

Land Use 4 & Annexation



The Land Use & Annexation section analyzes the current land uses within Atkinson and then provides a vision with possibilities and options for future land use developments and growth. During an evaluation of existing and future land use potential, discussions are held determining the physical, economic and social efficiency, health, and well-being of the community. This section also analyzes potential areas for annexation adjacent to Atkinson's corporate limits. This Land Use & Annexation section has the following two components:

- Existing & Future Land Use
- Annexation Plan

Land use is an important aspect in the Comprehensive Plan allowing community members to visualize existing land uses as well as to stimulate discussion and direction for how and where the community could and should grow. How the land is being used creates relationships between the physical, built environment and the social world. Land use planning is an important process because it involves the systematic assessment of physical, social, and economic factors in a way that should mitigate the potential for conflict. This section will give decision-makers options on how the community can grow.

Land Use

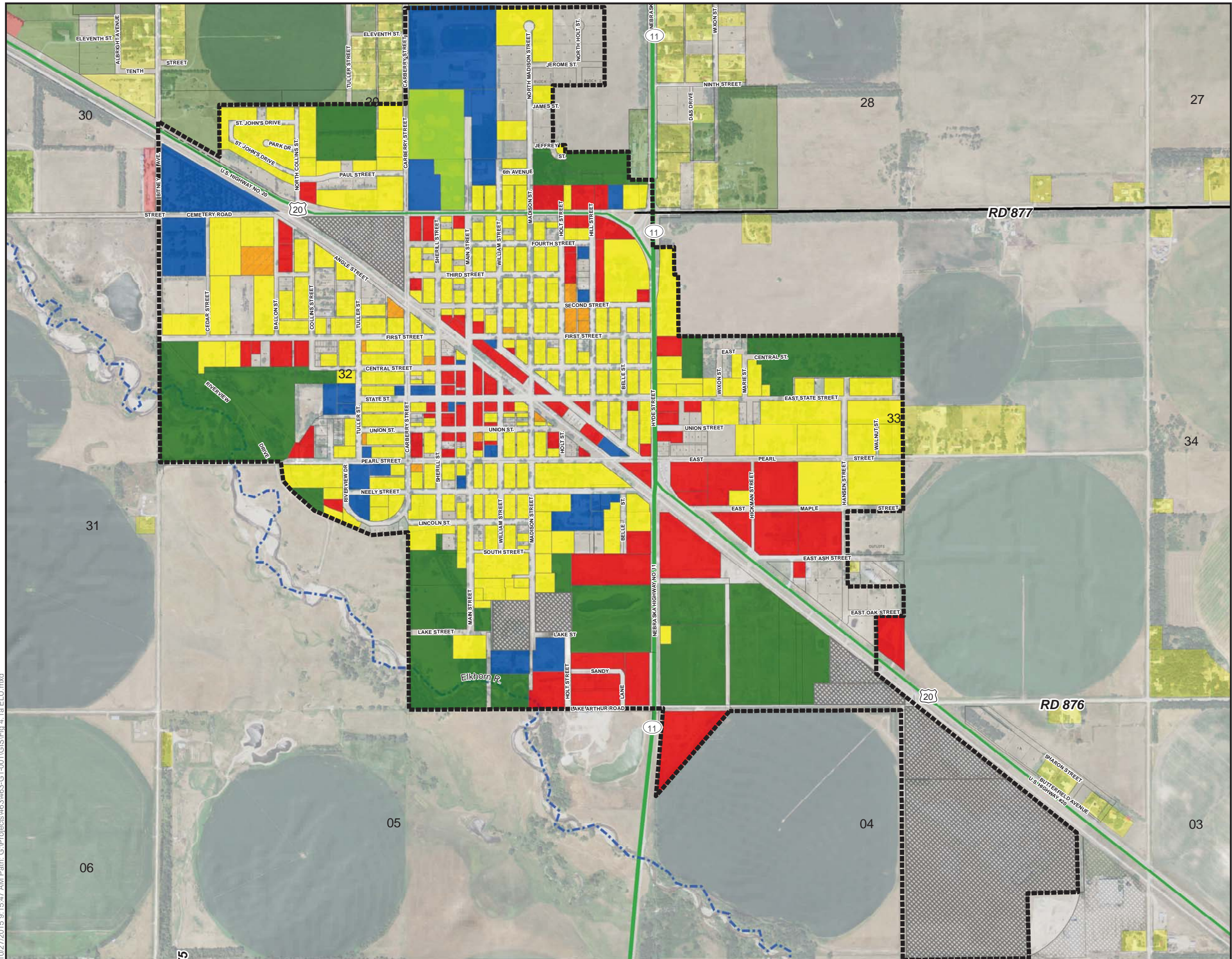
Existing Land Use

The land use section of the Comprehensive Plan consists of two separate but related parts. The existing land use section is where the community studies and evaluates the pros and cons of Atkinson's existing mix of land uses and development patterns. **Figure 4.1a**, the Existing Land Use Map, and **Figure 4.1b**, the Existing Land Use-ETJ Map, shows the current land uses in and around Atkinson. This allows the City to see how the community's land uses fit together and how the land use patterns should change in the future. Atkinson has eight different land use classifications including single-family residential, multi-family residential, commercial, light industrial, public/quasi-public, agricultural/greenspace, recreational, and vacant parcels. Commercial land uses are primarily found along the Highway 20 corridor and Downtown District as well as a few other areas spread throughout the community. Companies located along the highway corridors typically require easier access, more parking, or larger space/square footage. Larger economic ventures such as manufacturing, bulk storage, or distribution facilities typically fall into the light industrial category and those businesses should be located on the outskirts of the community so as not to adversely impact existing property owners. Highway and Downtown Districts tend to attract different types of businesses and they also tend to look and feel dramatically different from one another.

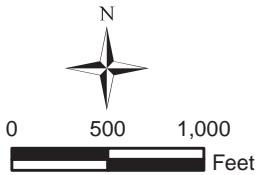
Many communities have separate zoning regulations for the highway corridor commercial district and the central/downtown commercial district. Separate districts are necessary because of the different setbacks, lot sizes, height restrictions, parking needs, and aesthetic desires for each of the areas. Downtown economic development should be catered towards retail, service, and/or hospitality businesses. It is important to protect the look and feel of the Downtown District because it is the heart of the community. Larger economic ventures are important to the economy because of the revenue and job opportunities they provide for the City; however, these developments should take place along the outskirts of town near Highways 20 and 11. Zoning Regulations are important to steer commercial development into proper zoning districts to ensure the mix of adjacent land uses is conducive to new development.

The primary land use in Atkinson is residential. Structures of this nature can be found throughout the community. As obvious as it seems, it is important when planning for any future development to maintain or enhance the existing feel of the neighborhood. This is especially true in residential areas of the community; any new structures that are built in those neighborhoods should be residential in nature. The existing residential land uses include both single-family and multi-family developments with mixes of single-family detached homes, duplexes, and apartments. There are a few multi-family or medium density developments spread throughout the community, most are duplexes that have been constructed amongst single-family residential homes. Other residential development has taken place outside the corporate limits but within the City's one-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction. A large number of these homes can be classified as rural residential homes including farm homes or single-family homes on large lots; however, not all residential development outside of the corporate limits should be considered rural residential or large lot development. This type of residential development can be very enticing and attractive for people because it allows for large spacious yards, privacy, and yet still in close proximity to the community.

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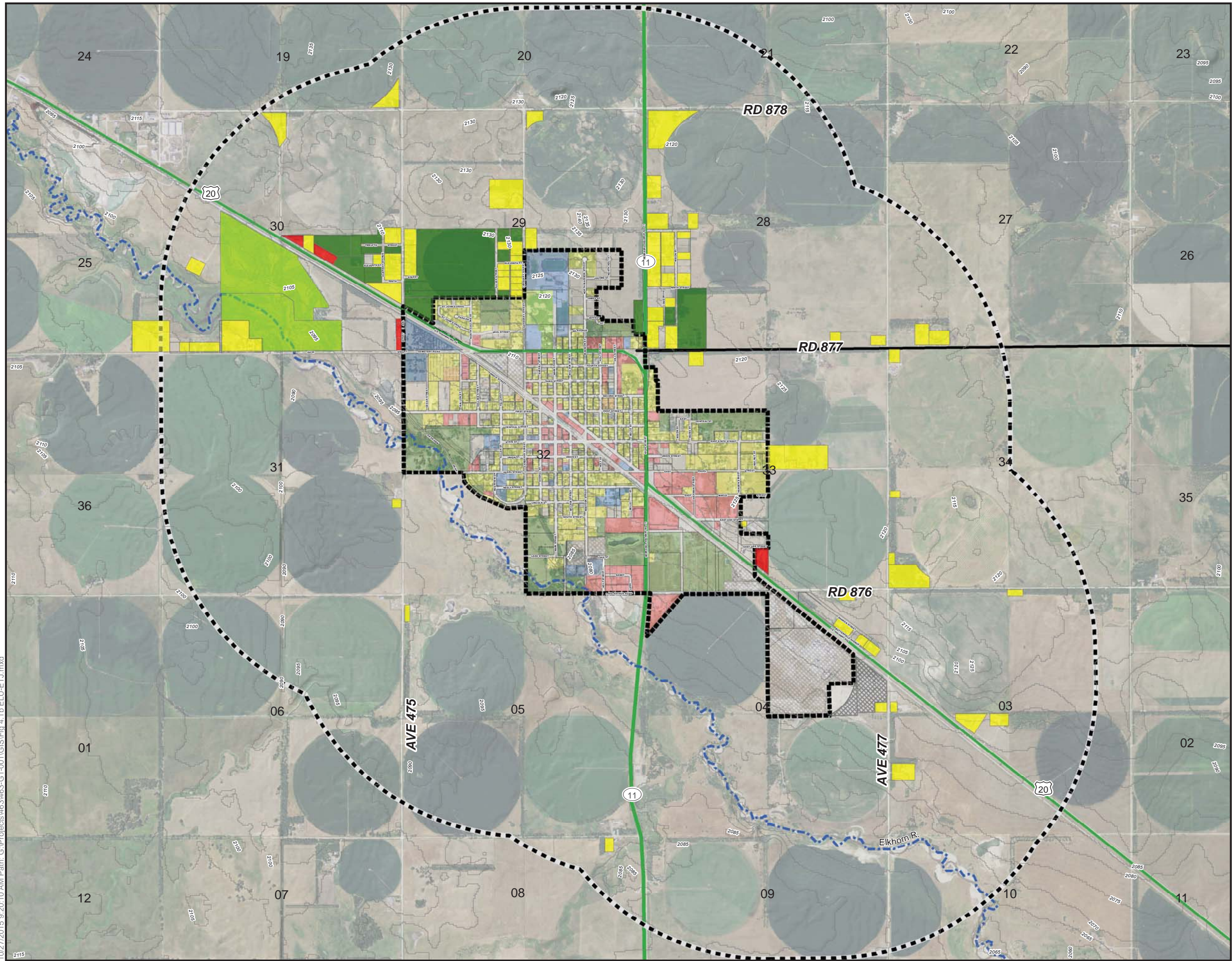


- Legend**
- Atkinson Corporate Limits
 - Existing Land Use**
 - Single-Family Residential
 - Multi-Family Residential
 - Commercial
 - Light Industrial
 - Public/Quasi-Public
 - Recreational
 - Agricultural/Greenspace
 - Vacant

Figure 4.1a
Existing Land Use Map
Atkinson, Nebraska

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- Legend**
- 1-Mile ETJ
 - Atkinson Corporate Limits
 - Existing Land Use**
 - Single-Family Residential
 - Multi-Family Residential
 - Commercial
 - Light Industrial
 - Public/Quasi-Public
 - Recreational
 - Agricultural/Greenspace
 - Vacant

Note:
All areas outside of the Corporate Limits that have not been classified as a particular land use may be classified as Agricultural/Greenspace.

Figure 4.1b
Existing Land Use Map
Atkinson, Nebraska

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There are several recreational areas throughout the community including the municipal swimming pool, campground, golf course, ball fields/courts, playground equipment, and picnic shelters. Recreational opportunities can provide amenities for a wide age-range of residents in a community. Availability and diversity of recreational services and parks is important to maintain a high quality of life for all residents in Atkinson, not just the children. Cowboy Trail is a recreational amenity located through the middle of Atkinson that provides many residents with a location for walking, biking, or running and it also provides visitors an opportunity to travel through Atkinson on the long trail. A few other recreational amenities includes the Atkinson Stuart Golf Course and the Elkhorn River. There are two main Parks in Atkinson. The first, City Park, is located on the north side of Atkinson adjacent to the Community Center and West Holt Public Schools. This park has three ball fields, picnic shelters, tables and benches, and playground equipment. The second recreational area is located on the northwest side of Atkinson outside of the corporate limits. This area is home to the Atkinson Stuart Golf Course and the Mill Race Park and Campground. Unfortunately, for residents to access the main community park, a majority of citizens must cross Highway 20 which can be a safety concern, especially for children. Both recreational areas are located on the north side of the community, creating a need for other recreational amenities spread elsewhere in the community. As the community grows, changes, or further develops it will be important to assess the need for improved and additional recreational amenities. One option may be to develop small neighborhood parks to serve adjacent residential areas. Having smaller parks within residential neighborhoods may help to decrease the number of children crossing the highway to get to City Park which is the main park in Atkinson.

Public/quasi-public land uses include churches, municipal properties, school buildings, healthcare facilities, museums, community buildings, etc. These existing land uses are spread throughout Atkinson, and rightfully so. Public land uses should be available and accessible by every resident in Atkinson, as opposed to being concentrated in specific areas that could segregate neighborhoods based on available amenities. Public/quasi-public uses are typically considered amenities for residents and add to the quality of life. With several of these public/quasi-public land uses, it is important to analyze the potential need for expansion and availability of vacant land for any expansion needs. Vacant land adjacent to existing public/quasi-public land uses should be considered a positive attribute for any potential future expansion or development need for those land uses, i.e. a Church or Museum needing more space may want to build an addition onto their existing structure.

Atkinson has several areas of land that are deemed agricultural/greenspace, especially on the fringe of the corporate limits. Some of this land is farmed, and should continue to be until it is necessary to subdivide and develop for the benefit the community. Other areas are also considered to be agricultural/greenspace although they may not be farmed. This is possible for several reasons including topographic challenges that have hindered development for those properties or they may be undesirable locations for development. Even though those areas of land may have development challenges they lend themselves to additional greenspace and/or buffers between the heart of the community and what lies outside of the corporate limits. This land use can also act as an important buffer between different land uses such as light industrial and residential.

There are also a few vacant parcels of land dispersed throughout the community; these lots are platted parcels of ground that may or may not have ever had a structure built on them. The lots are desirable for infill development because of their vicinity to existing public infrastructure; however, the current lot sizes and conditions may not be conducive for development. When developing vacant, infill parcels it is important to maintain the balance of existing land uses within the surrounding area. Most of the vacant lots are within residential neighborhoods; however, as previously mentioned original platted lots may not be suitable for development based on today's standards for single-family homes. In order to utilize vacant lots for infill development it may be necessary to have multiple adjacent lots. **Table 4.1** shows the approximate percentages of each of the existing land use categories and their portion of the total make-up of the community. Each land use category within the corporate limits can fit into a hierarchy with the least dense classification, single-family residential, on the top of the pyramid and the most dense classification, industrial, on the base of the pyramid. This is an important way in understand how land uses work with each other, including the need to create a balance with land uses. Having adjacent land uses from opposite sides of the pyramid does not create a well-planned balance and may need buffers to help offset the real or perceived conflicts. However, transitional zoning, having land uses adjacent to one another that follow the pyramid pattern, is a the proper way to encourage development to protect existing properties. For example, it is a good planning practice to have a multiply-family residential development between a single-family residential development and commercial land uses.

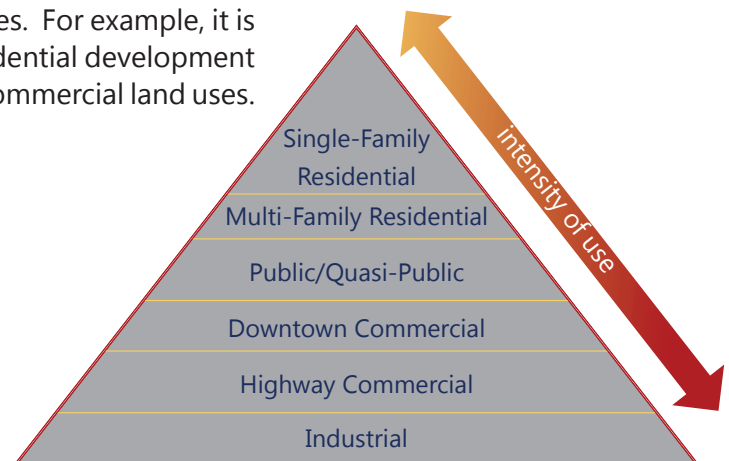


Table 4.1 Existing Land Use, Atkinson, 2015

Land Use Category	Approximate Percentage
Single-Family Residential	31%
Agricultural	23%
Commercial	13%
Industrial	12%
Vacant	10%
Public/Quasi-Public	8%
Recreational	2%
Multi-Family Residential	1%
Total Area	100%

Source: Miller & Associates, 2015

Future Land Use

Planning and preparing for future land use options is a vital part of Atkinson's Comprehensive Plan. Whether a community is growing or shrinking, there will still be changes in land use patterns; therefore, the purpose of this section is to provide a general guide for future development patterns. The idea is to avoid or minimize conflicts between land uses and the environment. The future land use plan must reflect existing land uses and options for changing land use needs. This plan should be flexible in nature in order to change as the community changes. Also, it should be molded to fit the needs, desires, and limitations of Atkinson and its residents. Part of the preparation for the Comprehensive Plan was to hold a series of steering group/public input meetings. The input from those meetings was imperative to planning for future land uses. Having an understanding of what residents want and need within the community is important for gaining support and assistance in bettering Atkinson. A summary of the input collected from one of the first steering group meetings can be found in the following chapter. Information gathered at those meetings as well as existing land uses and data from primary and secondary sources was used to develop the future land use plan. A workshop session was held with residents to determine where they could foresee future development taking place. Legos were used to address land uses, areas for growth, and to show the need for additional land for different land use classifications. A future land use plan should be a vision of what you want the community to look like; a vision of goals with different land uses to encourage 'smart' growth in your community. This vision should be an outlook and a guide for the next ten years.

In order to prepare and plan for the future of Atkinson, decision-makers need to have ambitions and goals. Realistically, what is the future of Atkinson going to look like, or what do you want it to look like? The main focus should be to keep the strong community ties and progressive drive while diversifying amenities and the tax base in order to provide a high quality of life for residents. The types of land uses should vary within the community from single and multi-family homes, commercial ventures of different sizes, public areas including recreational amenities and public services, and some vacant land and greenspace for aesthetics and screening/buffering purposes.

Homes should also vary, based on location, size, and price in order to attract a variety of residents. Having compatible housing is important when trying to appeal to new faces in the community. The housing stock versus household income analysis is an important way to determine the type of housing stock needed to best suit the needs and desires of residents. Improving the commercial sector should involve diversifying what is available to Atkinson's residents. Commercial development should be promoted and developed depending on available resources. However, commercial ventures not only add to the tax base for the City but they also create job opportunities for residents or potential residents of Atkinson. Envisioning goals as realities is important for the success of Atkinson and ideas need to become actions in order to turn them into realities. City leaders are the ones ultimately responsible for making the final decisions for the betterment of the community; however, it is up to the residents to hold City leaders accountable to ensure the goals of the community are being met.

During the steering group/public input meetings many future development ideas were discussed. Attendees were asked to ignore their knowledge of current property owners and to "dream big" for Atkinson. Exploring every possible option during the planning phase is important in order to be prepared and ensure that any community growth is following the goals outlined in this Comprehensive Plan or any other plan the City has created. **Figure 4.2a**, showing the corporate limits boundary, and **Figure 4.2b**, showing the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the City, outlines potential areas of new development in and around Atkinson. These areas will be discussed in detail throughout this section.

Residential uses make-up the largest percentage of existing land uses in Atkinson. Single- and multi-family residential construction is necessary for Atkinson to grow. A large majority of the existing housing units are dated and many homes need demolished and new home construction is needed to provide feasible options for existing and potential residents. In order to replace the aging, dilapidated housing structures, new homes and rental units will need to be built to create a housing market that can attract people to the community. There are a few vacant lots available throughout the corporate limits and these lots are best suited for infill residential development. The location and size of lot needs to be assessed prior to construction to ensure both attributes are enticing to today's buyers. Infill developments helps keep costs down because of the existing public infrastructure; therefore, infill development should be promoted first before the development of a new residential subdivision that would require infrastructure extension.

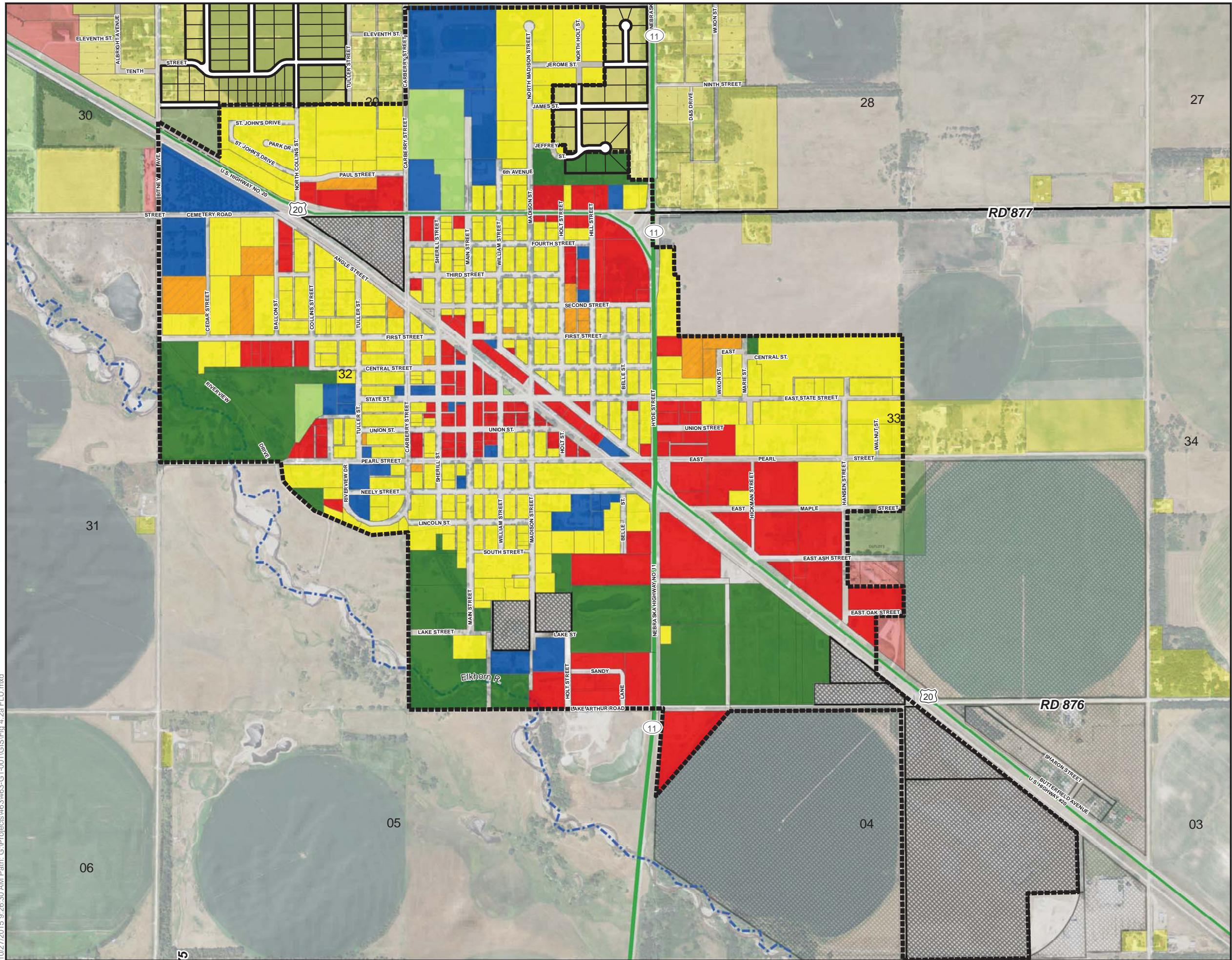
The potential for infill development is shown in the future land use maps. There are a few areas for single- and multi-family developments. A majority of the potential infill lots were originally platted when the largest lots would have been 50-feet wide and most people did not have a garage; therefore, they may be too small to build a home of today's standards. In order to utilize these vacant lots, adjacent properties may need to be combined before there is enough land to build, this is true for single-family and multi-family homes. By combining multiple, adjacent lots the builder has more land to work with allowing for construction by today's standards for homes which typically includes a minimum of three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a two car attached garage. Not all vacant lots have a second vacant lot adjacent to it, which makes it difficult to effectively utilize all of the vacant lots available throughout the community.

Single-family residential areas, shown in yellow on the future land use maps, include several vacant, infill lots as well as potential areas for residential subdivisions, on the north side of Atkinson. These areas were determined by residents during a public input session and multiple reasons for these areas were discussed including proximity to community amenities like the West Holt Public Schools and the park as well as the ability to connect with existing public infrastructure and tie in with existing streets to provide ingress and egress to the proposed development areas. The two main areas shown for future residential subdivision development have the potential to include multiple lot sizes to provide options for residents. These areas are the most ideal locations for new residential subdivisions; however, the City should encourage infill development before the extra money is spent extending water, sewer, and paving into a new subdivision.

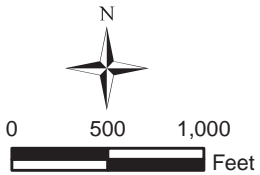
Areas with several vacant lots adjacent to one another may be best suited for multi-family developments. Multi-family housing, shown in orange on the future land use maps, can include a variety of options such as duplexes, four-plexes, townhomes, and apartments. Multi-family housing is typically renter-occupied which lends itself to fulfilling another housing need in small communities, transitional housing. Development of this type of housing would fill a large need in the community catering to young families, single persons, senior citizens, empty-nesters, etc.

Multi-family development can also mean medium density development which would have more homes per square acre than a type single-family residential development. Mobile home parks are typically platted for medium density development. One of the areas on the west side of Atkinson, shown as multi-family development, would make an ideal location for a mobile home park because of the amount of vacant land available, location, and proximity to public infrastructure. Although this area would work well for a mobile home park, any type of residential development would be best suited in this marked location. Many of the vacant platted lots on the east side of Atkinson are also conducive to multi-family development because of the amount of vacant land adjacent to existing infrastructure and because of its location near other duplexes. Ideas to keep in mind when planning for future residential development are finding ways to maintain a neighborhood feel, connecting new subdivisions to the existing community to promote accessibility, incorporating greenspace into development plans, and providing a small mixture of lot sizes for different residential development types in larger subdivisions.

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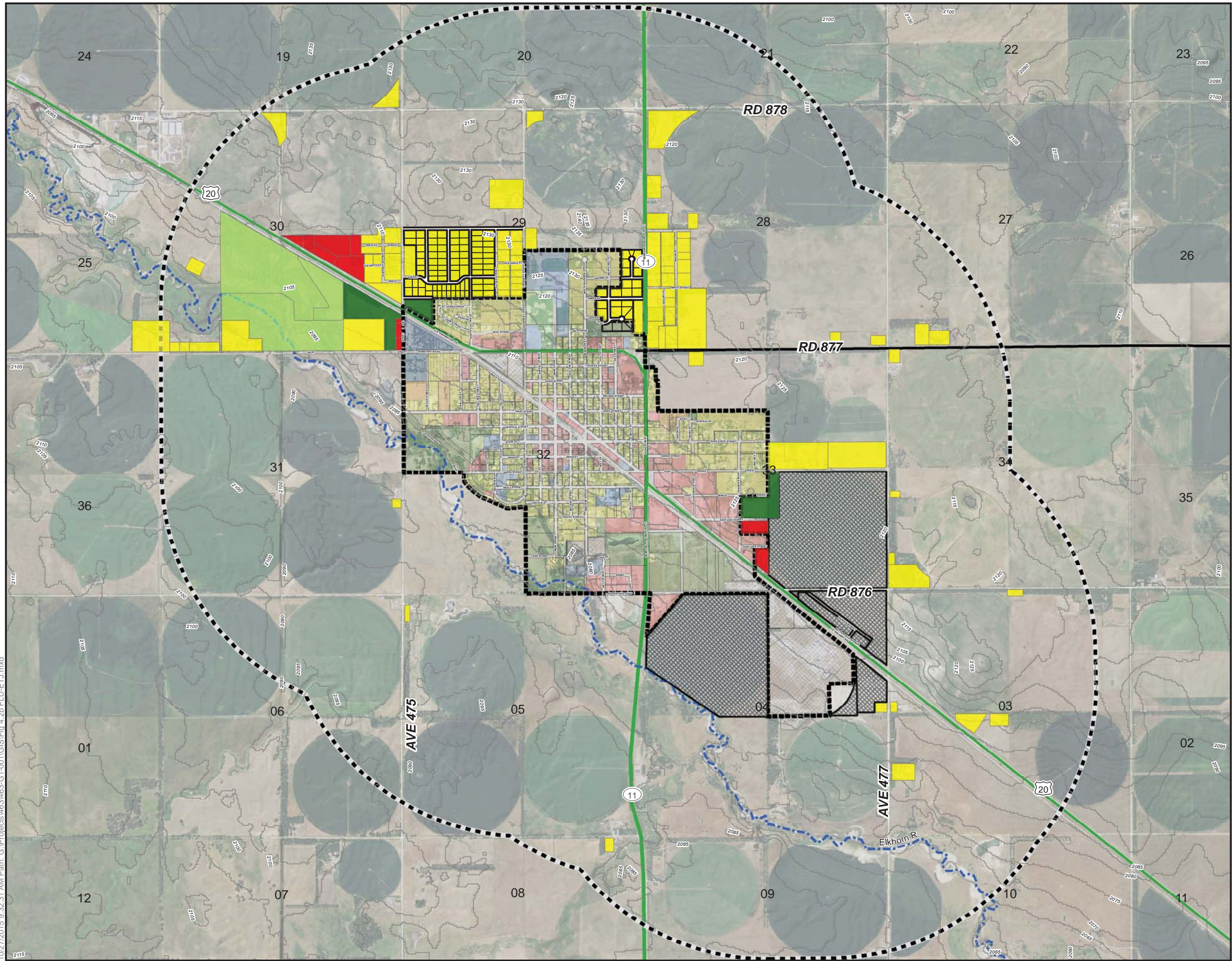


- Legend**
- Atkinson Corporate Limits
 - Future Land Use**
 - Single-Family Residential
 - Multi-Family Residential
 - Commercial
 - Light Industrial
 - Public/Quasi-Public
 - Recreational
 - Agricultural/Greenspace

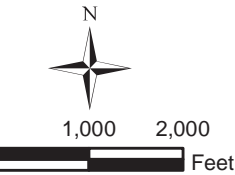
Figure 4.2a
Future Land Use Map
Atkinson, Nebraska

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- Legend**
- 1-Mile ETJ
 - Atkinson Corporate Limits
 - Future Land Use**
 - Single-Family Residential
 - Multi-Family Residential
 - Commercial
 - Light Industrial
 - Public/Quasi-Public
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 - Agricultural/Greenspace

Note:
All areas outside of the Corporate Limits that have not been classified as a particular land use may be classified as Agricultural/Greenspace.

Figure 4.2b
Future Land Use
ETJ Map
Atkinson, Nebraska

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Parks and recreation areas are major community assets. Parks provide open space for residents as well as visitors and generally enhance a town's appearance. Proposed recreational development can be seen in light green on the future land use maps. There are two existing parks in Atkinson, one is located on the north side of Highway 20 adjacent to West Holt Schools and Mill Race Park is located on the northwest side of the community. Although it is nice for community to have two different parks in two locations, having to cross Highway 20 is a safety hazard for residents, especially children. Improving the pedestrian crossings as well as the sidewalks in close proximity to each of City Park would be a beneficial improvement for the community. Adjacent land to Mill Race Park and Campground could be developed for additional recreational space that would tie into the existing park area. Some residents discussed their desire to add more amenities to Mill Race Park in the future which is why some of the adjacent land should be considered for recreational development.

Cowboy Trail is another recreational amenity in Atkinson. The trail runs through the middle of the community, near the Downtown District. The images below show a triangular-shaped parcel, that is currently vacant, redeveloped as a pocket park. This pocket park could act as an entrance to the Downtown District for vehicles and pedestrians because the park could be seen and utilized by both drivers and pedestrians on State Street and by pedestrians on Cowboy Trail. This triangular parcel may be challenging for typical commercial development because of the shape and size; therefore, it is an ideal parcel of land for a use that requires minimal development. Also, by beautifying this vacant piece of land, it will enhance the Downtown District and create an aesthetically pleasing entrance from the east. As seen in the computer rendering examples, a couple of benches, bike racks, and landscaping improvements would be a big improvement for the vacant parcel.



Existing Vacant Parcel



Computer Renderings
of Proposed Cowboy
Trail Park

Commercial development in Atkinson, like most rural communities, is a work in progress; however, the City has experienced progress with commercial development. A majority of the land that is ideal for commercial and/or light industrial development within the corporate limits has already been developed. There are a few shovel-ready sites for commercial development within the corporate limits. These lots are located on the southeast side of Atkinson along Highway 20. There are only a few lots left; therefore, it may be necessary to look at land adjacent to the corporate limits for other areas of potential commercial development. Ideally, the City could annex adjacent land for additional commercial and/or light industrial development. Several development locations have been highlighted on the future land use maps for commercial, shown in red, and light industrial, shown in grey. These lots border the highway corridor because most businesses are looking for land availability, easy access to transportation network, and high visibility. Land along Highway 20 provides all of those things to potential businesses.

If commercial/light industrial development potential requires sites that are outside of the existing corporate limits the City should conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine if it would be beneficial to annex the land. Through annexation, the City could capture sales and property taxes from potential businesses along the Highway corridor and would be able to provide development incentives to potential businesses through the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) process which can only happen, based on State Statutes, if the development is located within the corporate limits. Atkinson should consider annexation of prime commercial/light industrial real estate to target for development. Through this process the City would need an infrastructure expansion plan and could possibly include the development/expansion of new infrastructure to serve the annexed areas. This would require a site survey and engineering design before the full cost-benefit analysis could be completed; however, it would mean tax base growth for the community as well as the ability to offer development incentives to potential businesses. The commercial and light industrial areas shown on the future land use maps were discussed during a public input session. Residents shared their thoughts on having additional space available for commercial development and wanted to ensure the potential locations were in close proximity to existing businesses, the corporate limits, and public infrastructure. The area on the southeast side of the community, along Highway 20, is ideal for a light industrial development or commercial development, depending on the business's needs. This is a large area that would offer many options and opportunities for light industrial or commercial development. This area is adjacent to existing light industrial and commercial development. As discussed, Highway access is important for many businesses, but the Highway corridors are also important to the community because they serve as the gateway entrances into the community. Therefore, it is important that any new development would include landscaping, greenspace, and screening to ensure the highway corridor is enhanced with any new businesses as opposed to becoming an eye sore.

The areas southeast of Atkinson on Highway 20 and near the intersection of Angle Street and Highway 20 provide a large amount of land that could be developed for light industrial purposes. Most industrial parks range between 20 to 50 acres, sometimes even larger and these areas, shown in grey on the future land use map, would provide enough space for that type of planning and future development potential. The main area planned for light industrial is on the outskirts of the community for other reasons such as the possibility of having a light industrial business that may create noise, dust, smell, etc. pollution concerns for nearby residents so it was planned to have this type of development on the fringe of the community as opposed to the near heart of the community. City leaders should determine potential impacts a new business may have on the surrounding land uses before approving any development permits. This will ensure all concerns are thoroughly analyzed prior to construction. When there are any conflicting land uses proposed adjacent to each other a buffer should be encouraged to provide a visual and physical break in the land uses. Some buffers include trees, shrubs, and greenspace while other buffers consist of transitional zoning allowing transitions from higher density land uses to lower density land uses. These transitions in the land uses help protect each land use. Careful consideration should be taken when planning for areas of mixed land uses in order to protect the least dense use (i.e. single-family residential) while also allowing the most dense use to have the opportunity to operate without hassle or complaints from the least dense land use.

Both Highways are resources that Atkinson should always try to take advantage of because it provides many opportunities for commercial growth and development. Access, visibility, and land availability along the two Highway corridors shaded in red and grey on the Future Land Use Map are highly feasible areas for commercial and/or light industrial developments such as a manufacturing company, Shopko, bulk grain storage, implement dealers, car dealerships, etc. The City should work with potential small business ventures in the retail/trade sector to focus on development in the Downtown District whereas the large tracts of land on the fringes of the community are prime areas for 'heavier' commercial businesses like manufacturing, farm implement dealers, or car dealerships that require high visibility and traffic volumes as well as access to transportation. Developing along a highway does come with a few constraints including obtaining permits from Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR) to be able to have access onto the highway. NDOR would like to limit the amount of access points for safety purposes because of the high rates of speed people travel on a highway so frontage roads and cul-de-sacs may need to be constructed in order to best utilize all of the land available while limiting the amount of access points onto Highways 20 and 11.

Desires for downtown improvements were discussed by several residents. Completing a Downtown Revitalization Plan for Atkinson would address concerns for downtown development and would provide the City with a plan for further revitalization. A Downtown Revitalization Plan will help residents and decision-makers envision an overall look and feel to physically emulate in the City's Downtown District. The planning process allows residents and downtown stakeholders to dream, discuss, and brainstorm ideas for improving the Downtown District and the plan provides images and ideas for aesthetic improvements including facades, awnings, signage, and streetscapes as well as ideas for improving the economic climate in the Downtown District. There is only so much real estate space available in the Downtown District so planning for future commercial development will ensure space is used wisely to continue to encourage downtown businesses to grow. Businesses in the Downtown District should be centered on retail, service, and entertainment such as restaurants, bars, theaters, etc. As shown in the future land use plan maps, the goal for the future of the Downtown District is to encourage appropriate infill development as well as improving the overall appeal for Atkinson's mainstreet.

Other future development options include enhancing the wayfinding, branding, and beautification throughout the community. Gateway entrances can make a statement to travelers passing by on the Highway which is why it is important to beautify these entrances and corridors. Wayfinding signage is dual purpose; it directs and informs people while also being aesthetically pleasing and attention grabbing. Based on traffic counts, roughly 2,700 to 3,300 vehicles pass through Atkinson on Highway 20 every day. Of course, some of those travelers are residents of Atkinson commuting to and from work; however some of those vehicles are visitors to Atkinson and the gateway entrance and Highway corridor is the City's opportunity to grab people's attention and make a good impression. Highway 20 through Atkinson is a way to advertise all that Atkinson has to offer. Banners, landscaping, beautification, and wayfinding signage highlighting all of Atkinson's amenities are ways to take advantage of the Highway and promote the community to all of the travelers. A beautified highway corridor helps make a memorable statement to a visitor and it can help to direct and promote what the community has to offer. Wayfinding signage could be used to act as directional signage to the parks, museum, Library, Downtown District, Hospital, schools, or anything else the City would like to highlight.

One idea discussed during public input sessions was to develop a way to attract Highway 20 travelers to the Downtown District. Development wayfinding signage is one way to point visitors in the right direction towards any type of attraction or amenity. Examples of wayfinding signage highlighting Atkinson's Downtown District can be seen at the bottom of the page. Both of these examples are at the corner of State Street and Highway 20. The first computer rendering is on the north side of State Street where a vacant gas station exists today; the second example is on the south side of the block on a vacant lot. Only one of these options would need to be developed, but renderings were completed for both locations to show two options. Also, wayfinding could be included for other amenities/attractions on the same sign but for this example only the Downtown District is highlighted. These computer renderings provide residents with an idea about what this area could look like with signage and improved landscaping. It allows City stakeholders to visualize ideas for beautification and wayfinding.

This is a "first impression" to visitors, but beautifying the highway corridor may also give residents more of a reason to help keep all of Atkinson beautiful. Landscaping can be used for aesthetics and screening unwanted sites from vehicles. Land along highway corridors tends to be unsightly in many communities. Screening these land uses from highway travelers can really make a big impact. Zoning regulations are one way to help ensure land along highways and major arterials and connector streets are screened to create an appealing view for travelers.



Proposed Wayfinding Signage Option
NW Corner - State Street & HWY 20



Proposed Wayfinding Signage Option
SW Corner - State Street & HWY 20

All of the proposed new developments that are not currently in Atkinson's corporate limits should be annexed into the community prior to any construction. This will allow the City to expand its physical size, population, and tax base while also providing potential benefits to the new developments. The following section discusses in more detail about Atkinson's annexation plan. All of these ideas discussed in the future land use plan are goals to work towards over the next ten years. This plan is to be used as a guide to help prioritize and steer ideas for future development. When planning for future growth it is important to consider any potential issues that could arise in order to protect the City and its current residents. The goal for any community should be to continually move forward with population and development growth while mitigating the impact on existing residents and property owners. It is important to have ideas and plans in place to steer growth in the right direction.

Atkinson's annexation plan should create opportunities for new development as well as help facilitate the goals of the future land use plan set forth in this document. In order to create opportunities for new development, Atkinson needs to have a plan in place to reserve the land necessary to successfully accomplish the goals of the community. In order to do this, the City may need to consider annexing adjacent territory and expanding its jurisdiction, including its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). This annexation plan, like the future land use plan, is a guide or a tool the City can utilize when discussing future growth and development options. This annexation plan is not law; annexation should take place in a manner that will follow State Statutes and best suit the City's development needs and goals. The City's annexation plan should do the following:

Annexation Plan

Protect and Enhance the City's Tax Base

Annexation allows each community to protect and enhance the City's tax base for several reasons. Land along the Highway corridors is prime real estate for commercial and light industrial development. In order for the City to capture property and sales taxes, those companies need to be within the City limits of Atkinson. Also, many new business developments look for incentives before building a new facility in a community. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is an incentive communities can offer to a potential business. In order for a business to utilize TIF, the development must be located within the City limits. Another facet of annexation includes the benefits citizens receive from the City, although they may not own property in the corporate limits. The residents and businesses located in the fringe of the community still benefit from the City's parks, streets, amenities, other facilities and programs, and sometimes even public utilities without having to contribute to the tax base that directly supports those amenities. By annexing this property into the community, these property owners would then be paying taxes for multiple amenities and services they most likely already utilize.

Increase Population and Size

By increasing the City's physical size and population, Atkinson could also increase its level of political influence and attractiveness to commercial and light industrial developments. Annexation has a way of encouraging new development, which, in turn, can help increase the City's tax base and job opportunities.

Avoid Jurisdictional Confusion

Having a plan in place will ease the confusion of jurisdictions between the City and the County and will help Atkinson plan for future services by establishing an orderly and logical boundary and understanding for how growth will affect public infrastructure needs. This process would be very beneficial for both the City and Holt County, especially because changing boundaries between two different jurisdictions can be cumbersome if plans are not well communicated.

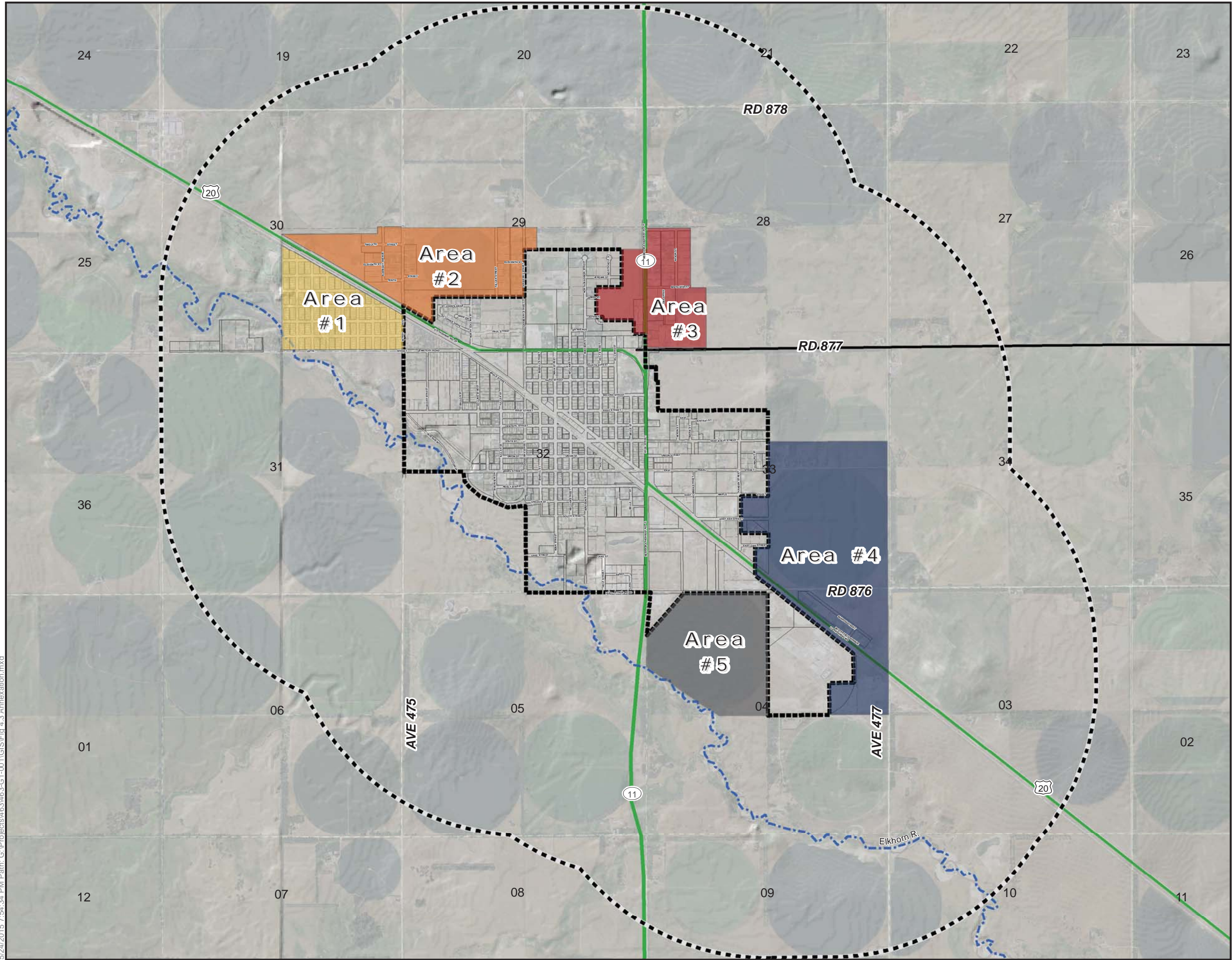
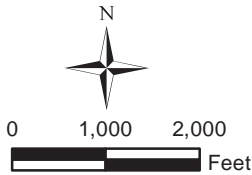
Control Fringe Development

Planning for the growth of Atkinson is important for the community as well as the land adjacent to the corporate limits. Finding a balance between development and existing land use requires time and planning. Infill development should be promoted until larger parcels of land are needed for growth. This will help avoid sprawling development and protect the agricultural land around the community. Any new annexed land should be for the benefit of residential and commercial development, and public service needs should be assessed as the population of Atkinson continues to change. Through annexation, Atkinson can extend its zoning jurisdiction to adjacent areas and thus guide development in a direction that will provide a safe and healthy environment for residents and businesses in the community.

Annexation should follow the guidelines set forth through Nebraska State Statute 19-3052. As seen in **Figure 4.3** the proposed areas for Atkinson's annexation plan are the following:

1. Area 1 is on the northwest side of Atkinson, along Highway 20. This annexation area would include existing single-family homes, a portion of the Atkinson Stuart Golf Course and Mill Race Park and Campground, and undeveloped farm ground that could be developed for residential or commercial use. This area may also be suited for expanded recreational purposes near the golf course and Mill Race Park and Campground. The west boundary of Area 1 follows a quarter-section line allowing for a clear determination of the boundary line. This area is ideal for large lot residential development or commercial development because it is adjacent to Highway 20. Although, the land should be development solely for residential or commercial purposes, not both. Land in this area may also be ideal for recreational developed which is a complementary land use for residential and commercial land uses and could act as a buffer between the two land uses. The Elkhorn River runs through the southwest corner; therefore, mitigating flooding hazards will be crucial during the pre-development stage.
2. Area 2 is also located on the northwest side of Atkinson, north of Area 1. The annexation of Area 2 would include residential homes, a commercial business, and vacant agricultural land. Because of the location and close proximity to the school, recreational amenities, and other residential development this is a well-suited location for additional residential homes, especially on the east side of Area 2. This area could properly tie into the existing grid system for transportation access and proper ingress and egress. Lots developed for the proposed annexation area could follow a typical single-family, low density pattern of development but could also be suited for larger lot residential development. The western and southern portions, bordering Highway 20, are ideal for commercial development because of the access, visibility, and high traffic volumes for the land adjacent to the highway corridor.


3. Area 3 is located on the north side of town, along Nebraska State Highway 11. This proposed annexation area would include several single-family homes, a few public/quasi-public land uses, and vacant agricultural land. This area is suited best for residential development because the vacant, agricultural land is surrounded by single-family homes, some of the land has been preliminarily platted as residential lots, it is close to existing public infrastructure, and it would allow for proper ingress and egress in continuity with the community.
4. Area 4 is located on the southeast side of Atkinson. This annexation area would include vacant, agricultural land as well as several existing single-family homes. Development of the land on the north side of Area 4 could very likely replicate existing residential development directly west of the proposed area including single- and possibly multi-family development. However, the majority of Area 4 is ideal for commercial and/or light industrial development. Because of its location along Highway 20, the area has high access and visibility and there is ample space to fit many different needs of businesses. This area could be subdivided into multiple lots for an industrial/business park or it could be utilized for a business needing a large open space. With close proximity to the community, this area is accessible to connect with existing public infrastructure and has commercial development adjacent to the site. Proper planning for transitional zoning or bufferyards needs to be taken into consideration in order to protect existing or proposed residential land uses from any potential commercial and/or light industrial developments. Because this land sits along the Highway corridors, extra precaution should be taken to ensure the gateway entrances and highway corridors through the community are clean, attractive areas that enhance the overall charm of the community.
5. Area 5 is located on the south side of town, adjacent to Green Plains Ethanol Plant. This proposed area of annexation includes undeveloped agricultural land that is adjacent to light industrial and commercial development to the north and east. This area is prime real estate for light industrial or commercial development because of the access to transportation, accessibility, and availability of a large amount of undeveloped land. Area 5 is also attractive to existing businesses, including Green Plains Ethanol Plant for potential expansion of their existing operations. A presumed floodplain boundary borders the southwest edge of Area 5; therefore, it would be important to ensure the new development does not adversely affect the floodplain.



- Legend**
- 1-Mile ETJ
 - Atkinson Corporate Limits
 - Area #1
 - Area #2
 - Area #3
 - Area #4
 - Area #5

Figure 4.3
Annexation Plan Map
 Atkinson, Nebraska

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Public Input & Goals

This is the action section of Atkinson's Comprehensive Plan. It is here to help plan goals, guidelines, regulations, and future practices. The goal of this Strategic Planning section is to help decision-makers implement the visions and actions presented by the plan through a realistic process that is in step with the resources of the community. This Strategic Planning section will cover the following components:

- Public Input
- Goals

Public Input

These questions were asked during the first public input sessions in the planning stages of the Comprehensive Plan. Residents had the chance to openly discuss some of their responses. This

analysis is called SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). Strengths are viewed as assets to the community; areas community members want to retain and continue to improve. The weaknesses are seen as areas that need improvement in the community. Opportunities are viewed as potential areas of gain in the future, and threats are seen as aspects that may hinder the growth and development of Atkinson.

Strengths (Now/Internal-advantages, things that are unique to Atkinson)

- Housing Prices
- School System – Parochial School
- School Population has Doubled
- Parks – Playground Equipment
- Swimming Pool
- Hospital
- Medical Facilities, Eye Doctor, Dentist, Physical Therapy, Clinic, Vet.
- Library
- Economic Development Resources
- Completed a 3.8 Million Dollar WWTP
- Ranching Economy
- Sale Barn
- Jobs are Available
- Down Payment Assistance
- Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation (OOR)
- Assisted Living
- Fire Department
- Ethanol Plant
- Hotel/Motel Investment
- Shovel-Ready Sites
- Volunteerism
- Variety of Stores
- Community Support
- Community Center
- Trash Service – Locally Started
- Businesses
- Bowling Alley
- Lift Station To Open Up Development
- Churches
- Country Club/Golf Course
- Fundraisers/Investors
- Weller Foundation Left Money to the City
- Core Base of Young Entrepreneurs
- Infrastructure
- Community Involvement
- Airport
- Progressive Community
- Safety
- Outdoor Recreation
- Young Families Moving To Town
- Clean Town
- Wide Streets
- Attitude of People
- People Wrap around Goals/Ideas
- Manufacturing
- Business District
- People
- Duplex Construction by Investors
- Lb840 Spec Home
- Business Loans
- Strong Mainstreet
- Helicopter Pad
- Atkinson Betterment Group
- Non-Profit Organizations – West Holt Foundation, Atkinson Foundation

Weaknesses (Now/Internal-limitations, where could Atkinson improve, what should we avoid)

- Lack of Street Signage/Wayfinding
- Lack of Workforce
- Lack of Daycare
- Lack of Public Transportation
- School Population Has Created Challenges - Pick-Up/Drop-Off Lanes at School
- Restaurants – Irregular/Inconsistent Hours
- Lack of House Address Numbers
- Downtown Landlord Owns Several Buildings
- Downtown Buildings Used for Storage
- Sidewalk Limitations
- Internet Speed
- Vacant Homes – Families Will Not Sell
- Dilapidated Homes
- Lack of Rental Housing
- Shortage of Housing – Both Rental and Owner-Occupied

Opportunities (Future-opportunities for Atkinson to improve, grow, attract new people/businesses)

- Hospital Development
- Fitness Center
- Car Rental
- Art Center
- Restaurants – More Variety and Hours
- Indoor Recreation
- Activities for Teens – School, Church, and FFA/4H
- Transitional Housing
- Several Empty Downtown Buildings
- State Park Playground
- Need More Laborers
- Market Lots for Business Growth along Highway 20
- Communications – More Fiber Optics through Town
- Software/Technical Jobs
- Downtown Revitalization
- Boutique Stores
- Dance Classes
- Ethanol Plant Growth
- Restaurants
- Low Income Housing
- Manufactured Homes
- NECC Extended Campus
- Wind Power Development

Threats (Future-what obstacles does Atkinson face, what are other communities doing)

- Proximity to O'Neil
- Stuart Ice Skating Rink
- Youth Sports Programs in Neighboring Communities
- Small Farms Decreasing

Goals

This section is in place to give ideas, summaries, and guidelines for development and growth for Atkinson to work towards in the next ten years. These goals are a combination of information gathered from the public input sessions, the 2014 Community Needs Assessment Survey, and data analysis. The importance of these goals is that they are realistic in nature, but allow the community to continually have something to strive towards.

Improve the Existing Housing Market

As discussed earlier in this plan, there is a housing shortage in Atkinson for both renter- and owner-occupied units. In order to solve this issue a few things can be done. The obvious answer is to develop more housing, but to accomplish this goal, private developers or local investors will need to be willing to participate; otherwise, residential development will only happen when a person/family constructs their own private residence. Within Atkinson, there are a few types of lots available for development including infill lots spread throughout the community and several vacant lots in the platted J's Subdivision. Having options available for interested parties, is crucial for improving the existing housing market in the community.

Housing development and job growth/economic development fits the old adage, "What comes first the chicken or the egg?" Developing new housing will help attract new residents to Atkinson and work as a chain reaction, with new homes available, more families can move to town and enroll their children in West Holt Public Schools, keeping Atkinson a viable community with a high quality of life for all residents. More families in the community may also help create more jobs. If more jobs are available in Atkinson, it is most likely employees will want to live in the community. Decent, attractive, and affordable homes as well as shovel ready lots need to be available in order to ensure that new employees will live in Atkinson instead of a different nearby community. With a close correlation between the housing market and economic climate for businesses, it is even more crucial for housing market improvements to be taken seriously and made a top priority.

Housing market improvements such as developing new homes, improving existing homes, and creating a demolition program for vacant, substandard homes, were high priority projects discussed by Atkinson's residents and City leaders. Housing has become a major challenge for many communities in Nebraska, big and small; Atkinson is no exception. There are a number of homes in need of demolition and yet there is a need for more quality, affordable homes and rental units. The City must work to encourage new home construction as well as find feasible ways to demolish vacant, unsafe structures across the community.

Housing needs in Atkinson include the demand for additional, affordable rental units, mid-level housing for purchase between \$100,000 and \$150,000, and incentives for new construction as well as home improvements. Residents understand the need for additional housing and realize the importance the housing market plays on the overall viability of the community.

Mid-level housing development in the \$100,000 to \$150,000 price range was also discussed as a need by residents during a public input session. The housing affordability analysis also indicated through data analysis that there is a need for homes valued over \$100,000 fitting what residents said during the public input session. It would be challenging to construct a home for under \$180,000; therefore, this mid-level housing will have to come from existing structures in the community. Many updates to homes would need to be made in order to modernize a home and increase the value to the needed price range in order to attract a mature family in need of a move-in-ready home. Another option, discussed by residents during public input sessions, included the construction of "plain stock housing" as described by one resident. This bare-bones design would allow for more affordable housing construction and could then, in turn, allow homeowners to customize and make updates when it was more affordable. Basements would not have to be finished and garages would not have to be built, as long as there was space and the potential ability to make the improvements in the future.

Improve the Existing Housing Market
 Improve Public Infrastructure
 Promote Commercial Development
 Further Enhance Amenities/Promote Tourism
 Develop Marketing Campaign
 Enhance Highway Corridors & Community Beautification

The City also can be involved in housing improvements in a few different ways. Cleaning up lots and uninhabitable homes in Atkinson is an on-going task; however, it will create more lots for new infill development as well as rid the neighborhood of eye sores that are also potential safety hazards. Improving the condition of the existing housing stock will also help attract new residents to the community because the condition of the homes available will be more appealing to buyers. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) can be used to carry out plans for the demolition of structures determined by the City to be unsafe or unfit for human occupancy in a redevelopment area. This is new to the Community Development Law with LB 729 and Atkinson should look into this option to see how it could benefit the community. The City could also implement and enforce a nuisance abatement program to help identify all areas within the community in need of clean-up and proper abatement to ensure property owners are in compliance with nuisance codes, enhancing the health and safety of the community. Nuisance abatement can be a City-driven program or it can be completed by a third-party contracted by the City. Following the project will help identify properties that are detrimental to the health and safety of the community and will encourage and, when needed, enforce, property upkeep.

Atkinson can also access funds for demolition through Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). The one stipulation for this grant is that a new housing structure has to be constructed on the newly vacant lot, and the house will only be available to residents who qualify as low-to-moderate income (LMI). This is a way to rid the community of an unsafe, unsightly dwelling and replace it with a new home; however, the new home may not be available to all citizens who are looking to purchase a home. Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED) through CDBG has offered owner-occupied housing rehabilitation funds to help home owners make improvements to their homes including exterior and energy efficiency improvements. Although there are other ways to encourage home and property improvements, the creation of a purchase-rehab-resell program would also enhance the existing housing market. A purchase-rehab-resell program allows a group, whether it is a private investment group, economic development group, or some other group interested in improving housing in Atkinson, to purchase a home in need of rehabilitation, make the necessary improvements, and then sell the home. The money made from selling the property can then be used to purchase another property and restart the process. This revolving program is another way to help improve the existing homes in Atkinson and make needed improvements to provide quality housing for homebuyers. Each of these avenues could help enhance the overall housing market in Atkinson by encouraging property upkeep, home improvements, and demolition of unsafe structures.

The public-private partnerships will be key as the City tries to accomplish the goal of housing market improvements. If private developers are not able to relieve all of the pressure on the housing market in Atkinson, then local investors or a local committee may need to implement a plan for home development. Some communities have a group of residents who contribute money to begin the process; funds contributed are used to build a spec home, also employing a local contractor. The home is then sold and the money is used to build another spec home, continuing the home development process for these communities. This has been a feasible model for home construction in small communities throughout Nebraska and could be an avenue for Atkinson to consider although it takes a motivated leader and group of people willing to invest money for the housing cause. Other communities have proven this to be successful, and Atkinson has the ability and potential resources to do so as well. Atkinson has been taking all of the right steps to ensure the housing market is capable of expanding to support an increasing population and stimulate growth.

In order to make housing market improvements, the City should work to meet the following objectives:

Inventory infill lots and promote infill development;

Infill development, by nature, is less expensive because there is no need to extend public utility services. Infill development utilizes existing public infrastructure, filling in vacant properties with residences. Promoting infill development, can save the City funds by avoiding sprawl and the need to extend public infrastructure to new developments on the out-skirts of the community. There are a few potential infill areas that would be ideal locations for multi-family development. These areas should be considered for duplex to four-plex development because there are multiple vacant lots adjacent to one another, providing enough land for a multi-family development. There is a large need for rental housing in Atkinson and constructing these units on infill lots will help keep development costs down. J's Subdivision has lots still available and is platted for additional streets and lots to the east. Atkinson should continually market and promote all infill lots in order to encourage lower cost development options. Infill lots are scattered throughout Atkinson and vary based on availability, price, zones, dimensions, etc. The City and/or Economic Development Office should create a database or inventory of lots available for residential construction. Flyers and maps could also be created to help with marketing efforts. Location, current zoning, dimensions, costs, and ownership of lots should all be included within the flyers and maps to market the lots for new home construction.

Work with local businesses to determine housing needs for employees;

By working with local employers, the City may be able to get a feel for real-time and projected housing needs in the community. Having these discussions with employers is beneficial for multiple reasons, it shows support for the local businesses and it opens the line of communication between the City and employers to help provide beneficial information to one or the other. Local businesses may also be able or willing to offer assistance with improving the housing market conditions in Atkinson. Examples from other communities of business involvement in the housing market include businesses providing down-payment assistance for their employees, businesses purchasing homes to rent to their employees, and businesses building spec houses or affordable workforce housing to offer to new or existing employees. There are many ways businesses may want to get involved to benefit both the community and their company, but the conversations must be had between City leaders and employers to determine if they are willing or able to assist with housing market improvements.

Locates areas for future residential development;

The City should use the Future Land Use Plan Map in the Comprehensive Plan to establish target areas for all types of residential development including large lots, single-family homes, transitional housing, and other types of medium-density rental housing in order to fill all of the needs in the community. Although the City may not need to develop additional residential subdivisions at this time, it is important to target areas that are attractive for residential development in order to plan for effective growth and development in Atkinson.

Develop Purchase-Rehab-Resell Program;

Developing a Purchase-Rehab-Resell Program would help solve multiple challenges facing Atkinson including housing needs and outdated, aging housing stock. A Purchase-Rehab-Resell Program could be initiated by the City or another entity in the community. The Program would be designed to target ideal homes for rehabilitation, purchase the homes, renovate each property, and sell the property. Money gained during the home sale could then be used to purchase the next property for rehabilitation. Purchase price and renovation needs should be evaluated for each potential property to determine if the investment is worth the risk. The size, including number of bedrooms and bathrooms, for each potential property is also important to consider in order to invest in properties able to meet buyer's needs once the rehabilitation project is complete. Grant funds are available to initiate a Purchase-Rehab-Resell Program. The City could partner with other community entities to ensure this program is successful. Many community stakeholders expressed their desires to have a program like this in Atkinson in order to improve the condition of existing homes and provide homes fitting the buyers' needs in Atkinson.

Enforce property up-keep through Nuisance Abatement Program;

All vacant lots and vacant, uninhabitable homes are potential properties for infill residential development. A strong nuisance abatement program, whether completed by the City and legal counsel or by a third party source, is important to encourage property upkeep and provide ways for the City to appropriately encourage renovations or property demolition of non-compliant, unsafe structures. Nuisance abatement is the enforcement of nuisance codes in the City, to bring properties in compliance with City codes. The process includes City Council approval and authority, code review, letters mailed to non-compliant property owners, periods of time to allow property owners to abate any nuisances, and further legal action if necessary when working with non-compliant property owners. A Nuisance Abatement Program is important to residents and City leaders to ensure properties are maintained and efforts are being made to rid the community of unnecessary eye sores and potential safety and health hazards.

Clean-up vacant out lots and uninhabitable properties;

All vacant lots and lots with vacant uninhabitable homes are appropriate for infill residential development. The City should access different avenues available to them to assist with the clean-up of vacant lots and uninhabitable properties. Infill development is attractive because it is a lower cost development option; therefore, efforts should be made to create more available lots. Also, by cleaning up vacant lots and uninhabitable homes the City will be able to rid the community of unnecessary eye sores and safety and health hazards. Based on data presented previously in this study, approximately 48 homes need to be demolished due to age and condition. Nuisance abatement, TIF, a few grant programs, and City dollars are a few ways Atkinson can work to demolish substandard properties and clean-up lots.

Create Investment Group to develop spec or stock homes;

Stakeholder citizens should be encouraged to create an Investment Group of some type to build spec housing in Atkinson. Many times people are afraid to construct a new home on their own; however, if a group of residents was able to get the ball rolling, it may prove to be beneficial for existing and potential residents as well as provide some relief for the housing market. Some housing professionals in Atkinson were concerned about the success spec housing in Atkinson because previous attempts have not been as successful as desired. However, if the home can be marketed and sold prior to completing construction, it is more desirable for the contractor, investor, and homebuyer. The homebuyer is then able to personalize the home to fit their needs, the investor is able to get their return, and the contractor is able to work with the homebuyer to finalize the home based on their wants and needs. Therefore it is encouraged to market the home prior to and/or during construction so the home does not sit because of poor finishing touch decisions that do not fit the buyer's taste. This may also be an opportunity to develop, as one resident explained "plain stock housing" to create a more affordable construction option which would then allow homeowners to personalize and complete updates when it best suited them.

Investigate Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation Funds; and,

Grant funds are available through NDED to develop a revolving loan or grant program for qualifying homeowners to rehabilitate their homes. Homeowner qualification standards are set by the Federal government and are different for each County. Atkinson would be required to follow income standards set for Holt County and the program would also be dependent on the number of people living in each household. These grant funds are only available for low-income families and due to the income restrictions set by the Federal government, many homeowners will not qualify for assistance. However, there would still be several eligible homeowners in Atkinson who could take advantage of funds to help them with necessary home updates. In order to offer funds to a broader range of residents in Atkinson, the City could also create their own loan program for owner-occupied housing rehabilitation setting guidelines and regulations based on the needs of the City. This option may be attractive to the City and its residents because the City could help middle-income residents while also boosting the existing housing conditions in the community. If the City creates their own revolving loan fund, they have the ability to set their own guidelines, income-restrictions, interest rates, pay-back regulations, etc. The City could create their own program to fit the needs of their community.

Encourage property upkeep.

The City should work to incentivize as well as continually follow-through with nuisance abatement throughout the community to encourage residents to maintain their properties. A clean community is attractive to visitors, potential residents, and potential new businesses. A "Yard of the Month" program or some type of incentive could be created to encourage residents to maintain their properties and take pride in the way the community looks. Property upkeep is essential as the community works to encourage new development.

Improve Public Infrastructure

Atkinson's officials are taking the necessary steps in order to resolve some of the on-going issues with public infrastructure. Improving and expanding public infrastructure is an on-going task. The most important step is to prioritize the tasks required for updating and improving public infrastructure. Once priorities have been set, the City can then begin to plan and budget for necessary repairs, updates, and improvements as well as evaluate all of the potential funding sources. Public infrastructure needs and improvements are listed below according to each infrastructure system. The City will continue to have infrastructure needs and projects will be adjusted on the priority list as issues or concerns arise. At this time, the City has completed some recent improvements to public infrastructure and they will need to continue to assess the City's needs on an annual basis.

Water

Recent work on Atkinson's water distribution system includes the installation of Variable Frequency Drives on two wells and water main extension through the Gaylen-Seger Subdivision. Almost 80 percent of the Community Needs Assessment Survey respondents believed the City's water infrastructure was in good to excellent condition. The City recently purchased a camera to conduct closed-circuit video inspections of the City's water and sanitary sewer mains. The goal is to video the lines to help prioritize main replacement needs. Future improvement projects would include replacement of four-inch water main which is important to ensure adequate flows, pressure, and fire protection. Other lines may need replaced and those will be determined after video inspection of the water mains. Other improvements would include the need to extend water main to areas of new development or potential new development in order to provide City services to marketable areas for commercial and residential development.

Sanitary Sewer

As described in the Utilities section of Chapter Two in this plan, the City owns and operates a sanitary sewer collection and treatment system. Recent sanitary sewer improvements include a new Wastewater Treatment Plant and lift station, a 500-foot sewer main extension on North Carberry Street, and a sewer main extension project through Gaylen-Seger Subdivision. As mentioned above, the City has recently purchased a camera to conduct closed-circuit video inspections of the City's water and sanitary sewer mains. Future improvements will be determined and projects will be prioritized after video inspections are completed of the existing sanitary sewer mains. The City received assistance from USDA-Rural Development Planned to complete the Wastewater Treatment Plant and lift station improvements. The City has a goal of establishing a sinking fund for future improvements and needs at the Wastewater Treatment Plant. Future improvements would also include the need to maintain and update the City's other lift stations and the need to extend infrastructure to new developments.

Paving/Stormwater Drainage

The City's 1 & 6 Year Road Plan can be found in the Transportation section of Chapter Two in this plan. This map shows road improvements that the City planned for 2015 as well as road improvement goals for the next five years. Based on the City's 2015 Lane-Mile Report, there are 4.77 miles of gravel roads in Atkinson. Also, a large portion of the City's streets were paved in the 1980s; with aging street infrastructure and several streets with gravel surfacing it is important for the City to work on street improvements. In order to extend the life of the concrete pavement, the City will need to continually monitor the streets and fix large cracks, potholes, etc. Other future projects include paving and drainage improvements on Carberry Street, asphalt resurfacing projects, and any paving and stormwater drainage extension projects necessary for future growth.

Sidewalks/ADA Compliance

Based on the public input sessions, Atkinson's residents discussed their issues and concerns with the condition and lack of sidewalks in the community. Improving the sidewalks and following ADA compliance guidelines is an important goal for the community. A sidewalk inventory should be used to analyze areas in need of sidewalks and existing sidewalks in need of repair. It was estimated that approximately 76 percent of the platted community is lacking sidewalk infrastructure. Condition of the existing sidewalks and presence of ADA ramps has not been evaluated; therefore, a sidewalk inventory would be an important step to understanding the overall needs for pedestrian accessibility improvement. The sidewalk inventory would analyze each sidewalk and ramp (or lack thereof) to determine the overall needs for the community. At that time the City could formulate a plan for improvements including construction of new sidewalks and improving existing. These improvements require funding as well as support from the residents of Atkinson in order to turn into actual results. An idea for implementing a program feasible for the City to utilize would be to create a cost-share program between the City and the property owner to split costs for the new improvements. Some financial assistance may entice residents to put forth some of their funds to assist in the development of ADA accessible sidewalks. The City could budget a set amount each year and residents could apply for funds out of that budgeted amount to assist in making these improvements throughout the City. Pedestrian accessibility throughout the community is important for residents especially between key features in the City such as the swimming pool/school, the downtown district, medical facilities, public parks, Library, etc. To improve accessibility for all pedestrians the City must continually work to make these improvements a priority.

Federal ADA compliance regulations were updated in 2010. City leaders are aware of the goals that they need to accomplish. They are working towards making Atkinson an ADA compliant community, but it requires time, funding, and community support. The City will continually work to resolve this matter making it a goal to accomplish accessibility for all residents and visitors.

Technology Infrastructure

City residents and leaders would like to see technology infrastructure improved in Atkinson to provide more opportunities for businesses and employees. Residents discussed the desire and opportunity for many citizens to work from home; the increase of bandwidth and other technological advances for providing a solid, progressive infrastructure in Atkinson would advance many opportunities to work from home as well as increase abilities for existing and new businesses. It is a goal of City leaders to make these upgrades and improvements to provide progressive technology infrastructure to help support a strong economic base in Atkinson along with providing a high quality of life for residents who rely on and enjoy technology.

The City will continue to have infrastructure needs and projects will be adjusted on the priority list as issues or concerns arise. At this time, the City has completed some recent improvements to public infrastructure and they will need to continue to assess the City's needs on an annual basis. Updates will continually need to be made in order to provide the best quality of life for all of Atkinson's residents. Community support will entrust decision-makers with the tasks of accomplishing these goals in a timely manner; however, the City must continually prioritize project needs and evaluate funding sources for public infrastructure improvements.

Promote Commercial Development

Improvements to Atkinson's commercial sector and providing opportunities for increasing commercial development is another goal determined to be a priority by Atkinson's stakeholders. The City is home to several services and businesses that greatly attribute to the quality of life in Atkinson. Those businesses and services include a two grocery stores, two hardware stores, hospital, Library, Museum, restaurants, boutique gift shop, bowling alley, and many more. Because of Atkinson's geographic location, the community faces certain advantages and challenges for attracting and retaining commercial services and businesses. Commercial goals, determined by Atkinson's stakeholders, include developing additional and marketing existing shovel-ready sites for new commercial development, creating an incubator space to promote entrepreneurship and business start-ups, and make improvements to the overall Downtown District.

Ideas for creating a distinct appeal for the Downtown District would come from a Downtown Revitalization Plan. This plan would give the City ideas on aesthetic improvements, traffic and pedestrian flow, parking, and potential residential opportunities. The City of Atkinson needs to first achieve the designation of Leadership Community from the NDED, which the City is working hard to achieve. This is no longer a requirement to apply for Downtown Revitalization grant funds; however, communities with the Leadership Community designation receive 75 extra points on their Downtown Revitalization grant application scoring making it important for communities to complete this step because the grant program is highly competitive. The first grant is a Downtown Revitalization Planning grant. Just as any other planning process including the one for this Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown Revitalization planning process should include several opportunities for public input from building and business owners downtown, City officials, and other community stakeholders. The plan would be a guide for development in the Downtown District. The positive side of following NDED's guidelines for Downtown Revitalization and seeking grant funding for the planning process through the State includes the opportunity to apply for Phase II funds which historically has been for \$350,000 for physical improvements in the Downtown District that were outlined in the Downtown Revitalization Plan.

Because commercial development is so heavily hinged on attracting private investors/business owners it is essential for the community to constantly work on attracting new businesses in order to grow the tax base. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is an important card to hold when private developers are interested in commercial developments. New commercial development will create more job opportunities which in turn attracts new people to Atkinson, increases the City's tax base, and potentially provides residents with a new amenity or place to shop or eat. Developing relationships and resources, such as TIF and the Economic Development office and other resources they create, in place is beneficial for private developers and existing businesses. Promoting and marketing Atkinson's assets, needs, location, funding sources/incentives, and land availability will be key to attracting private investment. One statewide source the City can utilize to share land and building availability information as well as a community profile for possibly attracting new businesses to the community is Location One Information Systems (LOIS). LOIS is an online database that the State of Nebraska, as well as many other states, utilizes to share current information with potential businesses. For example, an owner wanting to expand his manufacturing business could look at LOIS's website and search for the specific requirements necessary for his business including location, land availability based on size, availability of public utilities, etc.

Recruitment of new businesses should be based on the feasibility of the business being successful in the region as well as how it will complement the existing industries, such as agriculture sector which is vital to the progress and growth of Atkinson. Businesses in the agricultural sector currently exist in Atkinson, but expanding this sector with complementary businesses could not only benefit the City but also help existing agricultural businesses and possibly lead to necessary expansions for those existing businesses. When potential commercial companies start looking at Atkinson, the City should consider how these developments might impact existing businesses within town. To ensure existing businesses have the opportunity to expand, new businesses will need to complement the existing economic industries in Atkinson.

One of the City's main goals is to continue economic development efforts for the City of Atkinson as well as the Holt County region. Residents from Atkinson discussed several different economic development goals and strategies ranging from large scale desires for more shovel-ready commercial and/or light industrial sites to smaller commercial projects within the Downtown District. The previous Public Library building, which is located in Atkinson's Downtown, has been underutilized for the past few years since the new Library location opened. Several different ideas have been discussed for this facility; however, the limited retail and service space within the Downtown District lead community stakeholders to focus on ways to increase space for new businesses wanting to locate in Atkinson. A commercial incubator space was discussed during multiple public input sessions as well as during the Economic Development Strategic Plan surveys. Residents would like to see a space available for new business start-ups in order to encourage entrepreneurship in Atkinson and provide locations for additional commercial businesses that will benefit the community and provide services/amenities to residents.

Ideas for the incubator space include renovating the old library facility to create a few areas for office/retail space that citizens could lease which is ideal for start-up companies and has worked successfully in other communities across Nebraska. The overall plan is to provide a small space for start-up companies and once those companies start to grow, expand, and succeed they can then find a larger space that will suite their growing needs.

Residents also discussed their desire to have a business center that citizens of Atkinson could utilize for printing, shipping, internet, and other business service needs. There are many residents in Atkinson that work from home and may not have access to shipping or printing, scanning, or faxing. A centralized business center could provide these services, for a fee, to residents needing it personal or professional reasons. It would be ideal if a business center could be tied into an incubator business space, so the businesses within the incubator spaces could also utilize the business center. These ideas were discussed heavily during public input sessions and residents truly believe that an incubator space and business center would be positive additions to Atkinson's economic field. Although these two goals are small portions of the overall, long-term economic development goals of the community, they are goals that residents and City stakeholder alike, want to see accomplished in the community. Especially because they realize the impact these facilities could provide to residents and entrepreneurs in and around Atkinson.

Because of the limited space available in the downtown district, vacancies should be filled by retail and/or basic service sector businesses. Larger companies or service businesses that provide a unique service may best fit along the Highway 20 and 11 corridors. In order to have a distinct Downtown District appeal, the sidewalks need to be filled, store fronts need to be decorated, and businesses need to be open. Some businesses, even in the service sector, do not fulfill all of those needs for the Downtown District; therefore, the selective retail space should be left to retail and entertainment oriented businesses which encourage pedestrian traffic throughout the day, evenings, and weekends. During public input sessions residents discussed their desires and wants for additional retail, entertainment, and service businesses in the Downtown District. Residents of Atkinson need to support existing and any new businesses in Atkinson in order to keep store fronts occupied and open.

Developing along Highways 20 and 11 can be viewed as daunting because it is a challenge to encourage development of commercial space while keeping an aesthetically pleasing corridor. Possible commercial businesses could include a car dealership, truck wash, implement dealer, or a strip mall to provide space for the service sector businesses or offices and possible manufacturing or light industrial businesses like grain or bulk fertilizer storage, and possibly could lead to existing businesses expanding because of the land availability. Having two Highways present in Atkinson provides many opportunities for commercial and light industrial development that other communities do not have. Knowing the value of the land and promoting or marketing that to companies is important; companies need to feel like the land was meant for their business. Through the process of engineering site design, it is important to understand if the area can be served with utilities and how those utilities will get there, but it is also important to leave some of the land development open for change therefore it can best fit the needs of the business or developer.

Putting efforts towards marketing Atkinson outside of the community is just as important as it is to promote and market within the City of Atkinson. It is the best way to inform potential residents and investors about all of the positive aspects of the community and a way to remind local residents what it takes to be a self-sustainable community. Promotion and marketing is an important step for officials and local committees or groups to take in order to stimulate commercial development. Some of the other steps for City leaders to take would include partnership development and creation of relationships that support funding resources available in the area including regional, state, and federal agencies that may be useful. The future land use plan and map gives developers and City decision-makers a plan to follow. It allows leaders to make informed decisions and to ensure everyone is working towards the same goals.

In order to promote commercial development the City should work to meet the following objectives:

Target areas for prime commercial development;

The City should work to target areas of land for prime commercial development. This land should have access to the larger transportation network including Highways 20 and 11. Visibility and land availability are important aspects for commercial business ventures; therefore, those should also be important factors when locating prime commercial and light industrial real estate. This land should be close to the existing corporate limits and public infrastructure and adjacent to existing commercial and/or light industrial businesses. Once areas have been targeted for commercial development, the pros and cons of allowing other types of development on that property should be heavily weighted in order to prevent unnecessary urban sprawl.

Continue effective Business Retention and Expansion Program;

Through the Community Needs Assessment Survey, respondents voiced their opinion on the City's economic development efforts and where they wanted the City's efforts to be focused. Survey respondents' top goals were business retention by supporting existing businesses, housing development, youth retention, recruiting new retail businesses, and downtown revitalization. An effective way to work to retain existing businesses is to focus efforts on an on-going Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) program. This will help to maintain relationships with business owners, open lines of communications between the City, Economic Development Office, and businesses. It will help the City and Economic Development Office understand and prioritize employers' needs. This is a job the Economic Development Director can continue to focus on and work towards meeting with all business owners on an annual basis. Each of these 'interviews' or conversations should be recorded and formatted so that the Economic Development Office can keep a database. This helps ensure that the Economic Development Office and the City knows of business owners' needs, can help recruit employees when needed, can help with any expansion needs, search for possible grant funding or other development resources, and can assist with succession planning.

Job and employee recruitment;

The City of Atkinson and Atkinson Economic Development Office should market the community to potential business developers and while the City is working to recruit new businesses they could also work with employers to determine what their need is for employees in order to recruit personnel to the community. Businesses and City officials should work together to market the community to needed employees and additional businesses that could improve the economic climate in Atkinson. By working together it would be easier to market and recruit for a variety of positions to help fulfill the needs of employers in the community as well as to recruit potential businesses. This collaboration would show a strong support system within the community between existing businesses and the City. This level of support and a growing economy would be an attractive quality when a business owner is looking to relocate/open a new location.

Develop annexation plan of prime commercial real estate;

Any land targeted for prime commercial development that does not fall within the existing corporate limits boundary should be analyzed for possible annexation. Having commercial property within the corporate limits is important to help expand the tax base for the City as well as to be able to offer certain development incentives such as Tax Increment Financing to the potential businesses. Also if the new business wants to utilize public infrastructure it is essential then, that the business is located within the corporate limits.

Strive towards Downtown Revitalization;

Residents and City leaders alike wish to see revitalization efforts focused on the City's Downtown District. To fulfill the capacity of any Downtown District, it should have a unique neighborhood feel. Ideas for creating a distinct appeal for the Downtown District would come from a Downtown Revitalization Plan. This plan would give the City ideas on aesthetic improvements, traffic and pedestrian flow, parking, and potential residential opportunities. There are grant funds available to help communities develop and plan and make improvements within their Downtown Districts. The grant program is a two-phase grant, with the first phase grant funding the development of a Downtown Revitalization Plan. Just as any other planning process including the one for this Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown Revitalization planning process should include several opportunities for public input from building and business owners downtown, City officials, and other community stakeholders. The plan would be a guide for development in the Downtown District. The positive side of following NDED's guidelines for Downtown Revitalization and seeking grant funding for the planning process through the State includes the opportunity to apply for Phase II funds which historically has been for \$350,000 for physical improvements in the Downtown District that were outlined in the Downtown Revitalization Plan. It is the City's goal to focus efforts on Downtown revitalization, and they plan to apply for grant funding through the State to assist with the process. Downtown improvements goals focus on façade, aesthetic, drainage, wayfinding, and pedestrian accessibility improvements to name a few. A Downtown Revitalization Plan will provide an opportunity for residents, business owners, and City leaders to share thoughts, ideas, and determine priorities for improvements.

Market prime commercial real estate to potential businesses and developers;

The City has a few shovel-ready commercial sites located along Highway 20; these sites vary in size and are ideal for new businesses wanting to locate in Atkinson. These shovel-ready lots, along with other identified areas for prime commercial real estate should be marketed to potential businesses and developers. It is important to utilize all marketing sources available especially online sources. The City should not only market each individual site, but also what the City has to offer to the businesses including any local, regional, or state development incentives. Location, lot dimensions, current zoning, ownership, availability of infrastructure, connection to the transportation network, and potential costs along with development incentives should all be marketed to potential businesses. Like the residential infill lot inventory, a database of existing commercial and light industrial sites should be created for the City to attract new commercial ventures.

Complete Blight & Substandard Analysis of prime commercial real estate; and

Completing the Blight and Substandard analysis is important for the City if they want to be able to offer Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as an incentive tool for new commercial development. It is imperative to complete the Blight and Substandard Study prior to any commercial development taking place and it can be an encouragement to a potential business; therefore, the City should consider meeting this objective prior to marketing the prime commercial real estate.

Align development incentives from local, regional, and state sources.

Aligning development incentives for all sources including local, regional, and state could help attract a potential business to locate in Atkinson. When marketing any real estate, the City should also show what development incentives are offered in the area. When developers are looking to locate a new commercial business venture they also consider how development incentives can entice them to select a certain location. Having all development incentives labeled easily and readily available for businesses to analyze and utilize will be helpful when encouraging development in Atkinson.

Further Enhance Amenities/Promote Tourism

Atkinson has many amenities to offer to its residents and visitors; however, residents and community stakeholders realize the value additional amenities can add to the quality of life in the community. Below is a list of potential amenity enhancements that will focus on quality of life, recreational opportunities, and tourism. Atkinson has several goals and objectives that have been determined throughout the past year working on the City's Comprehensive Plan. Many goals are tied to the quality of life for Atkinson's residents. Community amenities are crucial to the quality of life for every person within the community and many community amenities help to draw visitors to the community as well. The items listed below do not cover all of the possible improvements that may be needed or desired in the future, but at this time, these are goals or ideas that were discussed by residents at the several public input sessions held and in the mail-out surveys that were conducted during the planning process of this Comprehensive Plan.

One goal to both enhance an amenity and increase tourism for the City is further development of Mill Race Park. The Park is already a wonderful amenity for residents in Atkinson and it helps attract visitors for camping and other outdoor recreational purposes. Improvements made to Mill Race Park will enhance the existing amenity for residents and possibly attract more visitors to the community to utilize the Park space.

Proposed additions and improvements at Mill Race Park include the creation of a shower house, improving the layout and overall campground area, rehabilitating Bluebird Trail, extending the hike/bike trails at the campground, to the north and south, developing a fishing pier, constructing a pedestrian bridge over the Elkhorn River, and potentially connecting future hike/bike trail options to the existing Cowboy Trail north of Mill Race Park. Many residents discussed their desire to make improvements at Mill Race Park, the City then decided to complete a master plan specifically for improvements at the Park. The master recreational plan outlines each specific goal, cost estimates, and funding strategies.

Improvements at Mill Race Park could greatly enhance the City's tourism draw. Providing additional camping pad sites, creating a shower house to be utilized by campers, developing additional hike/bike trails, and adding a fishing pier will increase the draw to Mill Race Park. These improvements and additions will also provide increased outdoor recreational opportunities for residents of Atkinson. Residents will be able to park at Mill Race Park to enjoy many of the enhanced features, and if the hike/bike trail at Mill Race Park is connected to the existing Cowboy Trail, residents could walk or bike to Mill Race Park via a safe pedestrian-friendly alternative.

These outlined goals for Mill Race Park improvements would be truly beneficial for the City. Community stakeholders have outlined their priorities specifically for improvements at Mill Race Park. Those priorities and project details have been included in the master recreational plan. There are many other objectives that will help enhance amenities and promote tourism in Atkinson; however, improvements at Mill Race Park will help to complete both goals.

Atkinson's Community Center was discussed during public input sessions and listed through the Community Needs Assessment Survey as a strength and positive amenity for the community. The City and its residents have been able to make full use of this facility for many different types of events including class reunion celebrations, family reunions, wedding receptions, community public input sessions, group meetings, etc. Because this facility is widely used and draws many people to the community, the City views this facility as a true staple in the community and one that needs to continually be maintained and updated to ensure it remains a valuable asset to Atkinson. The City has done a good job of keeping the facility clean and free of damage; however, larger maintenance and update needs are becoming a concern for the community. Larger maintenance and update issues the City needs to complete in the next year or two including painting the facility and updating the lighting to more energy efficient fixtures as well as installing projectors and projection screens to allow for presentations, slideshows, and movies to be shown during the hundreds of hours the facility is rented each year. Other improvement projects include paving the remaining two-thirds of the parking lot and purchasing new equipment for the kitchen. General maintenance and updates also need to be continued in order to maintain the successful facility that the Atkinson Community Center has been for the community for the past several years. Because the Community Center is so important to the residents and brings people into the community, the City leaders understand the importance of providing funds for these updates and maintenance. They realize it is the only way to ensure that the facility is still viable for years to come.

Atkinson's public swimming pool was constructed in the 1998, which is relatively new in comparison to many other municipal pools across Nebraska. Residents consider the swimming pool a strength for the community, an amenity they wish to keep. The City will need to continually assess the condition of the pool and continue maintenance and updates as needed. In the future, the City may determine major updates are needed to ensure Federal and State compliance, proper functionality, and that the pool is meeting the needs of the community.

The City has three ballfields located in the Atkinson City Park, adjacent to the swimming pool, Community Center, and West Holt Public Schools. These fields are used regularly during warmer months and they provide an amenity for many age groups in addition to bringing people into Atkinson for games and tournaments. Facility and equipment upgrades such as bleachers, dugouts, fencing, score boards, lighting, infield and outfield conditions, batting cages, restroom facilities, concessions, scorer's box, etc. may be needed in the future. The ballfields are very important to the community; therefore, updates and upgrades should be completed, as necessary.

Atkinson has a variety of playground and picnic equipment to suit families and children of all ages. Existing park equipment should be periodically monitored to determine times for improvement or replacement to ensure Atkinson's parks are a safe environment for children to play. In the future, it may also be a goal for the City to add more playground equipment or create an additional "neighborhood" park on the south side of the community. Playground equipment can be developed to fit different age groups, it is ideal for the City to have options for all ages. Updating, replacing, or adding new equipment to fit the needs of the community should always remain high on the recreational priority list.

Atkinson is a part of the Cowboy Trail loop, which is a rails to trails program that converted old railroad right-of-way into a hike/bike trail stretching from Norfolk to Chadron. An obvious attraction to hike/bike trails is the ease of access and use for all ages. Hike/bike trails provide a safe environment for exercising including walking, running, biking, and skating. Hike/bike trails can be constructed in phases which can add to the appeal of developing an amenity with the ability to grow and expand for residents. It may be desired to construct additional hike/bike trails around the community connecting key areas like the school, Library, and Mill Race Park. Another addition to the Cowboy Trail would be improvements to the existing Railroad Park on Main Street, which is adjacent to the south side of the Cowboy Trail or the creation of a new park on State Street on the east side of the Downtown District. Computer renderings of this option can be found in the Future Land Use section. This park would be dual purpose, connecting Cowboy Trail users to the Downtown District (in the same fashion as Railroad Park); however, it would also help to create an aesthetically pleasing entrance into the Downtown District on State Street from Highway 20. The lot shown in the images for the computer rendering is currently vacant and the parcel size and shape is very irregular creating many challenges for commercial development. This site may be best suited for greenspace and an entrance into downtown that can help make a statement.

Through public input, residents have also shared their desire for the addition of sand volleyball courts and a disc golf course. These two recreational amenities are attractive to many different age groups, including junior high and high school students which would provide another safe opportunity for an activity that may be desirable to them.

Another amenity that is becoming more popular in Nebraska's communities is a splash pad. A splash pad would be a great addition to Atkinson's long list of amenities. Splash pads can be designed to attract children at a variety of ages. They should be designed to have special areas that best suit each age group. These specified bay areas allow for a safe play environment for everyone. Splash pads are a way to provide community enhancement as well as a healthy way for families to play safely. A couple of positive functional attributes to a splash pad are that they do not require lifeguards and they are designed to have the ability to regulate when features are able to be used.

All public restroom facilities should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure accessibility for all of Atkinson's residents and visitors. An evaluation of public facilities should be completed for the City to effectively budget and plan for the improvement and removal of any physical barriers in public places, including recreational facilities. Such updates require planning to ensure funds are available to complete the tasks and guarantee compliance with ADA design guidelines and regulations. The design guidelines for ADA compliance was updated in 2010; the City is aware of these regulations and is working hard to solve any issues regarding the updated regulations.

Vibrant, colorful landscaping helps draw people to an area, and creates a positive first impression. Not only does landscaping add beauty to the parks, but it is also an opportunity for residents to volunteer their time and talent in order to keep the parks beautiful. While considering landscaping improvements, stakeholders should also consider options to add shade trees or structures to areas in need, i.e. near bleachers, at the swimming pool, or near parking. This can help protect and provide relief from the summer sun for visitors of the park.

In order to expand community amenities and promote tourism in Atkinson, the City should work to meet the following objectives:

Establish locations for each amenity;

With a long list of goals for additional amenities in the City, residents should devise a plan for a location for each amenity. Proximity to other community amenities, the general public, and access/visibility for visitors should all be taken into consideration when planning for locations of community amenities. Once each goal has a proposed location it will be simpler to establish a plan for development.

Prioritize projects;

Because the City has many goals for additional recreation and service areas, the City should work to prioritize the list of goals. Once priorities have been set, the City can work with community groups to establish a plan for implementation. It is very important that the City establish their priority projects in order to be effective with implementation of the goals outlined in this Plan.

Set group(s) to be in charge for each project;

It should not be the entire responsibility of the City to complete all of the goals outlined in this Plan; therefore, the City should work with community groups to determine which groups will be in charge of which projects. Once groups are set with their associated goals they can begin to implement based on the timeline determined by the City and community groups.

Engage in marketing efforts; and

The City and Economic Development Office, as well as other determined community groups, should market all amenities and attractions in the community to draw people to Atkinson. This is also beneficial to remind all of the community's residents about the wonderful benefits of living in Atkinson. Marketing objectives are outlined on the following pages. These should be completed to help educate and inform existing and potential residents and visitors about the things Atkinson has to offer.

Formulate timeline/funding options.

Because so many groups will be involved in the development of the community amenities, a timeline should be created based on priority projects and funding availability. This timeline should be followed by the City and all community groups involved. Funding options, including grant opportunities should also be determined. Typically grant applications can only be submitted by one community for one project; therefore, it is necessary to determine which goals meet the grant application requirements and determine how each goal will be funded. Currently, there are a few grant opportunities available for different community amenities; however, these grants are highly competitive and are not available for all types of projects. It is important for the City to have other sources of funding for amenity development because grant funds may not be available or accessible.

Develop Marketing Campaign

Creating a community brand and marketing that brand to existing and potential residents and visitors is important when trying to develop an image. It is evident that several of Atkinson's stakeholders realize this importance because of the recent desire and efforts made for a 'marketing campaign'. With all that Atkinson has to offer its residents, from amenities to local retail businesses, the community truly is a destination place and does attract visitors. However, the city needs to develop a marketing campaign to promote existing businesses as well as capitalize on its ability to grow.

The City and/or local Chamber and Economic Development offices should also focus on marketing to its own residents. A "shop local" campaign could involve many different marketing strategies to reach various community members. Marketing the City to existing residents is sometimes just as important as marketing to potential visitors. A shop local campaign could consist of yard signs, placement reminders at restaurants, or participation in "Thankful Thursdays" when residents are encouraged to show their support and thanks to local businesses.

Social media marketing is one way to share information with existing residents while also marketing the community to potential residents and visitors. Online marketing is a quick and almost instant way to share information. It is also accessible almost anywhere for most people. In today's society, people want instant information and one way to provide that is to have a strong web presence promoting the City and all that it has to offer including both public places and private businesses.

Marketing the City should be an on-going effort made in part by the City of Atkinson as well as the local Chamber and Economic Development offices with the assistance of local businesses. The idea is to inform the surrounding area, as well as visitors passing through, of the wonderful amenities the community has to offer. The goal is to let people know that Atkinson is a community with multiple things to do throughout the day for a variety of age groups. Atkinson truly does have a lot to offer to its residents and visitors; however, sharing that information is the only way the City will be able to capitalize on all it has to offer. Social media and other internet sources, regional or State-wide visitor's guides or magazines, and marketing brochures and materials are just a few of the ways the community can get the word out about Atkinson.

In order to develop a marketing campaign for Atkinson, the City should work to meet the following objectives:

Develop a brand;

By developing a brand for the City to use to market itself, it has an image that can be identified by residents and non-residents alike. Branding and marketing a community is becoming more and more important with today's society. The brand needs to be instantly recognizable and be representative of the entire community. Developing a brand could include a logo, slogan, color scheme, and theme to represent the community.

Establish responsible roles for marketing;

As with community amenity development, not all of the marketing should be left to the City. Other community groups such as the local Chamber or Economic Development office or even a regional regional Economic Development office could also be instrumental in marketing for Atkinson. These groups, along with the City, should work to establish roles for marketing.

Create marketing pieces;

Using the brand developed for the City, marketing pieces should be created that can be utilized online as well as for posters, videos (which has been a wonderful marketing tool the City has been creating), brochures, etc. Thinking comprehensively to hit all targeted areas is important when creating marketing pieces. It is also important to continually update the marketing pieces to ensure current information is being utilized and the pieces look modern and up-to-date.

Maintain updated social media and other online marketing materials; and

Social media can be thought of as a way to get information to a large amount of people in a short amount of time. Also, social media sources such as Facebook and Twitter are free resources to use for marketing and most likely a majority of the community's residents and visitors use some form of social media on their own. Other online marketing tools should also be considered in order to effectively reach potential developers or business owners to show what the City has to offer.

Market within Atkinson.

Marketing within the City itself is also important. Developing a "shop local" campaign to market to residents and encourage them to support local businesses is important to the success of businesses in the community. Signs, such as a shopping mall directory, could also be placed at key points of interest in the community to display other amenities or businesses in Atkinson. It would serve as a map showing other possible areas to visit or things to do in the community.

Enhance Highway Corridors & Community Beautification

Highway corridors and overall community beautification were discussed during the public input sessions held for the Comprehensive Plan. Not only were the issues discussed, but ideas were developed to improve the aesthetics of the area. Unappealing highway corridors can provide visitors with a bad reflection of what the community really is and what it has to offer. After an individual has lived in a community for several years, one starts to overlook the negative aspects or the visually unappealing areas. However, a gateway entrance and highway corridor is Atkinson's first impression and opportunity to market to visitors. In order to improve the corridor through town, adjacent property owners will need to be supportive and understanding of the overall goal that Atkinson is trying to achieve. Ideas and visuals for this goal can be seen in previous sections of this Comprehensive Plan.

There are many different ways to create beautiful corridors. Typically landscaping, lighting, signage, and screening are the main projects involved. A Highway Beautification Committee could be created or an existing community group could help drive these projects or an existing group or board could volunteer their efforts for beautifying the highway corridor through Atkinson. It will be important to achieve continuity in the aesthetics of all improvements. Having a plan or visuals in place before making any changes will be important to stimulate public support and develop a cohesive look to match the City's brand. There is no right or wrong answer to how this process will unfold, and it will be up to the community to determine the best method.

It will be up to the City and their citizens to make final decisions for the vision of their community; however, this vision should encompass the entire community for all beautification projects as opposed to having a mixture of several different "looks" or products used. Beautification is important throughout the entire community not just the highway corridor, so any of ideas or themes could be carried into the Downtown District, public parks, or any residential neighborhood. If the City works to beautify the community and its highway corridor, it may spark the desire in residents to keep their properties clean. General property up-keep can be enforced through nuisance abatement and conversations with private property owners to encourage general property beautification. Wayfinding signage should also be considered as options for highway corridor improvements. One example of a wayfinding sign along Highway 20 would be a sign on State Street and/or Main Street pointing traffic towards the Downtown District. This signage would help inform drivers on the location of the Downtown District, which can be confusing for visitors who are not familiar with the community.

A partnership could also be created with adjacent property owners to ensure everyone is on the same page aesthetically, and hopefully with the support of property owners this goal could be accomplished. As previously mentioned, one group or several groups could work to make this goal become a reality. The most important part is to have an overall plan and vision created before any projects are started; that way there will be a cohesive look throughout the community and every group will know what needs to be done to achieve the community's vision.

Screening will make the most noticeable improvement due to some unsightly land uses located on both sides of the highway corridors. Screening could also be beneficial for property owners because the screening can act as a sound buffer from the highway traffic. Signage should not only be informational, but also attractive. A cohesive look starting from one entrance sign and carrying through the community to the opposite end creates a distinct appeal and enhances the brand Atkinson is developing. Another improvement option could include wayfinding signage to signify and direct traffic to key attractions in the community such as the Downtown District, School, Hospital, parks, Museums, etc. Creating a cohesive, aesthetic plan; forming a group to spearhead the project; balancing partnerships with adjacent property owners, City officials, and other community beautification groups; and aligning funding will be the key steps in beautifying Atkinson's gateways and highway corridors.