to eliminate it. Every willing person, and every child, merits our support as he or she strives for a better life. We preserve our historical buildings and artifacts. We promote a positive image for our communities, based on real achievements and capabilities. Our partnerships also help to fund and promote economic development activities at local, county, and regional levels.

- **Cowley County attracts and retains youth and young families.**

Children and youth are nurtured, mentored and taken seriously, which cements a lifelong tie to Cowley County. Our optimistic and enthusiastic residents promote our family-friendly communities among their own friends and relations. Cowley County's employment opportunities, recreational activities, and competitive cost of living encourage young families to make their homes here.

- **Our schools help each individual develop his or her talents and interests to their fullest potential.**

Our schools help their students achieve the high educational standards the community expects. We support our students and their teachers in word and deed. We assure every student, preschool through adult, has a safe and challenging learning environment. Our schools prepare their students for successful careers, fulfilling lives, and valuable contributions to civic life.

- **Our private and public spaces reflect the pride and creativity of our people.**

Cowley County looks as good as is. Our businesses, neighborhoods and countryside are attractive and well maintained. We accept and share responsibility for the upkeep. Our city and county entrances reflect our rich heritage and our optimism. Our public spaces are clean and inviting.

- **Our community charm and tourism attractions lure visitors.**

Cowley County's communities and countryside have developed unique identities to become favored tourist destinations. Residents rally around these qualities. Together, we promote each of our communities' special brands. Small-town life and prairie living are "in." Our agri-tourism and other ag-based industries are thriving. Our farmers and ranchers are prospering. We welcome visitors and artisans from throughout the world, encouraging them to make Cowley County their home.

- **Cowley County treasures our historic, cultural, financial and human resources.**

We retain local wealth and preserve our natural and historic assets. Cowley County is rich in arts, music and lush parks. Southwestern College and Cowley County Community College are important focal points for cultural and civic events. Our festivals and other cultural attractions can boast of international audience appeal. The people of Cowley County are imaginative, creative and resourceful.

- **All residents have safe, affordable and suitable housing.**

Housing options are plentiful for all income levels and lifestyles. Both public and private entities ensure this need is met.

- **Cowley County is a healthy community blessed with good doctors and other health care professionals.**

We actively pursue every opportunity to enhance our health care capabilities, to attract needed professionals, and to encourage new health care enterprises. Residents are able to choose local providers to meet their health care needs. Families and employers can afford health care and health insurance. We encourage and promote healthy lifestyles.

- **Diversity enriches all of us.**

Every individual is welcomed into civic life and treated fairly. Inclusion guides us. We accept the challenges that diversity in ethnicity, experience, aptitude and thought can present, and we resolve differences in a civil and respectful manner. Our laws and enforcement of them are colorblind and ignorant of wealth and social standing. Our youth are valued and taken seriously. Our seniors are respected and cared for.

This is the future that we, the people of Cowley County, have determined that we will achieve and maintain. Many voices have shared their worries and their dreams in a spirit of hope and trust. To honor those voices we will fund a long-term community development partnership. We will attract others to join with us. We will work together throughout the years to bring this shared vision to life.

Cowley County Community Goals

For purposes of organizing resources and initiating action for the future, our proposed five year plan for renewal has been modified for the current era and achievements from the past five year era. Vision 20/20 is still organized around five broad community interests: People, Economy, Place, Health and Culture. Strategies in each area are preceded by the same ideas and concerns we heard from the community and have been altered based upon reflection on the achievements and challenges in the past five years. Many strategies in these five areas are still closely interrelated, and their implementation will continue to require extensive collaborative action.

Below each area of strategic planning, you will find one of three categorical highlights:

Progress: This means that the work in this strategy is ongoing and may have significant long term effects that have not been realized yet or no change of status since last evaluated.

Successes: This indicates significant accomplishment of the goals set out in 2006.

Continue Work: This indicates that the work to accomplish the goal is occurring currently and will have short term realization, but has not been fulfilled completely to be considered a success.”

Though we have had many achievements in the past five years, it is hard to always be aware of all the actions that may affect this plan, therefore some highlights have included and some have not. As we enter into the next five year plan, localities are encouraged to report any activity that may affect the achievement of any goals outlined in the original Vision 20/20 plan directly to Cowley First.

Cowley County People

The strategies that follow are intended to contribute to the community’s social capital: positive, reciprocal relationships among people. The strategies should continue to embrace the original intent of Vision 20/20 by empowering all community members, increasing harmony among racial and ethnic groups, improving opportunities for young children, retaining young people in the community, enhancing technology skills and nurturing community leaders.

Community Concerns

- *Retain youth in the county*
- *Further strengthen and fund public education*
- *Address poverty among children and families*
- *Increase resources for senior services, especially in smaller communities*
- *Address the shortage of child care and early childhood education*
- *Ensure that programs are inclusive and serve all communities in the county*
- *Strengthen cooperation and partnerships among individual communities*

1. Attract and retain young people in the community through increased economic opportunities, appealing housing choices and civic partnerships that make the area more appealing to young people.

Cowley County has pushed hard to listen to the youth in our region of the last five years. If this desire is to become a reality for many, we must create more and higher-paying jobs and more affordable housing. Ideas for doing so are found in other sections of this plan. Young residents of this community still want more than a good paycheck to remain close to home. We must make greater efforts to include youth and young adults in community decision-making. It must become second nature to seek their voices and votes as we make choices about everything from recreation to economic development. Regular surveying of younger people to get opinions and spot trends would be a start. We should also create incentives for businesses that target youth as customers and/or owners.

Successes:

2008 Economic Forum: Three local young leaders in their respective sectors were asked to speak about what they would like to see in Cowley County and what they felt was keeping them here.

Cowley Young Professionals: Created in 2008, now holds regular gatherings and socials aimed at mixing and reaching out to young professional, skilled, college residents of the area. Age requirement is 18-35.

Winfield Chamber & Leadership Southwestern College: Working together to create a place where students can interact in the community and create a relationship between community members and students.

Arkansas City Chamber & USD 470 Business Leadership Class: Working together to build relationships and skills aimed at keeping young students local.

Kansas Leadership Center, USD 465 Leadership Class

Elections/Appointments of 2006-2009: Cowley County saw several races where working families and young individuals decided to run for political office.

Continued work:

Build a system to communicate with graduating classes from both County High Schools and Southwestern College and Cowley College.

Continue to encourage young people to become involved in local service by actively engaging in community building through board roles etc.

2. Increase available early childhood programs (birth to age 5) and build community awareness about the value of these programs, so as to enable all children in our community to learn, grow and develop their potential.

Research tells us a child's earliest years are the most critical in his or her development and provide the foundation for success in school and in life. All young children and their families deserve the opportunity to succeed, regardless of demographic, geographic or economic conditions. There is alarming evidence that many young children in Cowley County do not have access to activities that promote optimal development, and as a result, they are entering school developmentally delayed. Promoting and fully funding existing programs is a natural starting point.

Progress:

Significant economic challenges were presented as we continue to find a solution to the inadequate child care in Cowley County.

3. Build understanding of our diverse cultures through affirmative steps to welcome all residents and include them in public decision-making and community affairs.

In many respects, we are a welcoming community. Some barriers remain to full inclusion of all persons, however. Public services need to be evaluated to ensure that citizens are fully served regardless of language and other barriers. Social barriers should be reduced or eliminated so all residents may contribute to the community's life and enjoy it. When we work together our differences recede, and our common humanity is manifested. Inclusion of diverse cultures and viewpoints captures the true needs of the community and provides for more effective use of community resources. Building an inclusive environment encourages participation in public affairs and community life and makes the community more appealing as a place to live and work.

Successes:

Cowley County continues to embrace human relations commissions within its communities.

4. Support and improve public education for all students

The Vision 20/20 survey results showed strong support for public schools. In many respects schools in Cowley County, including those in smaller communities, are outstanding. High-quality educational opportunities are key to retaining and attracting families, industry and business. Those opportunities are also key to the community's success in meeting workforce needs and dealing effectively with poverty, health needs and social problems. The image of our schools should be improved so we can continue to retain and attract managers and workers with a high priority for their children's education.

Successes:

Attendance rewards offered at Winfield High School through a 'get out early' option.
Back-Pack Food Program- in USD's

Continued work:

Encourage local business and political leaders to participate within the school system to encourage students to do things right the first time when it come to attendance, sports, homework, and serving the community.

5. Expand educational opportunities for young people who elect not to attend college, and for young women and gifted students.

Although the percentage of young people in Cowley County who graduate from high school exceeds the state average, our high school graduates often lack technical skills needed to participate in the workforce. High school technical programs continue to expand, but these programs do not always prepare students to enter the workforce successfully. More importantly, technical training programs now in place are not well aligned with the work opportunities available in the county.

Young women seeking to prepare themselves for professional and technical fields need encouragement in a culture that traditionally favored males. Young women's athletic opportunities remain limited compared with those of young men. Educators should take the lead with volunteers and community leaders to improve support for young women in school and athletics. Gifted students are well identified but need more options for expressing their talents. Their success of young women and gifted students is important to the community and its future. Volunteers should work with schools and the community to enrich the opportunities for both these groups.

Successes:

Implementation of Mechatronics Program through Cowley College.

Entrepreneurial/Leadership Classes at USD's—over the top enrollment for these classes

Continued: Registered Apprenticeships, nationwide programs- Workforce Dev

6. Provide mentoring and leadership to promote diversity, reduce poverty and create a balanced economy.

Cowley County residents continue to see a change in our mindset to address the complicated issue of poverty. Much of the poverty in the county is generational, requiring interventions that change patterns of behavior but still respect individuals and families. We must also continue to provide employment opportunities and related supports that can prevent individuals from falling below the poverty level. Local leaders, schools and churches should play an active role in the implementation of this strategy. Our efforts should start at the earliest ages and extend support such as mentoring to residents of all ages who want to fulfill their dreams.

Successes:

Citizens Police Academy

Leadership Cowley County

KICC

Example of Local Non-Profits continuing to increase programming despite budget cuts.

- BBBS of Cowley County- Financial Literacy Training
- Eagle Nest- Many programs for Women

Continued Work:

Local Government Challenges—with looming budget problems, it is imperative that the poor remain an important piece of the problems affecting our cities and county.

7. Improve services for seniors countywide by obtaining increased funding at the local level, countywide.

The elderly population of Cowley County is larger than average and those individuals are living longer. Their contributions to the community have been, and are, great. But many seniors are not well integrated into community life today. Because of their numbers and experience, the community can benefit considerably from their full participation. A number of businesses in the county exist to serve seniors, and those businesses should take a lead in bringing seniors into the mainstream of the community's life. In rural communities seniors may outnumber those who support

them. It is vital that federal, state and non-profit funding for seniors be supplemented by locally generated funds on a countywide basis.

Successes:

Cowley County Council on Aging has increased funding to local Seniors

Continued Work:

Cowley County continues to support the happiness of senior citizens, but the goal has not yet been achieved.

Cowley County Economy

The strategies that follow are intended to contribute to sustaining and expanding the county's economic base in ways that support entrepreneurship, business retention, business development, workforce recruiting and development, regional partnerships, wealth retention, tourism promotion and downtown development.

Community Concerns

- *Support home-grown business and industry*
- *Attract new business and industry*
- *Overcome barriers to successful workforce recruiting*
- *Stimulate and support entrepreneurship*
- *Provide incentives to develop more retail businesses*
- *Promote county tourism attractions and agri-tourism*
- *Strengthen regional economic partnerships*
- *Retain local wealth and direct it to future needs*
- *Continue to provide property tax exemptions for new and expanding industry*

8. Secure adequate, long-term funding for the Cowley First Economic Development Partnership

Success:

Economic Development in Cowley County has been fully supported through a local partnership focusing on providing excellence in staff support of entrepreneurship, business retention and rural developmental opportunities.

Winfield Public Library Entrepreneurship Resource Library formation.

South Central Kansas Cowley College Small Business Development Center formation.

Continued Work:

Business Retention/ Recruitment efforts should be rethought and implemented.

Cowley First and other economic development partners in our county should continue to develop closer ties and working relationships with state and regional economic development organizations. This would assist in recruiting jobs and workers and also provide a stronger voice on legislative issues affecting the regional economy.

9. Retain and expand existing industry

We should maintain an environment conducive to the stability and growth of local business and industry. We should develop a long-term strategy to market local business and industry to our residents, both for purposes of sales to consumers and employment of local people. This strategy should include such things as a single database of existing businesses in the county, "shop local" campaigns and business fairs.

Success:

S & Y Industries Expansion

Insight Newell Rubbermaid Expansion

Continued Support of local industry on federal and state regulatory matters

Several Recruitment Efforts working with the Department of Commerce

Progress:

Continue evaluating efforts to implement a plan that includes a rotating continual communication with local business and industry.

10. Overcome barriers to successful workforce recruiting and development, especially in housing, child services and perceptions of quality of life

We need to develop a countywide coalition of vision partners to address the significant barriers to employee recruiting that have been identified by local business and industry managers:

- Lack of affordable housing for hourly and semi-skilled workers
- Lack of daycare 24/7
- Need for technical and skills training tailored to local business and industry
- Perceived image of local schools as having low test scores
- Perceived lack of opportunities for shopping and dining out.
- Drug and alcohol abuse

Successes:

Formation of: Cowley County Drug Court Program

Continued partnerships between USD's and Cowley College

Affordable Housing USDA PUD 24 unit development discussions, Winfield 2007

Continued Work:

Daycare solutions

Affordable Housing discussions

11. Promote entrepreneurship development through a network of services to stimulate and support startup business ventures

We should enhance the entrepreneurship culture in Cowley County with steps that include:

- **An Entrepreneurship Center.** Cowley First should help create a one-stop support center as part of a network of technical assistance and business counseling to increase the sustainability of new companies. The center should provide hands-on support services equivalent to a virtual incubator. The Cowley College Business,

Industry and Entrepreneurship Program should be supplemented by complementary programs such as those at Southwestern College and SCORE's small business counselors. The center should continue to cultivate a culture that encourages entrepreneurs, including students in middle school and high school.

- **A Business Incubator(s).** Cowley First should work with economic development partners such as Winfield Economic Development and Ark City Industries to provide affordable, leased space to new entrepreneurs for their first two to five years, so they can invest their limited resources to meet other needs.
- **A "One-a-Year" Entrepreneurship Recruitment Program.** In order to supplement other entrepreneurship programs, a nationwide promotion should be undertaken annually to recruit an entrepreneur to start a new business in Cowley County. Business space, technical assistance and venture capital should be provided as necessary. Instead of making grants or loans, Cowley First should take an ownership interest in the new company. Revenue generated should be used to continue the program.
- **A Private For-Profit Venture Capital Corporation.** Cowley First should work with the private sector to stimulate development of a private for-profit venture capital corporation to provide entrepreneurs with working capital loans not available from traditional financial institutions.
- **An Inventor Center.** Cowley First should work with program partners to develop an inventor center that provides technical assistance and business counseling for creative individuals to test their product ideas.

Successes:

Implementation of South Central Kansas Small Business Center, Cowley College

Continued Work: Small Business Incubators

12. Promote rural development through expansion of tourism activities and initiatives in agri-tourism

Our *ABCDE Better Together* rural development program in eastern Cowley County is a Governor's Rural Life Task Force Pilot Project (2006-07) and a national model for sustainable rural development. We should regularly sponsor familiarization tours to create awareness and interest among tourism professionals. Feedback from these tours should help us learn how to entice tourists to "stay a while" in Cowley County. Strategic regional partnerships can help us expand resources and opportunities for success in agri-tourism.

Successes:

Through Federal Home Loan JOBS Grant, Cowley First awarded 25 grants for local accomplishments of vision 20/20 goals

Kansas Sesquicentennial Barn Painting Project- Agri Tourism

Continued Work:

Making Cowley County a place where people travel to tour models of how life could be.

13. Target and recruit new businesses and industries that will create jobs

Cowley First should work with program partners including cities and economic development organizations such as Ark City Industries and Winfield Economic Development to identify and recruit businesses with an emphasis on creating high-quality jobs. Partners in this effort should include regional and state economic development organizations.

Progress:

Continue working towards this important goal of vitality

14. Expand the number and variety of retail businesses in the county

Cowley First should partner with local chambers of commerce, downtown revitalization groups and other retail interests to develop a strategy to encourage the planned development and start-up of new commercial businesses and broaden the retail base in the county. Two types of businesses mentioned in the Vision 20/20 survey responses, clothing stores, shoe stores and quality restaurants, should have priority.

Progress:

Continue to work with localities in the opportunities for developing the proposed Highway 77 Corridor.

15. Grow endowments for the purpose of retaining wealth in the community and directing its use to future community needs

Financial resources are critical to economic development. Creating a civic attitude that encourages wealth retention is a key strategy that will enable the region to support and preserve its quality of life for future generations. Working through Legacy, a regional community foundation, we hope to encourage the growth of endowments that will allow us to maintain the rich and viable life we cherish in Cowley County.

Progress:

Cowley First continues to maintain a fund in the Legacy Foundation for endowed growth.

Cowley County Place

The strategies that follow continue to address the physical infrastructure and appeal of the community, including affordable, suitable housing, attractive visual appearance, appropriate

development of transportation corridors, improvements in public transportation and expansion of air and rail services.

Community Concerns

- *Clean up unsafe properties, trash and junk*
- *Make city entrances more attractive*
- *Provide more affordable housing*
- *Enhance the county's transportation infrastructure*
- *Protect and improve the natural environment*
- *Undertake more long range community planning*

16. Improve the appearance of commercial, residential and public properties, with a priority for those areas first encountered by visitors to the community.

A community's appearance conveys a powerful message about its values, self-image and aspirations. Appearance also markets the community to visitors who form first and often lasting impressions that influence investment decisions. A substantial majority of residents who participated in Vision 20/20 emphasized that the visual quality of the community -- both cities and rural areas -- was a high priority and that we can and must do better. Improvements should be initiated one property owner and one business at a time, with each taking personal responsibility for improving and maintaining its property. Residential and commercial neighbors should engage in joint efforts to raise money and volunteers for improvements local government cannot afford. City and county governments must also step up to the plate with strengthened zoning and nuisance codes, public education and, when necessary, tougher enforcement.

Successes:

Strengthened codes in both Winfield and Ark City

Udall has made significant progress in entrance to city on Highway K-15

Private housing development on the Northwest entrance to Udall is very attractive and inviting.

Removal of Recycling Center south of Winfield by County Commission.

The round-a-bout on the 77 bypass around Ark City and the resurfacing of Highway 166 east of AC should encourage property owners and the City of Arkansas City to enhance the appearance of that entrance to the City.

Winfield Chamber of Commerce has made this item a priority for the 2009-2010 fiscal year.

Continued Work:

County Commissioner/City Commission meeting held twice a year with the appropriate administrators of all the communities in the County. The agenda could be developed to discuss the various strategies and objectives and find out what has been done, what is in the planning stages and share successes and concern.

17. Improve and expand the availability of good quality, affordable housing for rental and home ownership.

The present shortage of affordable housing emerged as a priority issue in our focus groups and surveys. The shortage includes single and multi-family housing both for rental and home ownership. The lack of affordable housing impedes the vitality of the community in several ways and acts as a major restraint on individual and family quality of life. The community may also fail to recruit or retain industry due to our housing shortage. Implementing this strategy will require close collaboration among private developers, investors and public entities, as well as success in obtaining housing grants and related government resources.

Progress:

Affordable Housing Shortage continues to affect our local economy. With the national depression still affecting Cowley County, we will continue to face this problem. We are not a community who is alone in this issue.

Meeting held in Winfield, June 23, 2009 regarding the USDA Rural Development (Housing)

18. Begin implementation of a plan for development of the Highway 77 corridor from the north to the south county borders.

Highway 77 is a significant economic, social and cultural artery of Cowley County and its careful, coordinated development is vital to our future. Corridor plans should include not only improvements for safety and traffic flow, but also for sustaining pedestrian-friendly downtowns and commercial and industrial development between Winfield and Arkansas City. We should take a proactive approach to the future development of the corridor, rather than allowing it to develop haphazardly. The more efficient our highway, the farther people will travel to take advantage of employment, retail, tourist and cultural opportunities in our county. Coordination among the cities of Arkansas City and Winfield, the Kansas Department of Transportation and Cowley County will be needed to develop a comprehensive plan.

Progress:

A plan has been coordinated between local governments and the KDOT. This plan outlines the next steps needed to successfully make Cowley County a well managed development site for many years.

19. Complete and implement regional and countywide transportation plans.

One of the highest priorities for existing and prospective business enterprises is the ability to efficiently transport raw materials and goods from suppliers and finished products to market. We must have effective and strategic traffic flow through our county, which cannot be achieved in a haphazard manner, but only through long-range planning for the financing and construction of transportation infrastructure. The easier and more efficient it is to travel to and within the county, the more attractive we will be to business and tourism investments.

Progress:

Intermodal Freight has been moved to a priority in this community.

Expanded Heartland Amtrack Flyer Rail Services from Texas through Kansas has been proposed with the Federal Stimulus dollars in 2009.

Continued Work:

2011 project of installing signs for HIGH WATER throughout dangerous parts of county

20. Provide reliable air and rail service for agricultural, commercial and industrial transport needs.

Strother Field, our only public airport, is one of the community's most important assets, and investment in its maintenance and improvement is essential if we are to effectively compete for new business investment. Rail service has long been important to local agricultural producers and manufacturers. Given the growth of rail shipping in the country, we should investigate possible upgrades of local rail connections to ensure we can offer the best and most economical shipping options to local businesses and agricultural producers.

Successes:

2009 Fall meeting to be held with area businesses and industries who depend on different methods of transportation to get supplies and finished products shipped in and out of county.

2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010 funding for REAP approved by both City of Ark City and City of Winfield

2009-2010 Airport Improvement Plan has been completed, as have previous years.

KDOT has been asked by the State Legislature to fund a study regarding bringing AMTRAC services back into this area. KDOT has agreed to fund this study.

In 2007 and in 2009, Strother Field hosted a fly-in held in July. 2009 update- About 20 pilots and good attendance.

Progress:

As oil continues to become a scarcity and gasoline without a doubt climbs higher in affordability for our residents, rail services will need to be invested in to grant this community a sustainable future for both job markets, and affordable productivity for local industry.

21. Develop and implement countywide public transportation services to address the mobility needs of residents who lack access to a personal automobile.

The ability to access services or participate in community life is almost exclusively dependent on driving a personal automobile. A shortage of public transportation contributes to unemployment, poverty, poor access to health care and general isolation. We need an affordable, coordinated public transportation network to enable non-driving residents to locate and sustain a job, attend college, obtain medical and social services, visit a child's school, contribute volunteer talents, shop for necessities and participate in social activities. A first step should be creation of a profile of our public transportation needs. We should also access resources of the Kansas United We Ride program, an initiative of the governor's office to coordinate and enhance public transportation for human services. Current area transportation providers and a coalition of faith-based organizations, human service providers and other social service entities could be called upon to offer solutions and implement ideas.

Continued Work:

Continue to push and work with area legislators for ‘Councils on Aging’ to be removed from the Kansas Tax Rolls

Cowley County Health

The strategies that follow are intended to continue to promote the physical and mental health of people of all ages who live and work in the county. The strategies include preventing disease and disability, improving access to quality, full service health care and reducing substance abuse.

Community Concerns

- *Address the drug abuse problem*
- *Expand substance abuse prevention*
- *Improve the availability of affordable health care*
- *Provide and encourage more recreation opportunities for young people*
- *Reduce child abuse*

22. Protect and improve the natural environment and natural resources in the Cowley County region.

Note: After recommendation in 2009, this objective has been moved from the PLACE team of Vision 20/20 to HEALTH

Cowley County is blessed to have a relatively clean environment. Many of the people who participated in Vision 20/20 focus groups were pleased to live in a community where the air is clean and water plentiful. Citizens from all walks of life value the beautiful prairie and the wonders of our lakes, streams and rivers. It is critical that the unspoiled quality of our land and a continuing supply of potable water be preserved for the future.

Successes:

Continued control and slowing of mussels spread
Viability study for Winfield Lake

Continued Work:

Continue to seek ways to combat traveling toxins such as mussels and to continue to upgrade water treatment facilities as needed throughout the county for the better enjoyment of its residents.
Beginning to explore the possibility towards the establishment of a Green Team initiative in Cowley County.

23. Reduce drug and alcohol abuse among youth and adults in Cowley County through strengthened prevention initiatives, expanded mentoring opportunities and aggressive law enforcement and judicial responses to offenders.

Substance abuse was rated as one of the top three issues by residents in the Vision 20/20 survey. The community's message is clear: we must act to reduce the effects of this corrosive problem. We should communicate the devastating consequences of substance abuse to individuals, families and communities. The message should be delivered through multiple channels. Mentorship programs should be expanded to give

young people positive role models, and these programs should be coordinated with schools.

We must also aggressively enforce the law and prosecute crimes and, repeat offenders so that, real consequences for substance abuse are experienced by youth and their responsible adult parties. Enforcement standards must be consistently met. Consequences should include mandatory attendance at an alcohol and drug safety program which may reduce the probability of future substance abuse. If repeat offenses occur, consequences should be considered that include probation for the youth and jail for the responsible party.

Successes:

Cowley County Drug Court Program, 2009

County Drug Dog

Continued visibility of drug related arrests/operations by local law enforcement

Continue to make sure people are aware of the options for prevention/intervention

Friday Night After Hours, a youth program aimed at targeting youth between the hours of 9pm and 12am after Varsity games. (since discontinued)

Continued Work:

Winfield PD Drug Dog

Redevelop opportunities for youth to interact socially after 9pm

Continue to educate public about the guidelines set out by the state legislature when it comes time for sentencing on drug related charges.

24. Offset the attraction to alcohol and illegal drugs by expanding recreation and other programs for young people and adults.

Drug and alcohol-free activities should be organized around age groups, with a high priority placed on after-school and summer programs for youth. Programs should have youth appeal, e. g., they must be seen as creative, positive and fun from the point of view of young people, and must be marketed with this message. Programs should target development of interpersonal skills, skills for coping with stress and peer pressure, problem-solving and decision-making. Adult programs should offer parenting instruction, including ways to promote healthy life choices for all members of the family. Additional education programs should be made available for doctors and other medical professionals.

See Above, 24

25. Promote the physical and mental health of residents through expansion of public facilities and programs to encourage, walking, jogging, biking and community gardening.

Cardiovascular disease is the leading health problem in Cowley County. Low-cost family activities that increase cardiovascular health offer significant prevention benefits. We envision a public trail along Timber Creek similar to the Greenway in Arkansas City, and monthly "Walk-a-Mile" events sponsored by local churches. Those events could end with a meal at a host church to promote proper eating, family togetherness and community inclusion. We should also create community gardens in

rural and urban areas of the county to encourage healthy eating, family fitness and community interaction.

Successes:

Community Garden 2009, Southwestern College

USD 465, 2010 Community Production Garden

Winfield Timber Creek Walking/biking Trails, Assessment from MKC 2010

Arkansas City Greenway/ Walking/biking Trails

Continued Work:

Work to utilize empty lots downtown to be turned into productive pieces of garden use.

Continue to expand community gardens throughout Cowley County

26. Establish accessible free or low-cost medical clinics in Winfield and Arkansas City.

Such successful clinics would require close coordination among local governments and area medical professionals. Grant and foundation funds would be needed. Clinic services should be available to all county residents, including those who lack health insurance. Expanded clinic hours will be necessary to serve residents who work second and third shifts. Clinic facilities should be fully accessible to those with physical disabilities.

Continued Work:

Continue to explore the possibility of a need for this in our county. Taking advantage of Low Cost Prescription Drug Cards is one viable stop gap for the coverage of our lacking residents.

27. Increase access to health insurance in Cowley County

Far too many Cowley County residents lack adequate health insurance coverage and as a consequence, lack adequate health care. In many cases these individuals are fully employed, but their employers do not offer a health insurance benefit. We simply cannot realize our community vision when so many of our neighbors lack access to basic health care. While solutions to the nation's health care crisis are beyond the reach of our individual communities, we can and must do a better job of informing our residents of the federal and state programs that extend affordable health care coverage to those who are without private insurance.

See 28, as well.

Progress:

The United States government continues to tackle this issue in its 2009 session.

28. Increase the number of healthcare professionals in Cowley County.

Our emphasis should be on growing our own healthcare professionals. In addition to their current activities in this area, local medical providers should join in a community-based Health Careers program to promote health-related vocations in high schools. We should invite local health-related businesses to provide scholarships and

internships for students who pursue careers in health care at Cowley and Southwestern Colleges, and encourage the students involved to pursue their health care careers locally. The medical training resources at our local colleges are a significant asset and we should do all we can to sustain and expand them.

The focus of our work has been to tackle the problem of access.

Progress:

USD's, Southwestern College, Cowley College have teamed up for Health Career Coursework.

29. Undertake a public education campaign for a countywide tobacco free environment in public spaces and the elimination of youth access to tobacco products.

Prevention of disease through a reduction in tobacco use and second-hand smoke is a measure that promises significant improvement in the health of Cowley County residents. We should form a coalition to advocate that restaurants and other public spaces be free from second-hand smoke. Grants from the Kansas Health Foundation and other nonprofit organizations should be sought to underwrite the campaign. We note with gratitude that use of tobacco among teenagers in Cowley County has declined over the past five years, and we need to keep that trend line moving downward. Our campaign must also encourage retailers who sell tobacco products to increase their vigilance in preventing sales to minors. For retailers who fail to take appropriate measures, we should advocate strict punishment, including fines.

Successes:

Winfield. Passed Clean Indoor Air Ordinance in 2008. Effective Jan 2009
Arkansas City, CIA meetings underway

Continued Work:

Arkansas City, CIA meetings underway
Burden
Dexter

Youth Access Ordinance, encouraging local youth to denounce the sale to minors.

30. Reduce the historically high incidence of confirmed child abuse in Cowley County.

Analysis of data from the state Dept. of Social and Rehabilitation Services shows a high, if declining, incidence of substantiated child abuse in Cowley County. In 2005 the rate was 16.8 children per 1,000, according to the Kids Count Data Book. The state average was 10.1. Teachers, health care personnel, law enforcement, SRS and organizations like Safe Homes and CASA are on the front line when it comes to responding to spouse and child abuse. They need strong leadership and support from the community. We should no longer accept the high incidence of child abuse and neglect in Cowley County. We should change our mindset and take a proactive approach to overcoming this devastating social ill that diminishes the quality of all our lives.

Continued Work:

New parents should continue to be aided with a fact book on the stressors of transitioning into parenthood.

Continue to support local youth mentoring organizations through increased funding and unique ways of private support and volunteerism.

Continue Backpack Food Program. Making sure area children do not go hungry.

Work as a community to provide afterschool programs and summer day camps for children.

Continue to make parents and residents aware of Sex Offenders List.

31. Reduce the health threat from childhood obesity through school programs that increase physical activity and promote healthy nutrition choices.

Obesity in children is a continual national trend and critical and increasingly widespread problem in Cowley County. Its consequences threaten health in profound ways at all stages of life.

Successes:

Improved vending regulations at local schools.

Local summer Rec attendance/programs; Emphasizing nutrition and healthy exercise. Specifically Camp WeCan in Winfield, Kansas.

32. Protect the quality of our air and water, and continue to provide adequate quantities of water for Cowley County.

Many of the people who participated in Vision 20/20 focus groups were pleased to live in a community where the air is clean and water plentiful. Still stream biologists and the federal Environmental Protection Agency tell us there are threats to the quality of our air and water. We should seek the fullest cooperation possible to keep our air clean and assure quality water resources for domestic and industrial use. We should work with groups like river basin committees and the Grouse-Silver Creek Watershed organization, which have partnerships with state and federal agencies to preserve water flow and quality. And we should work with industry and agricultural interests to assure clean air for the future.

Progress:

Stencil/Medallion marked Storm Drains, advocating conservation efforts among residents.

Southwestern College, hosted the 2009 Kansas Environmental Convention

Continue to help local agriculture see the benefits of increased attention to water supply and quality through local and regional water seminars.

Future possibility of pharmaceutical disposal do not flush

Cowley County Culture

The strategies that follow are intended to continue to preserve and develop the community's creativity and cultural life, including the visual arts, theater, music and community festivals, and promote the preservation of historic structures.

Community Concerns

- *Preserve and promote historic landmarks and structures in the county*
- *Strengthen downtown revitalization*
- *Preserve the natural beauty of rural Cowley County*
- *Promote the humanities, including music festivals, theater and performing arts*

33. Develop pedestrian-friendly downtowns for day and evening activities to offer leisure and tourist opportunities for all ages.

Many communities in Cowley County have a core infrastructure of buildings and public facilities that provide opportunities for restoration and possibly reinvention of their downtown areas. Toward this end we should begin by analyzing local, state and federal regulations. We should advocate for changes that make our downtowns genuine destinations for residents and tourists, with special emphasis on congregating unique businesses that cannot be found at shopping malls or discount stores -- galleries, coffee bars, boutiques, eateries, farmers' markets and entertainment for day and evening hours. We must also insure that the plan for Highway 77 corridor development is compatible with the vision to make our downtowns friendly to pedestrians and tourists.

Successes:

Streetscape and kiosk maps – downtown Ark City

Sidewalk Sale and Family Fun Night in Winfield

Main Street's downtown music crawl in Winfield

Celebrate Summit, Ark City

Summit Olympics, Ark City

Downtown storefront improvements in Ark City, Winfield and Dexter

Students in Dexter raise \$18,000 for a downtown clock/electric sign

Helium Pocket Park improved in Dexter

Downtown Self-Guided Walking Tour updated by the Cherokee Strip Museum for Arkansas City.

Art Galleries have been made available for experience.

Farmer's Markets have grown in two major cities

Continued support of local governments and Main Street/ Chambers for the restoration and preservation of our historic downtowns.

Access to maps of important architectural qualities in County at www.cowleycounty.org.

Continued Work:

Training by Cowley County Historical Society for a group to be available to guide downtown tours for out of town guests. Including Winfield Historic Homes tours, Downtowns, Stone Arch Bridges

Spring and Fall 2010 – Winfield Chamber working to bring music/cultural events downtown

34. Showcase/Market Cowley County's history/culture through many avenues including attractions and events that highlight: architecture, waterways and other natural spaces in order to expand leisure activities for residents and tourists.

Cowley County residents often take for granted our tremendous natural and physical assets and their appeal to others. For example, in the new publication of "The Kansas Guidebook for Explorers" by Marci Penner over 70 specific historic and architectural sites, museums, events, natural areas and other attractions are showcased for Cowley County. We should use our rich history and features unique to Cowley County to promote our area to residents and visitors, and also to provide a backdrop to our own cultural life.

This plan will promote the community's creativity and diverse cultural life to our internal market -- Cowley County residents -- as well as to visitors. Our cultural arts events and programs should be marketed throughout the region, building upon our reputation and existing marketing efforts. We believe a dedicated staff position will be needed to implement the marketing plan, measure progress and champion Cowley County.

Successes:

Cowley County Tourism Alliance forms – regularly meets to identify ways to promote county to residents and tourists alike.

Cowley County Marketplace – first annual event held spring 2009 to showcase area events, attractions, etc.

Celebrate Cowley County Photo Essay Contests (2007, 2008, 2009)

Expanded Stone Bridge Tour now includes musical and re-enactment performances

New Mural by Gary Gackstatter in Ark City

Mural Painting on the Stone Barn Mercantile in Dexter in anticipation of the Kansas Sesquicentennial Celebration

Preservation and Recognition of the value of architecture in Cowley County including the Stone Arch Bridges. (moved from #33)

Increased Signage linking Cowley County to the Flint Hills (moved from #33)

Development of the first comprehensive Cowley County Visitors Guide

Creation of 2008, 2009 Cowley County Calendars, promoting rural Cowley County and large annual events.

Semi-monthly CCTA newsletter including projects, meeting information, and events

Continued Work:

Burford Theatre Restoration in Arkansas City

Bus Tours in Eastern Cowley County (“Explore Eastern Cowley”)

Next CCTA project is to develop a county-wide scavenger hunt/treasure hunt to residents

Work to develop the opportunities for local events to be branded and marketed through a continually updated online site. This could be used for monitoring and alerting volunteers of opportunities as well.

35. Encourage diverse local cultural festivals and celebrations, leisure activities and sports.

We need to build upon and take advantage of Cowley County's already well-earned national reputation as a music festival destination. We should support existing festivals and facilitate additional community celebrations that will broaden our cultural life experiences, stimulate creativity -- and we might add -- enrich our local economy. Sports events in particular appeal to both residents and visitors and give Cowley County its reputation for hospitality in this area.

Successes:

New Events:

- Railroad Heritage Days, Ark City
- Renaissance Festival, Ark City
- Winfield County Roundup
- River of Life Christian Music Festival, Ark City
- Downtown Music Crawl, Winfield

Jim Richardson Flint Hills Photo Exhibit hosting in Ark City, Winfield and Eastern Cowley

2 Smithsonian Exhibits showcased at the Winfield Public Library

Smithsonian Exhibit at the Cherokee Strip Museum

“K is for Kansas” exhibit at the Cherokee Strip Museum

Cowley County Marketplace

Walking Trail around Veteran’s Lake, Ark City

Improved walking trail at Island Park, Winfield

Skate Park, Ark City

Flint Hills Country Music Opry

The development of both major cities to expand the capabilities of its sports/ theatrical facilities has been a worthwhile venture.

Continued work:

Cowley County Tourism Alliance is exploring events for the Kansas Sesquicentennial in 2011.

Both Ark City and Winfield Chambers/CVB/C&T along with the Cowley County Tourism Alliance continually evaluate existing events and activities and determine how to improve upon them. Currently, the Winfield Chamber/C&T is exploring how to incorporate more music events throughout the year, especially in the downtown region.

36. Develop a Cowley County cultural life center to promote collaboration among cultural arts organizations and enrich the cultural life of the community.

As a result of our local colleges and community heritage we are extraordinarily rich in cultural arts for a community of our size. We could be even richer through greater collaboration among artists, cultural advocates and institutions. A county cultural life center would provide impetus for a myriad of collaborative efforts among individuals and organizations that contribute to the cultural vitality of our community. For example, the center could host quarterly round table meetings with representation from all towns and rural areas in the county. Another center program could be developed to publish an arts and humanities directory, both in print and online. We believe we could assemble the resources to build and operate the center through grants and other funding sources.

Successes:

Cowley County Tourism Alliance forms to collaborate on tourism efforts
Artist Alley forms in Winfield

Continued work:

Area-wide Community Theatre

County-wide collaboration on plans for the sesquicentennial

Continue to maintain contacts with local leaders.

Continue to create collaboration between local artists in music as well as other arts.

2010 RENEWAL STATEMENT

It is with great pleasure that this community strives to be the best that it can be. Throughout the next five years we see even more opportunities coming as the economy on a local level and a national level begin to pull out of the worst depression since the 1930's. Local governments will continue to be stretched thin and the organization of people in this county will have to learn to rethink the way they live in the future with respect given to the way they have lived in the past. Very likely, this county will never be the same following this depression and it is the best we can do to continue to collaborate and create a community that is a model for success in changing times.