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INTRODUCTION

LOCATION

Red Willow County is located in the southwest region of the State of Nebraska. Red Willow County borders the State of Kansas to the south, Hitchcock County to the west, Frontier County to the north and Furnas County to the east. The county is thirty miles long east to west and twenty-four miles long north to south. The City of McCook is the County seat and is located in the west-central portion of the County along U.S. Highway 34, running north to south and U.S. Highway 6, running east to west. The Village of Indianola is located adjacent to U.S. Highway 6 and is approximately eleven miles from McCook to the northwest. The Village of Bartley, located 6 miles east and slightly north of Indianola, is also located adjacent to U.S. Highway 6. Danbury is located in the southeast corner of the County on Nebraska Highway 89 approximately two miles from the northern border of Kansas. Lebanon, additionally located in the southeastern corner of the County, is seven miles to the west and slightly north of Danbury.

CLIMATE AND TOPOGRAPHY

The climate in Red Willow County is one of considerable change and unpredictability. The Rocky Mountains to the west of the county cut off any moisture that might enter the area from the west. There are no barriers to the north or south of the county. As a result, the county is subject to sharp changes in temperature when the wind shifts from south to north or from north to south. Changes in temperature are more noticeable in winter than in summer when the region to the north is too warm to provide much cold air. In winter, cold weather generally alternates with warm periods. The temperature equally remains below freezing only a few days each month. However, cold air occasionally moves into this region and remains for a month or more. Precipitation in winter is in the form of light infrequent snows that generally stay on the ground only a few days. The amount of snowfall increases through winter with the maximum amount falling in March. In the latter part of March, temperatures generally rise so most of the precipitation falls as rain, however, heavy snows occasionally occur in April and light snows in May. April, however, can bring severe thunderstorms. These storms are most frequent in June and can bring hail and tornadoes that potentially damage crops and homes. The summer weather is hot and unfavorable for crops. In July, afternoon temperatures can exceed more than 100 degrees F, but are generally in the 90s. Autumn begins a little later in Red Willow County than in the northern part of Nebraska. Hot winds are frequent in early September and can occur as late as October. The first freeze occurs as early as late September, however, this usually occurs early in October. In November, the days are mostly mild and the nights are frosty. By December, winter blizzards, accompanied by high winds pile snow into large drifts interfering with traffic and communications. Finally, strong winds also cause considerable dust blowing during droughts.

HISTORY OF RED WILLOW COUNTY

About the year 1870, the first settlements in the Republican Valley appeared. By the next year, a settlement was planned in what is now Red Willow County. In the fall of 1871, a company was formed in Nebraska City for the purpose of making a settlement somewhere in the Republican Valley. It was intended to start a town and induce a heavy settlement to the surrounding country, and in due time to organize a county. On November 4, 1871, the Board of Directors ordered Royal Buck, the President, to organize an exploration and location party from among the directors and stockholders of the new land. The party was to proceed to Republican Valley to select a location for the new settlement and to survey the town. In their examination of the country, the party found wild game, such as buffalo, antelope and various other kinds of game common to the Western prairies.

The town party had ideas of great prosperity for their new town site. During this time, the State Legislature framed a bill recognizing an area to be known as Red Willow County. This was an era of speculation and one

of the periods in the history of Nebraska when large and numerous town sites were laid out that were believed to become great, magnificent cities. Most of these platted communities however, never became towns at all and the others grew slowly, but generally kept pace with the settlements of the area. A newspaper, designed more especially for advertising Red Willow County, was started by the town party early in 1872 and was published in Nebraska City.

Through 1872, there were several settlements that commenced in the county, on and near Coon Creek, and covering the present town site of Indianola. In the spring of 1873, quite a heavy immigration west began and communities such as Indianola and McCook continued to see settlement into the early 20th Century, giving Red Willow County and its population the definition that it has today.

THE PURPOSE OF COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

The Red Willow County Comprehensive Development Plan is designed to promote orderly land use for the County and its communities. The Comprehensive Development Plan will provide policy guidelines to enable citizens and elected officials to make informed decisions about the future of the County.

*The Plan acts as a tool to “Develop
a road map that guides the county
through change”*

The Comprehensive Development Plan will provide a guideline for the location of future land uses within the planning jurisdiction of Red Willow County. The Comprehensive Development Plan is intended to encourage a strong economic base for the County so the goals of the County are achieved.

The Plan will assist Red Willow County in evaluating the impacts of certain land uses and encourage appropriate land use throughout the jurisdictional area of the County. The objective of planning is to provide a framework for guiding Red Willow County, toward orderly growth and use of land. The Plan assists the County in balancing the physical, social, and economic features as it responds to private sector interests.

Planning will make Red Willow County more effective in serving residents, more efficient in using resources, and able to meet the standard of living and quality of life every individual desires.

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process begins with data collection. Data are collected that provide a snapshot of the past and present County conditions. Analyses of data provide the basis for developing forecasts for future land-use demands in the County.

Next in the planning process is the development of general goals and policies, based upon the issues facing the County. These are practical guidelines for improving existing conditions and guiding future growth. The Comprehensive Development Plan is a vision presented in text, graphics and tables representing the desires of the County for the future.

The Comprehensive Development Plan represents a blueprint designed to identify, assess, and develop actions and policies in the areas of population, land use, transportation, housing, economic development, community facilities, and utilities. The Comprehensive Development Plan contains recommendations that when implemented will be of value to the County and its residents.

The final section is the implementation of the Plan. A broad range of land use policies and programs are required to implement the Comprehensive Development Plan. The Comprehensive Development Plan identifies the tools, programs, and methods necessary to carry out the recommendations. Nevertheless, the

implementation of the land use policies contained within the Comprehensive Development Plan is dependent upon the adoption of the Plan by the governing body, and the leadership exercised by the present and future elected and appointed officials of the County.

This Plan was prepared under the direction of the Red Willow County Planning Commission with the assistance and participation of the Red Willow County Board of Commissioners, and citizens of Red Willow County. The planning period for achieving goals, programs, and developments identified in the Red Willow County Comprehensive Development Plan is twenty (20) years. However, the County should review the Plan annually and update the document every ten to fifteen years, or when a pressing need is identified. Updating the Comprehensive Development Plan allows the County to incorporate ideas and issues not known at the time of the present planning process.

COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN COMPONENTS

Nebraska State Statutes require the inclusion of certain elements in a Comprehensive Plan. A “Comprehensive Development Plan,” as defined in Neb. Rev. Stat. § 23-114.02 (RRS 1997), “shall consist of both graphic and textual material and shall be designed to accommodate anticipated long-range future growth.” The Comprehensive Development Plan is comprised of the following components:

- § County Characteristics Profile;
- § County Facilities Profile;
- § Community Goals and Policies;
- § Environmental, Natural and Man-Made Resources;
- § Existing Land Use Analysis;
- § Future Land Use Plan
- § Transportation Plan; and
- § Plan Implementation.

Analyzing past and existing demographic, housing, economic and social trends permit the projection of likely conditions in the future. Projections and forecasts are useful tools in planning for the future; however, these tools are not always accurate and may change due to unforeseen factors. Also, past trends may be skewed or the data may be inaccurate, creating a distorted picture of past conditions. Therefore, it is important for Red Willow County to closely monitor population, housing and economic conditions that may impact the County. Through periodic monitoring, the County can adapt and adjust to changes at the local level. Having the ability to adapt to socio-economic change allows the County to maintain an effective Comprehensive Development Plan for the future, to enhance the quality of life, and to raise the standard of living for all residents.

The Comprehensive Development Plan records where Red Willow County has been, where it is now, and where it likely will be in the future. Having this record in the Comprehensive Development Plan will help County officials formulate future goals. The Comprehensive Development Plan is an information and management tool for County leaders to use in their decision-making process when considering future land use issues. The Comprehensive Development Plan is not a static document; it should evolve as changes in the land use, population or local economy occur during the planning period. This information is the basis for Red Willow County’s evolution as it achieves its physical, social, and economic goals.

GOVERNMENTAL AND JURISDICTIONAL ORGANIZATION

The Red Willow County Board of Commissioners, which is a board of elected officials, performs the governmental functions for the County. Each incorporated community in Red Willow County also has elected officials and officers that oversee the governing of their County.

The planning and zoning jurisdiction of Red Willow County, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 23-114 (RRS 1997), includes all of the unincorporated portions of the County, excluding the established extraterritorial jurisdiction of each incorporated city or village.

Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 17-1001 (RRS 1997), the planning and zoning jurisdiction for the incorporated communities in Red Willow County that have adopted Comprehensive Development Plans and Zoning Ordinances, includes the area within one mile of their corporate limits. As these communities grow and annex land into their corporate limits, their extraterritorial jurisdictions will extend further into the County. There are five (5) communities in Red Willow County that are incorporated including Bartley, Danbury, Indianola, Lebanon, and McCook. Danbury and Lebanon have not enacted zoning, while the McCook, Bartley and Indianola have.