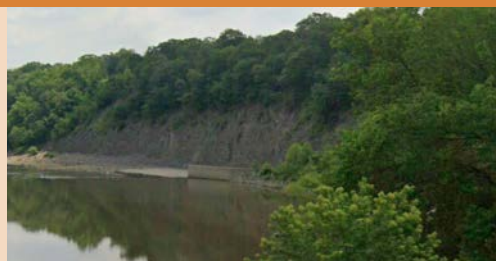




Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Acknowledgments

County Commissioners

Myra Carlisle Frazier | 1st District

Jack Garner | 2nd District

Cory Moates | 3rd District

Planning Commission

Brett Warstler, Chair

Roger Drager

Randy Commons

Scott Boyes

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Lorie Johnson, Secretary

Mel Haas, Consultant

Consultant Team

CONFLUENCE

Thank You

A special thank you to all residents and stakeholders that engaged with the Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan throughout the process. Your input was instrumental to creating the vision and recommendations for the future of Cherokee County.

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



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Chapter 2: Existing Conditions Summary

Chapter 3: Public Input Summary

Chapter 4: Future Land Use Plan

Chapter 5: Renewable Energy

Chapter 6: Transportation

Chapter 7: Parks, Recreation, and Tourism

Chapter 8: Recommendations



Chapter 1

Introduction

Project Scope and Schedule

The Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan was completed in four phased over [insert final month count] months in 2025-2026.

The phases are described below for additional context. Figure 2 presents the project schedule used throughout the process.

Phase 1 - Existing Conditions Assessment

Phase 1 included an inventory of existing conditions ranging from demographics to physical conditions of the community today.

Chapter 2: Existing Conditions Summary details these findings.

Phase 2 - Public + Stakeholder Engagement

Phase 2 included the public input activities with the residents and stakeholders to create a community vision to guide the development of the Plan's recommendations. **Chapter 3: Public Input Summary** outlines these events, engagement opportunities, and results.

Phase 3 - Draft Plan + Evaluation

Phase 3 took all of the findings from Phase 1 and 2 to inform and guide the development of the Plan's recommendations. This process included a series of input review meetings with County staff and the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee

Phase 4 - Final Plan + Adoption

Phase 4 included the formal public hearings and meetings needed to officially adopt an updated comprehensive plan from the Zoning Commission and County Commission.



Figure 1: Project Scope Details

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan

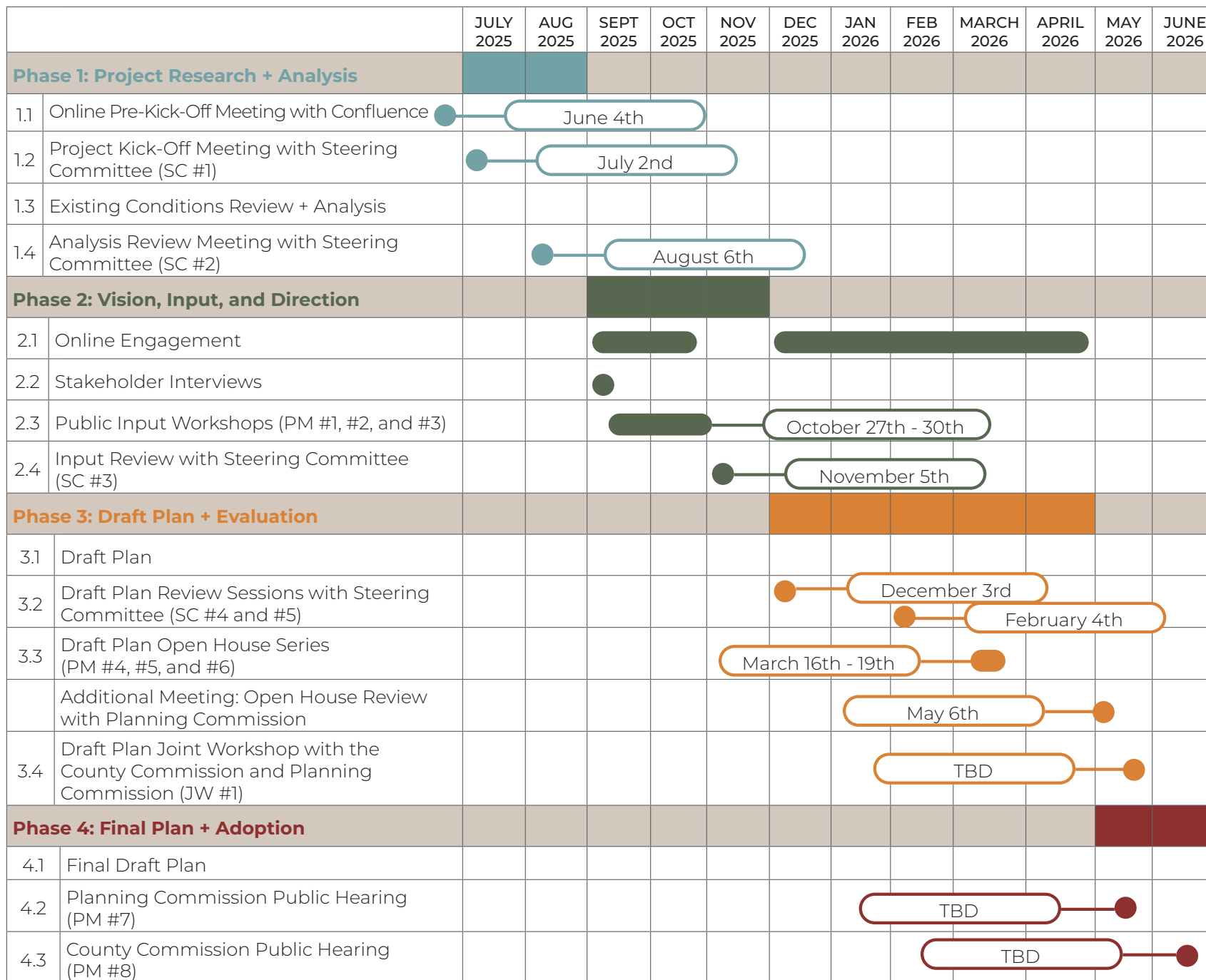


Figure 2: Comprehensive Plan Project Schedule

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Chapter 1

Introduction

Comprehensive Plan Overview

Comprehensive Plans help to guide decisions and policies for growth and development within a community. In this Plan, the recommendations are outlined for all of unincorporated Cherokee County, Kansas. The incorporated areas of Cherokee County are responsible for regulations, visions for growth, and policies to guide decision-making in their respective jurisdictions.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a document designed to guide the future actions of a community. It presents a vision of the future, with long-range goals and objectives for all activities that affect the local government.

Why We Plan

Cherokee County has not had a Comprehensive Plan until this document. Without the Comprehensive Plan, the County would not have a guiding document with a long-term vision for policies and recommendations. Furthermore, without the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission and County Commissioners would have no legal basis for zoning which is created to protect the health, safety, and welfare of residents and property owners.

Legal Basis for Comprehensive Plans

Kansas state law, K.S.A. 12-747, authorizes cities and counties to create comprehensive plans to help guide development within their jurisdiction. Comprehensive plans further serves as a basis for zoning and subdivision regulations should a city or county wish to adopt such regulations to assist with the management of new development.

How to Use the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan should be reviewed at least once per year by the Planning Commission and the County Commission to identify future initiatives and actions the County may wish to take to help address the goals provided within the plan and if certain areas of the plan warrant review and update. The Comprehensive Plan should be consulted when considering the adoption of any zoning or subdivision regulation and when reviewing a significant development proposal.

Cherokee County Planning Commission Resolution

[PDF of resolution to be added pending recommendation]

Cherokee County Commission Resolution

[PDF of resolution to be added pending recommendation]

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



**Planning Commission Resolution to
be added here.**

**County Commission Resolution to
be added here.**



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Overview

A thorough existing conditions analysis was completed as part of Phase 1 for the Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan. This analysis included examination of physical and community profile datasets ranging from floodplain and topography to socioeconomic factors. This chapter summarizes the findings from this analysis into two categories: physical profile and community profile.

Physical Profile

The physical profile includes the on-the-ground conditions of Cherokee County today. This includes natural resources, land uses, housing, major roadways, and infrastructure.

The physical conditions of Cherokee County have significant impacts on future growth and development considerations. To plan for the future, it is important to understand the existing functions and development patterns within Cherokee County.

Figure 3 presents the base map developed for this existing conditions analysis in which a series of other datasets were layered atop for further assessments. Cherokee County is home to seven incorporated cities including:

- Baxter Springs
- Columbus
- Galena
- Roseland
- Scammon
- Weir
- West Mineral

There are a number of unincorporated communities located along major roadways throughout the community that also contribute to the demographics and character of Cherokee County.

Cherokee County is the southeasternmost county located in Kansas, sharing borders with Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. Crawford and Labette Counties are respectively located to the north and west of Cherokee County.

The county itself has a long history of mining and agricultural operations that have contributed to the character and landscape of the area. Retired mining operations have transitioned to wildlife areas, farming and ranching remains at the forefront of land uses, and the county has a strong presence in manufacturing, construction, and transportation industries. These characteristics, among others, are detailed within this report.

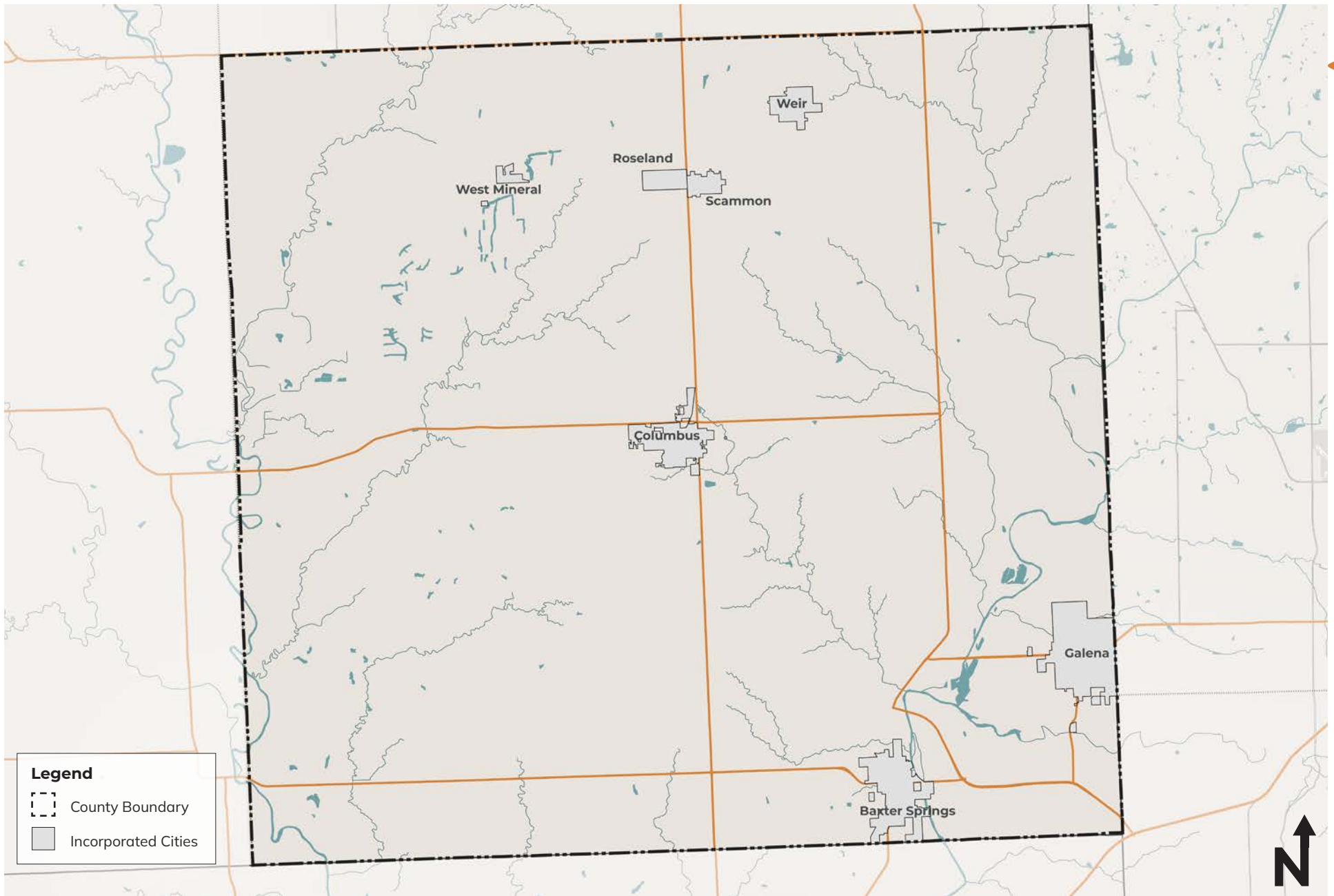


Figure 3: Base Map of Cherokee County

Source: Confluence with inputs from Cherokee County



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Existing Land Uses

The following map examines the existing land uses for the unincorporated land in Cherokee County. Table 1 shows the land use breakdown of unincorporated Cherokee County by land use type and the percent share land use for each category with and without agriculture included. From this table, it can be observed that:

- Agriculture and Open Space is the largest land use category in the County at 91.3%. Due to how high of a share this is of the total land use composition, further analysis was completed to understand dominant land use types excluding agriculture operations.
- Parks, Recreation, and Conservation is the second largest land use category. This trend and land use type is further explored in **Chapter 7: Parks, Recreation, and Tourism**.
- Single-Family Residential is the third largest land use category. This is typical for a rural community where it is not typical to see apartments or higher-densities units in unincorporated areas.

These findings support the guidance and recommendations outlined in **Chapter 4: Future Land Use** and the Future Land Use Map that helps the County guide and direct desired development types.

Land Use Category	% With Agriculture	% Without Agriculture
Agriculture and Open Space	91.3%	-
Commercial	0.1%	1.4%
Parks, Recreation, and Conservation	4.4%	51.0%
Industrial	0.5%	5.3%
Public/Semi-Public	0.4%	4.2%
Multi-Family Residential	0.1%	0.9%
Single-Family Residential	2.3%	26.2%
Quapaw Nation Land	0.1%	0.7%
Vacant/Undeveloped Lots	0.9%	10.2%

Table 1: Existing Land Use Shares

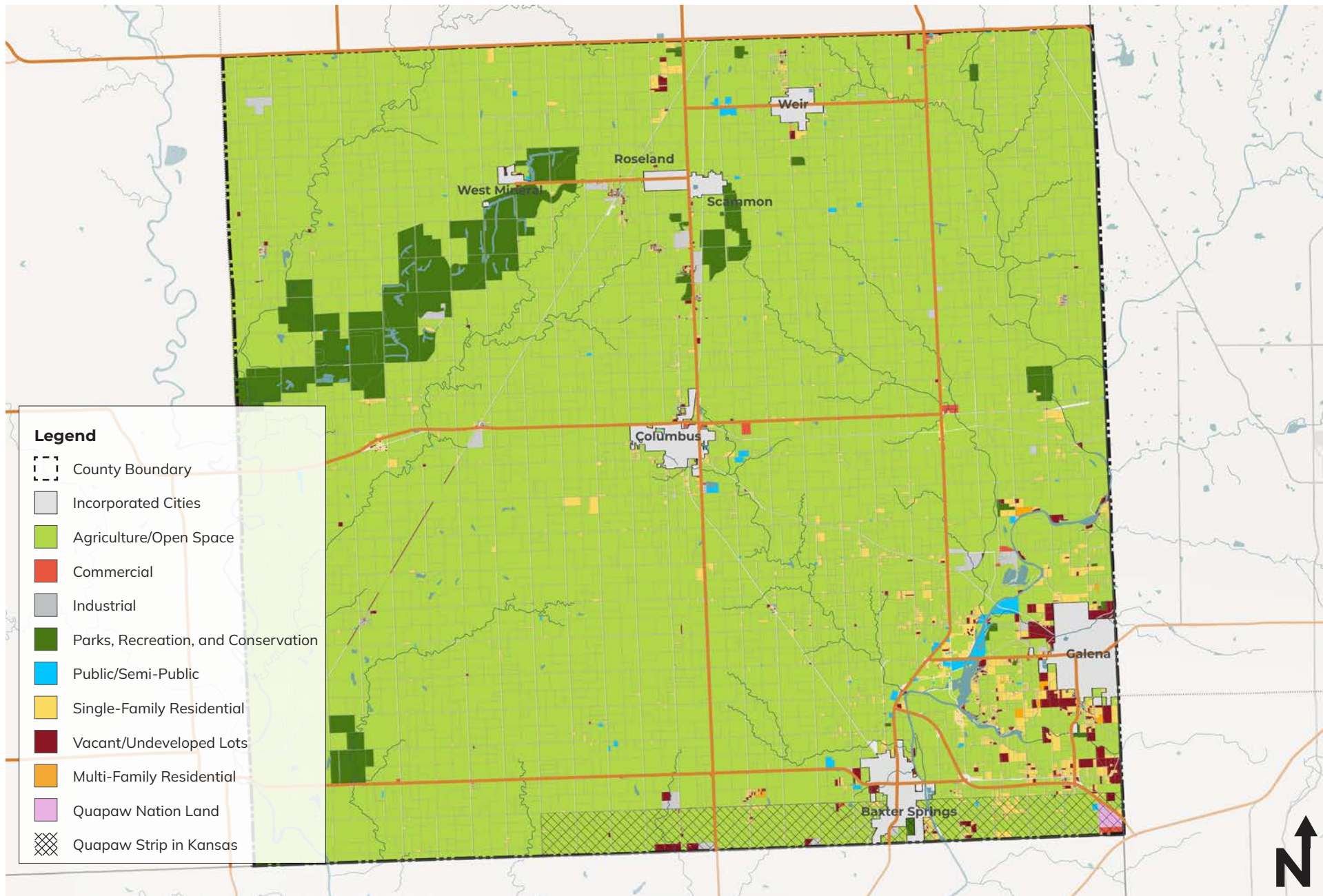


Figure 4: Existing Land Use

Source: Confluence with inputs from Cherokee County



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Parks + Recreation

The map in Figure 6 identifies land that is reserved for parks, recreation, or conservation. There is a vast amount of land in Cherokee County that is used for recreational hunting and fishing as a bi-product of the historic mining operations in this area.

Many of these areas, especially the contiguous land identified in the northwest corner of the county, are retired strip pits. These parcels are classified as a Mined Wildlife Area by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP). This land includes the Strip Pits State Wildlife Management Area, which is an area of land in Cherokee County that was formally mined, has been restored, and is now a protected wildlife area and space for recreation. These areas contribute greatly to the character, quality of life, and tourism of Cherokee County and detailed more in **Chapter 7: Parks, Recreation, and Tourism**.

Scan this QR code to learn more about the Mined Land Wildlife Area



Figure 5: Mined Land Wildlife Area

Source: University of Kansas

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan

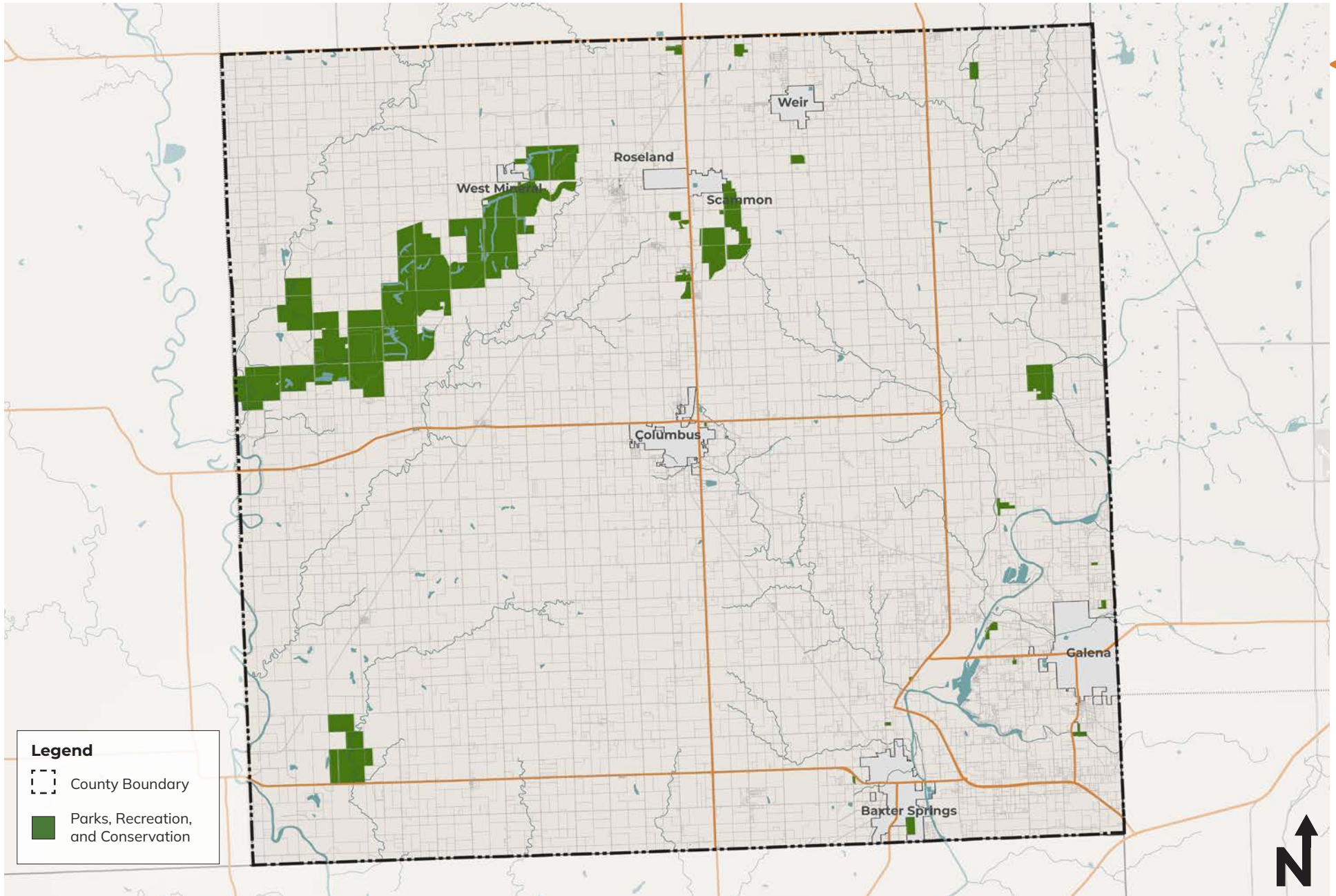


Figure 6: Parks, Recreation and Conservation

Source: Confluence with inputs from Cherokee County

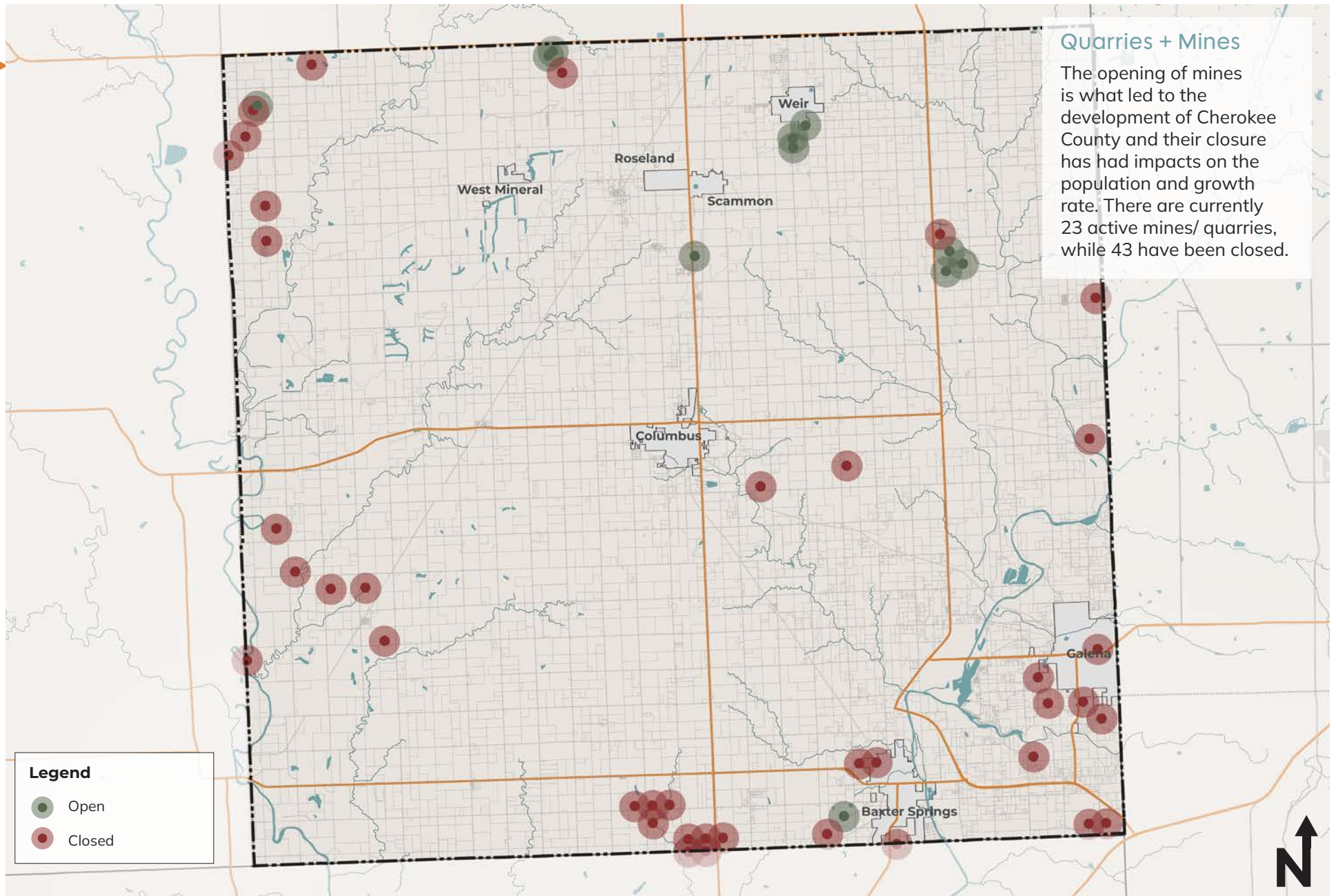


Figure 7: Quarries and Mines

Source: Confluence with inputs from University of Kansas

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan

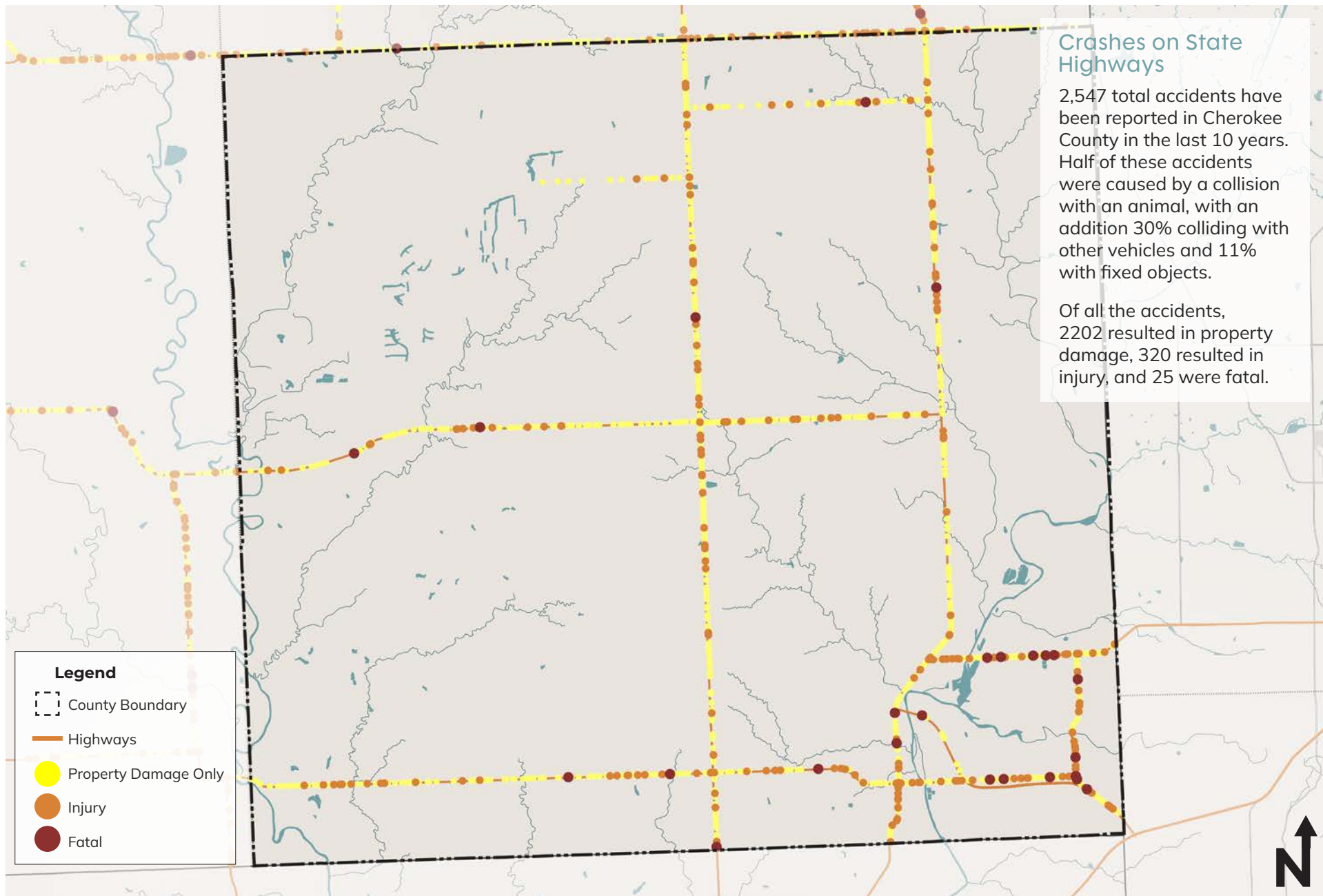


Figure 8: Crashes on State Highways

Source: Confluence with inputs from Kansas DOT



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Streams and Floodways

The map in Figure 9 displays the locations and types of streams, floodway and floodplain, and watersheds throughout Cherokee County.

Perennial streams are streams that have flowing water year-round. The water table is located above the streambed for most of the year. Groundwater is the primary source of water for the stream flow, and runoff from precipitation is a supplemental source of water for stream flow.

Intermittent streams are streams that have flowing water during some times of the year, but not all. When groundwater provides enough water, the stream flows, but may not be flowing during dry periods. Groundwater is the primary source of water for the stream flow, and runoff from precipitation is a supplemental source of water for stream flow.

Ephemeral streams are streams that have flowing water only during, and for a short duration after, precipitation events in a typical year. Runoff from precipitation is the primary source of water for stream flow.

There are many perennial streams throughout Cherokee County, with some intermittent and ephemeral streams.

Watersheds are areas of land where water drains to a common outlet, such as a stream. The different watersheds throughout Cherokee County are highlighted on the map in Figure 9.

The 100-year floodplain includes low-lying land often found near streams or other waterbodies that experience water inundation during or after rain and other high water events. The 100-year floodplain includes areas with a 1% chance of flooding each year.

Floodways are the channel of a river or other waterbody and the adjacent land area that cannot have obstructions placed within it or be filled in without causing water elevations to increase.

The 100-year floodplain is extensive in Cherokee County. Floodplains and floodways offer great biodiversity and are often fertile agricultural areas. These areas should be left undeveloped to prevent property damage or risk safety, as well as to protect the important natural functions of the land and wildlife.

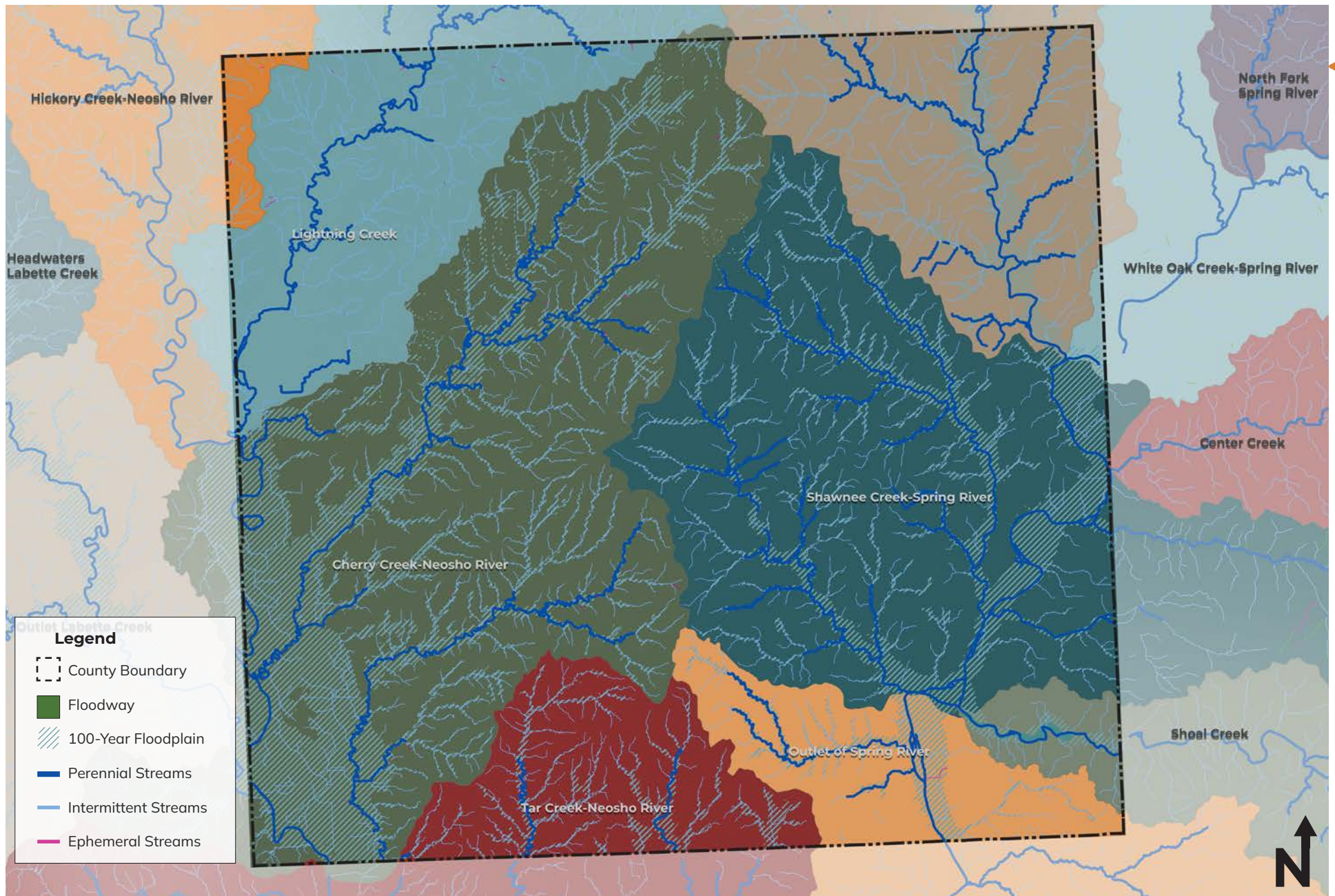


Figure 9: Sensitive Natural Features

Source: Confluence with inputs from USGS



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Community Profile

The community profile includes all characteristics related to the people living in Cherokee County. Information on the population and socioeconomics of Cherokee County are discussed in this section. This information will be used to help understand where Cherokee County is today to help identify potential recommendations within the Comprehensive Plan.

Population Change

Population Change

Figure 10 presents population change for Cherokee County from 1970 to 2024. Cherokee County has approximately 19,133 residents, as of 2023. The County has seen a decline in population since the 2000s. The overall change between 2000 and 2023 was -15.2%, demonstrating a long-lasting downturn in population trends in the county.

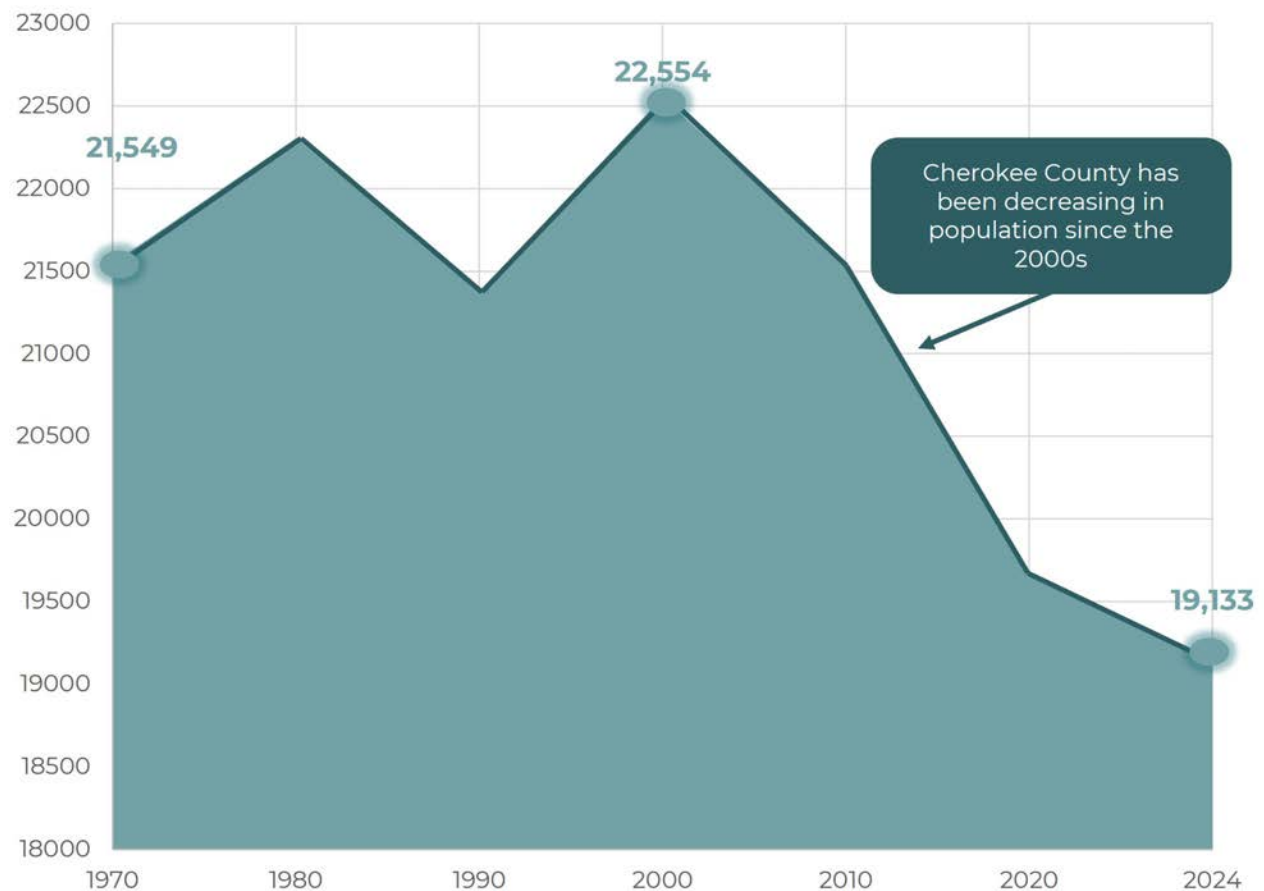


Figure 10: Cherokee County Population Change

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

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Population Change Regional Comparison

Figure 11 shows a regional comparison of incorporated cities and their respective average annual percent growth of populations from 2010 to 2023. Overall, Cherokee County shrunk by -11.5% in this time period. Furthermore, Baxter Springs, Columbus, and Galena all shrunk by similar amounts, while the population of the state of Kansas grew by 4.56%.

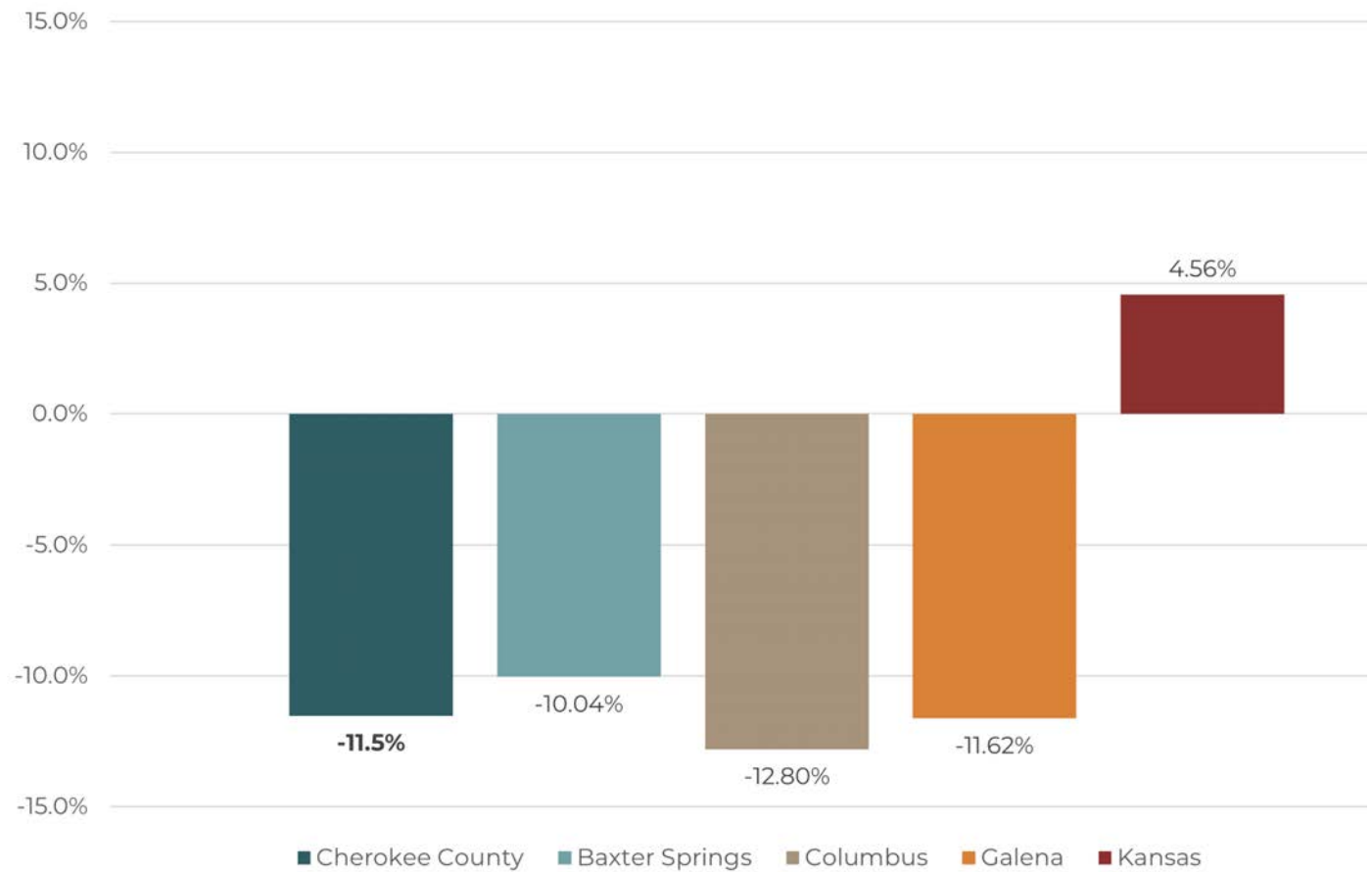


Figure 11: Population Change Regional Comparison

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Age

Age Group Comparison

Figure 12 shows a population by age group comparison for Cherokee County, Baxter Springs, Columbus, Galena, and Kansas. Nearly 25% of Cherokee County's population consists of teenagers and children (age 19 or younger). Younger adults (age 20-44) and older adults (age 45-65) each make up 28% of Cherokee County's population. About 20% of Cherokee County's residents are seniors (age 65 or older).

Population Pyramid

Figure 13 shows a population pyramid of Cherokee County. The County has a large population of older adults and seniors compared to the State of Kansas. There are also fewer younger adults in the County compared to the state of Kansas.



Figure 12: Population by Age Group Comparison (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

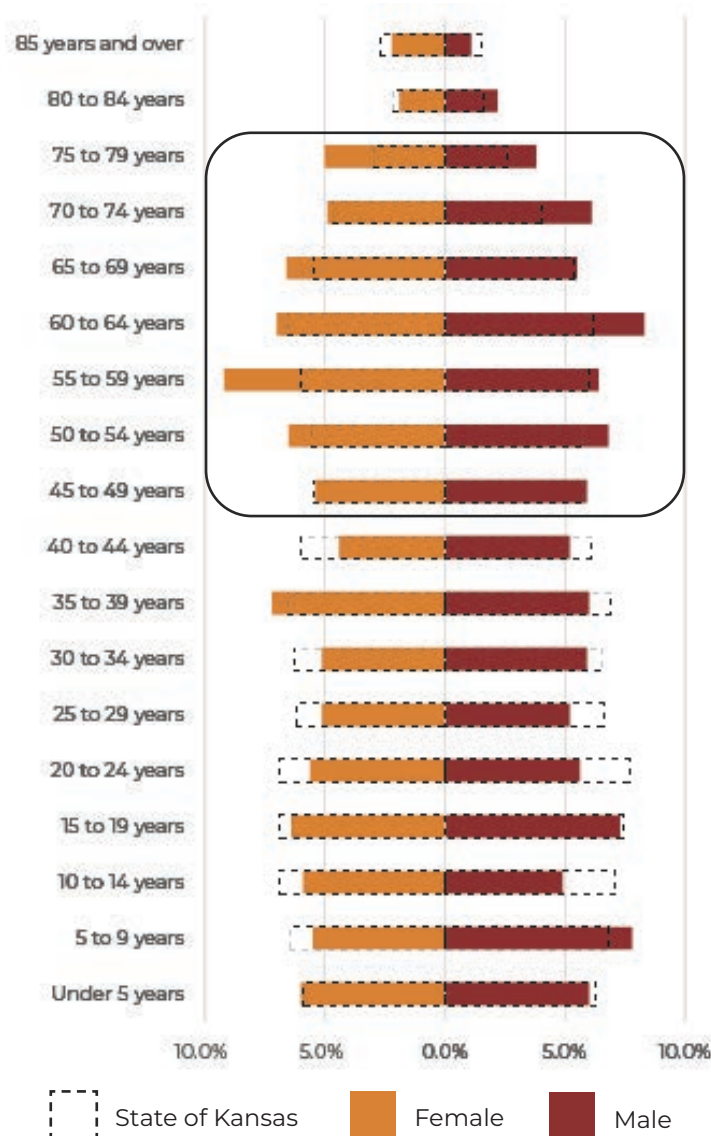


Figure 13: Population Pyramid (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Median Age Comparison

Figure 14 shows the median age comparison between Cherokee County, Baxter Springs, Columbus, Galena, and Kansas. These statistics help highlight the general composition and trends of population in these cities and county overall. Cherokee County and the incorporated cities within it have older median ages than the state of Kansas.

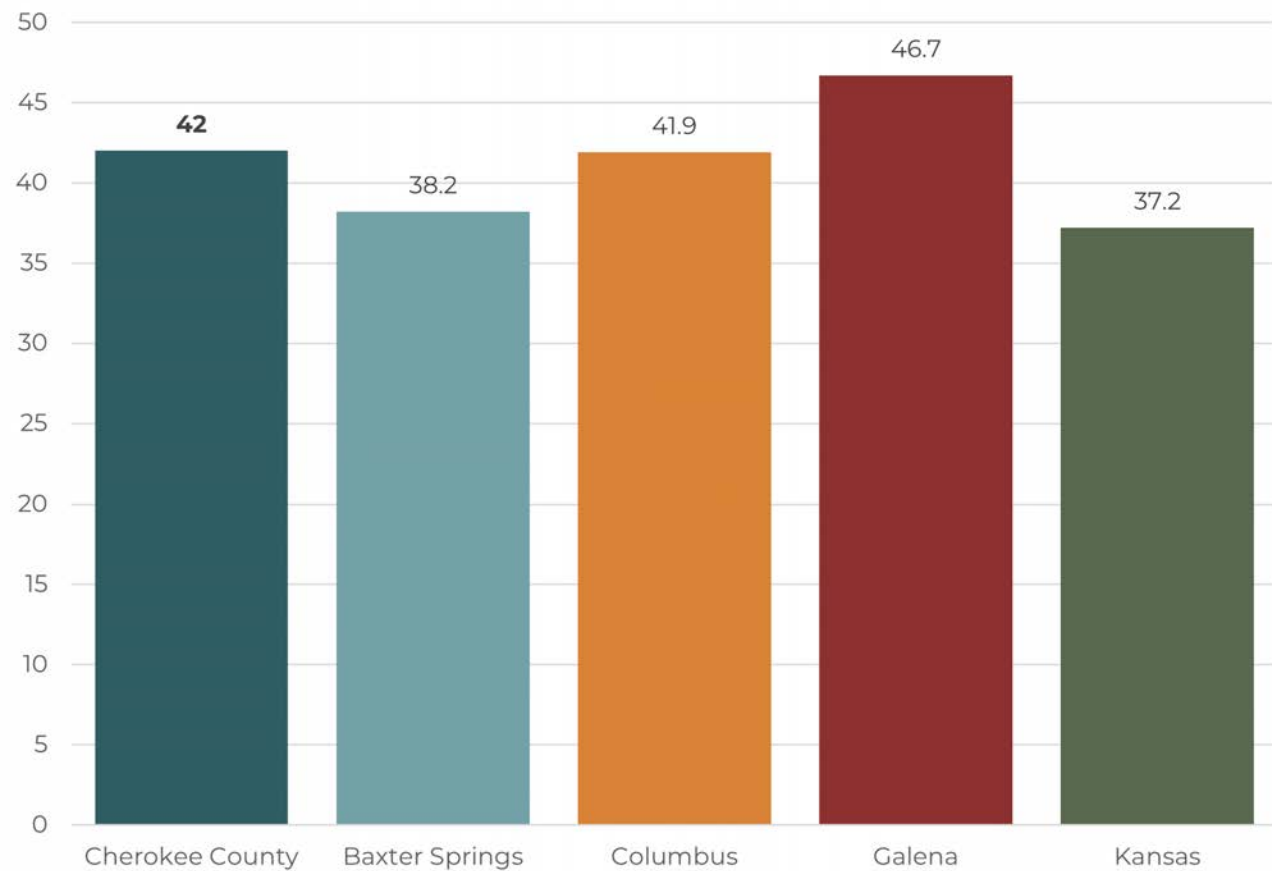


Figure 14: Median Age Comparison (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Household Composition

Household Size Comparison

Figure 15 shows a household size comparison between Galena, Columbus, Baxter Springs, and Cherokee County. Cherokee County has a high share of 2-person households, at 40.5%. Over 68.7% of households in the County are either 1-person or 2-person households. Baxter Springs has a higher share of 4+ person households when compared to the other cities within the County.

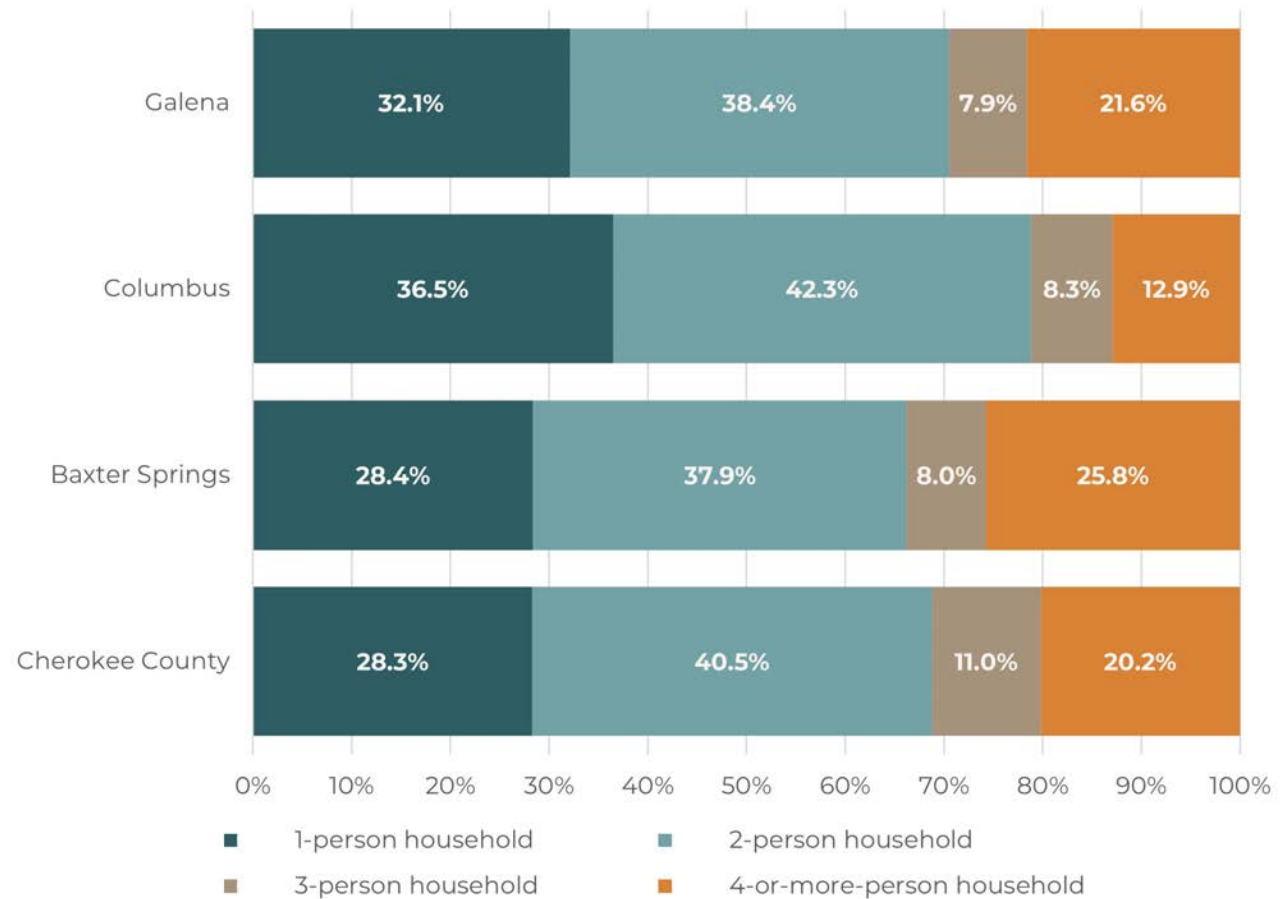


Figure 15: Household Size Comparison (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

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Housing Tenure

Renter vs. Owner-Occupied

Figure 16 shows percentages of renter-occupied compared to owner-occupied households. A majority of housing within Cherokee County is owner-occupied. Rental housing makes up 27.6% of occupied households in Cherokee County.

The average owner-occupied household size is 2.5 persons and the average renter-occupied household size is 2.37 persons.

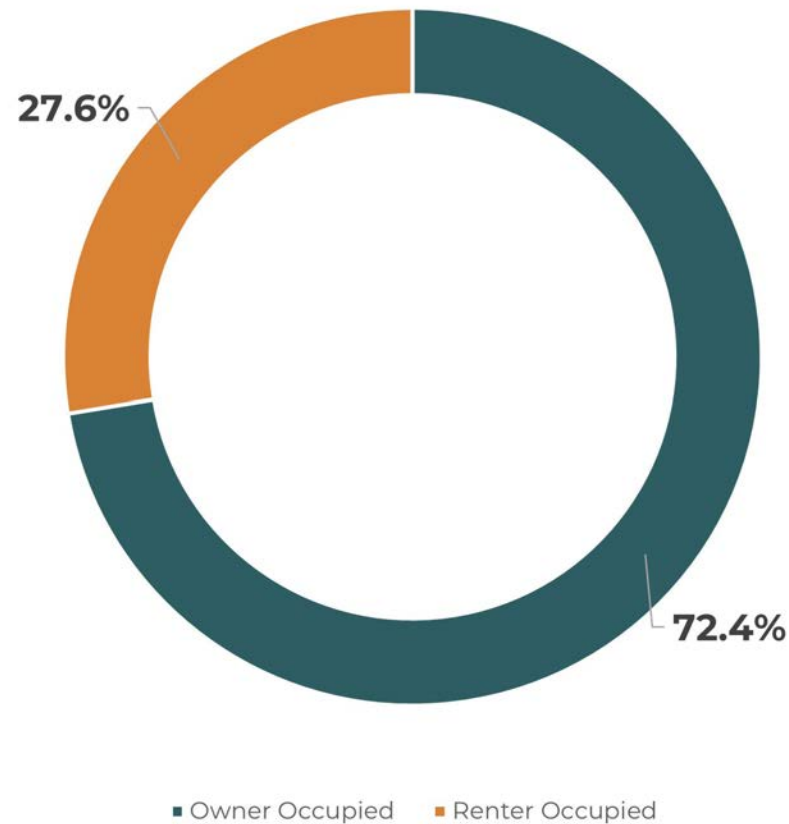


Figure 16: Housing Tenure (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

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Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Household Income

Household Income by Bracket

Figure 17 shows household income by bracket for Cherokee County. Over half of the households in Cherokee County are earning over \$50,000. The two largest income brackets include the \$50,000 to \$74,000 (20%) and \$100,000 to \$149,000 (16.2%) brackets.

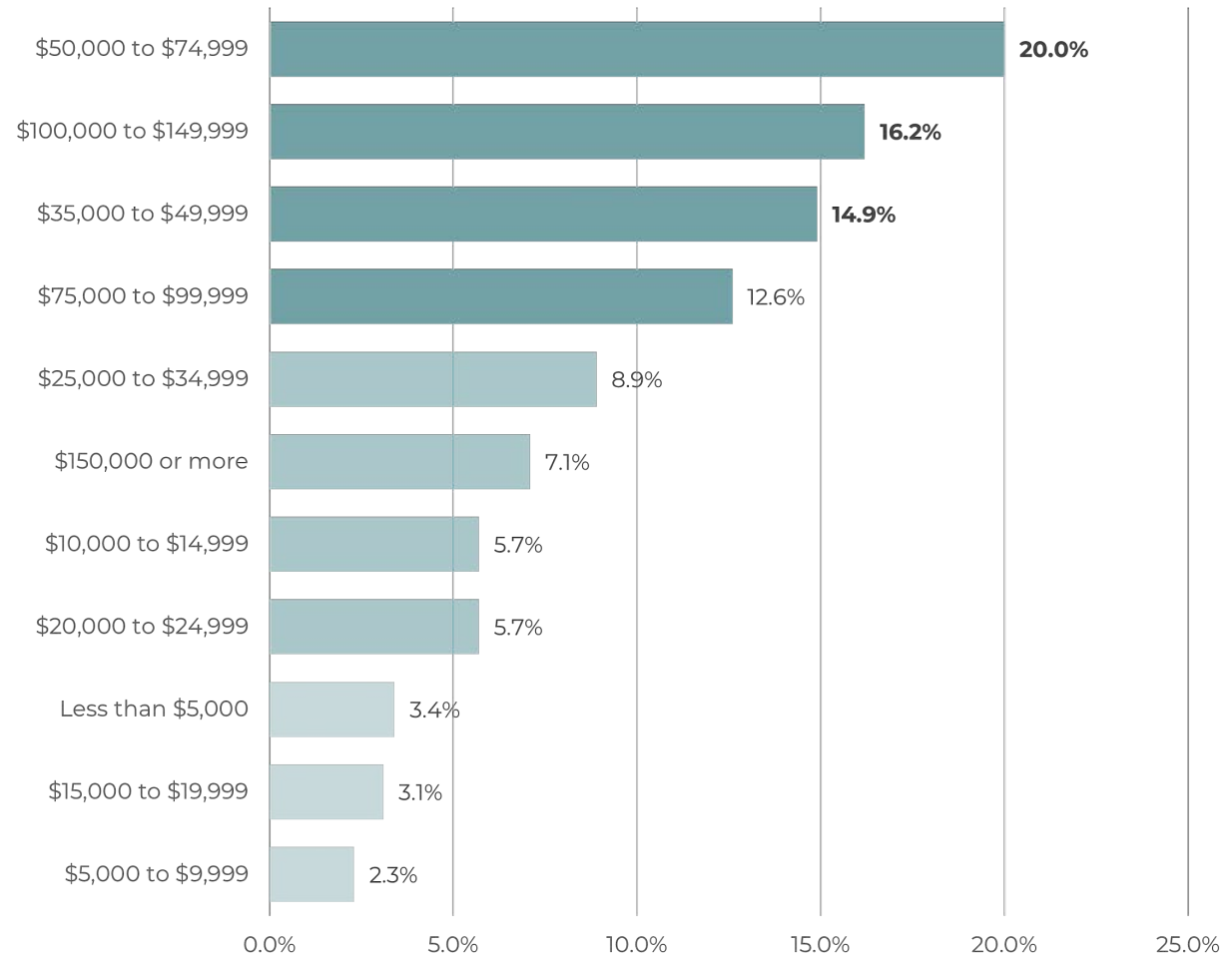


Figure 17: Household Income by Bracket (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Household Income by Earning Bracket Comparison

Figure 18 shows a household income comparison between Cherokee County, Baxter Springs, Columbus, and Galena. Baxter Springs has the most amount of people in the higher income brackets, compared to the other cities and the County.



Figure 18: Household Income by Earning Bracket Comparison (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Median Household Income Comparison

Figure 19 shows the median household incomes of Cherokee County, Baxter Springs, Columbus, and Galena. The median household income in Cherokee County is \$58,274. Baxter Springs has the highest median income at \$60,139.

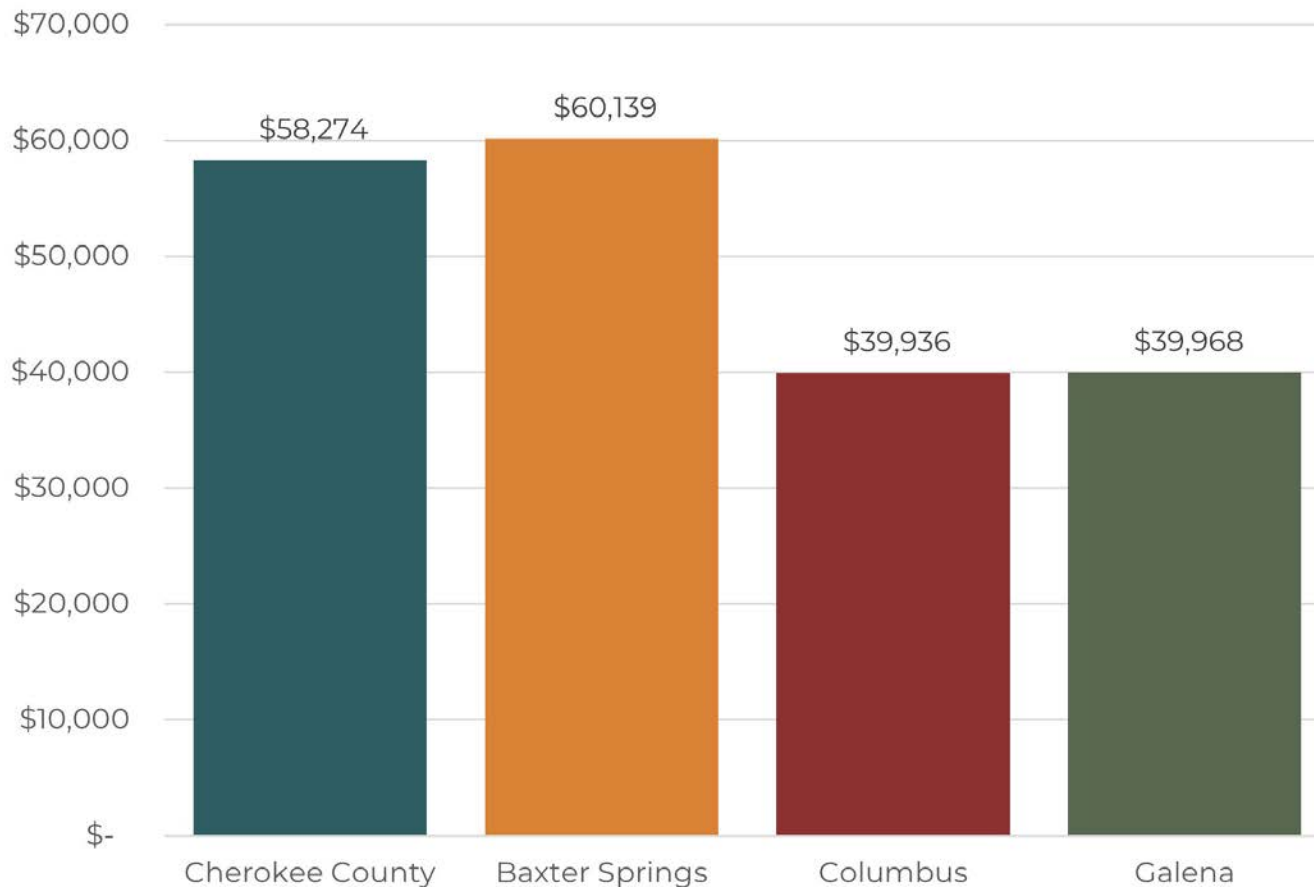


Figure 19: Median Household Income Comparison (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

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Household Income by Tenure

Figure 20 shows household income by tenure in Cherokee County. Homeowners are the highest earners of over \$75,000. The median household income in Cherokee County is \$58,274. The median homeowner household income is \$71,048, while the median renter household income is \$35,701.

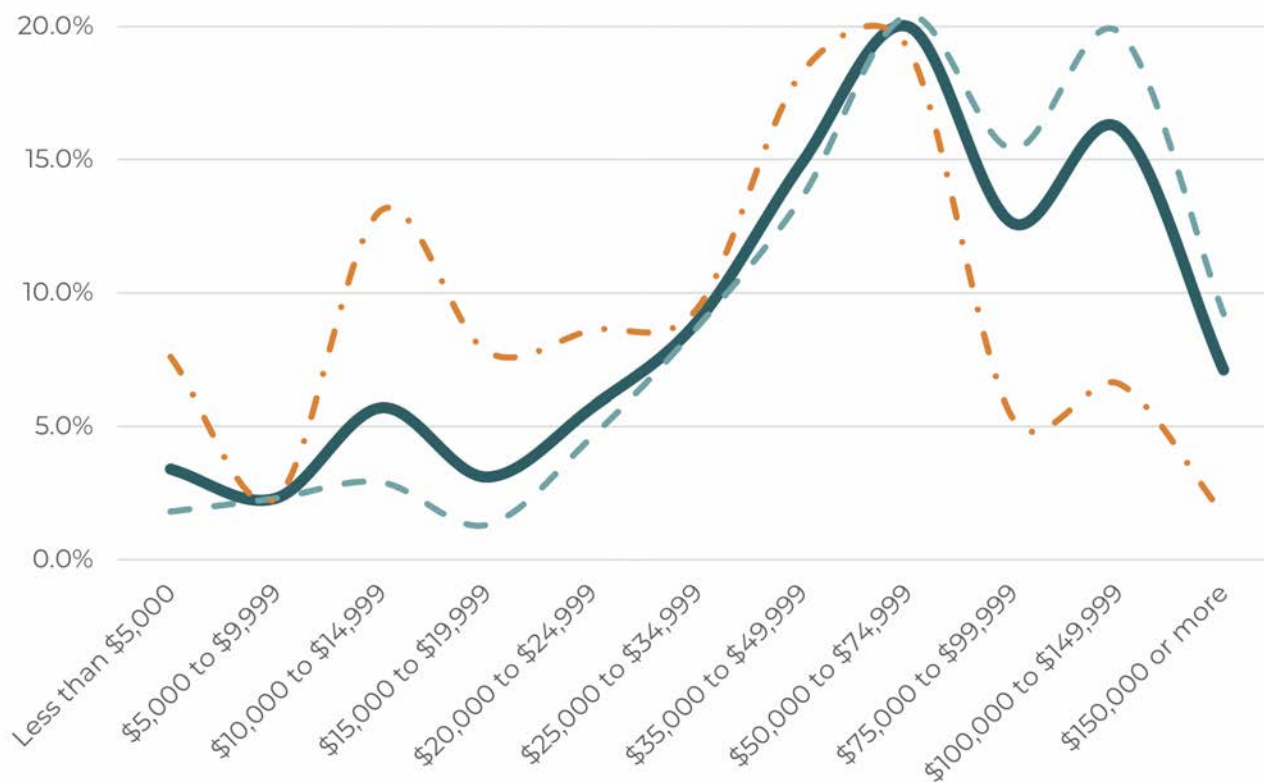


Figure 20: Household Income by Tenure (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Educational Attainment

Figure 21 displays educational attainment data in Cherokee County. Educational attainment data is gathered for the population ages 25 and older. There is high educational attainment in Cherokee County, with almost all residents having obtained a high school diploma or higher (90.9%). 20.1% of the County's population has received a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

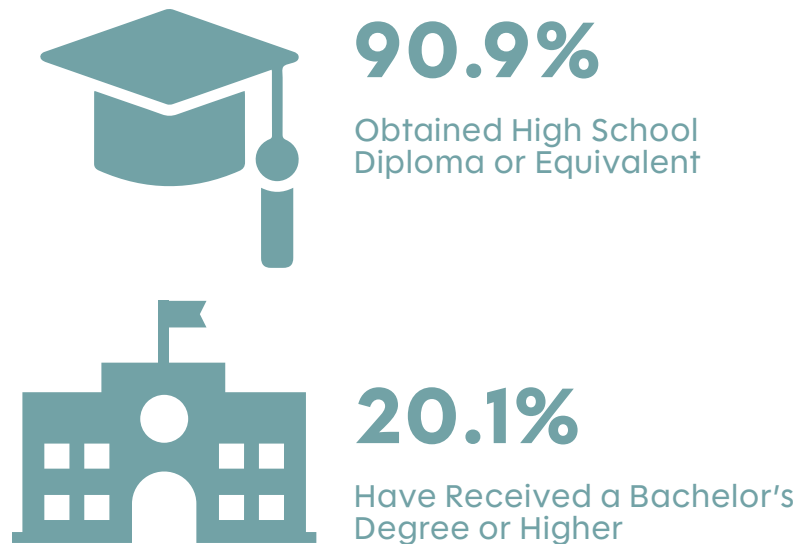


Figure 21: Educational Attainment (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

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Median Earnings by Educational Attainment

Figure 22 shows the median earnings by educational attainment for Cherokee County, Baxter Springs, Columbus, and Galena. The average overall earning for the population over the age of 25 in Cherokee County is \$39,601. Typically, median earnings increase with higher levels of education. Cherokee County follows this trend.

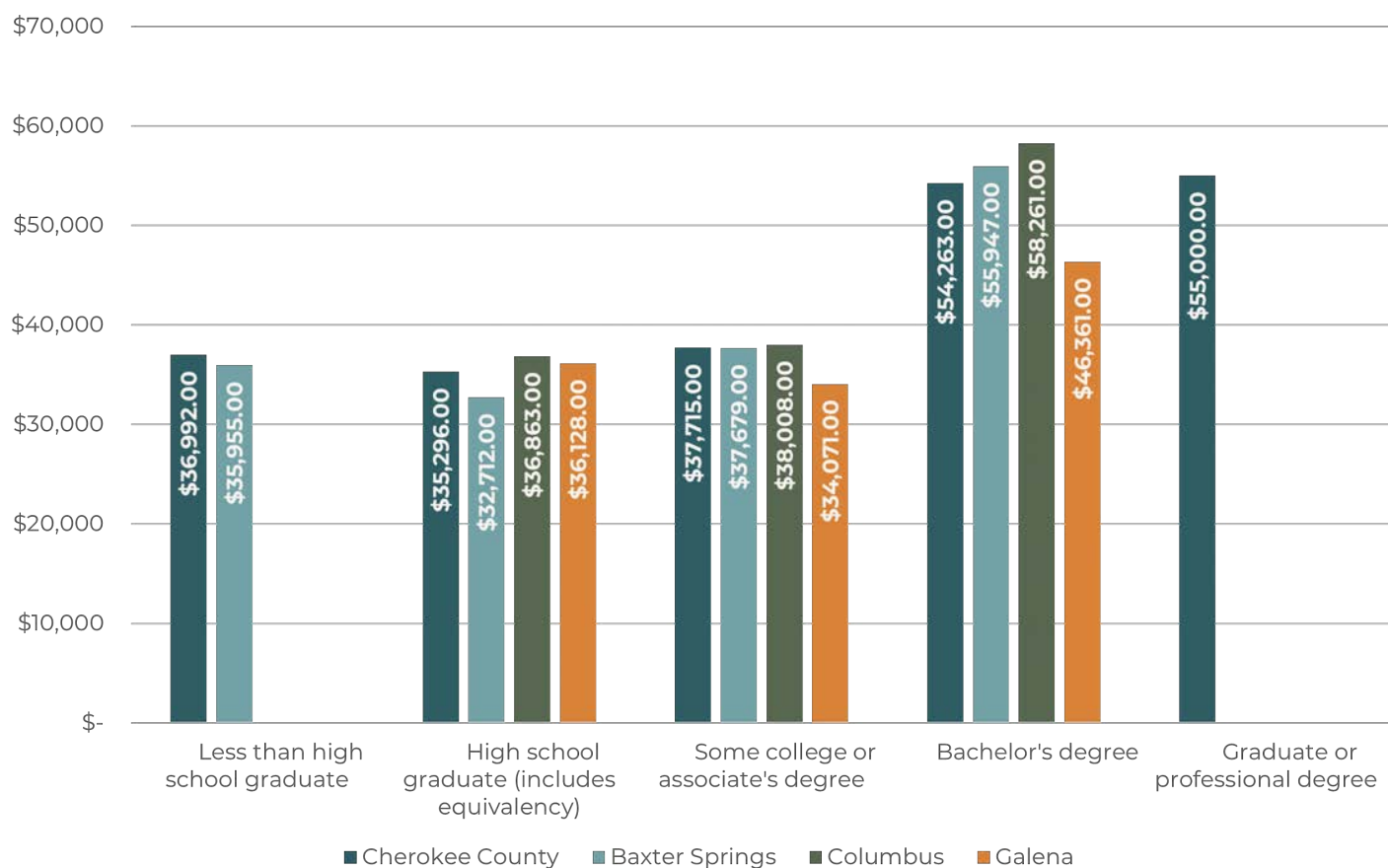


Figure 22: Median Earnings by Educational Attainment for the Last 12 Months (2023)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Housing Overview

Units in Structure

Figure 23 breaks down the types of residential densities in Cherokee County. Over 80% of housing is single-family detached homes. About 7% is single-family attached homes (townhomes, rowhouses, duplexes, bi-attached). About 10.5% of housing is part of multi-family developments (apartments, condominiums).

Figure 24 displays residential land uses in unincorporated Cherokee County.

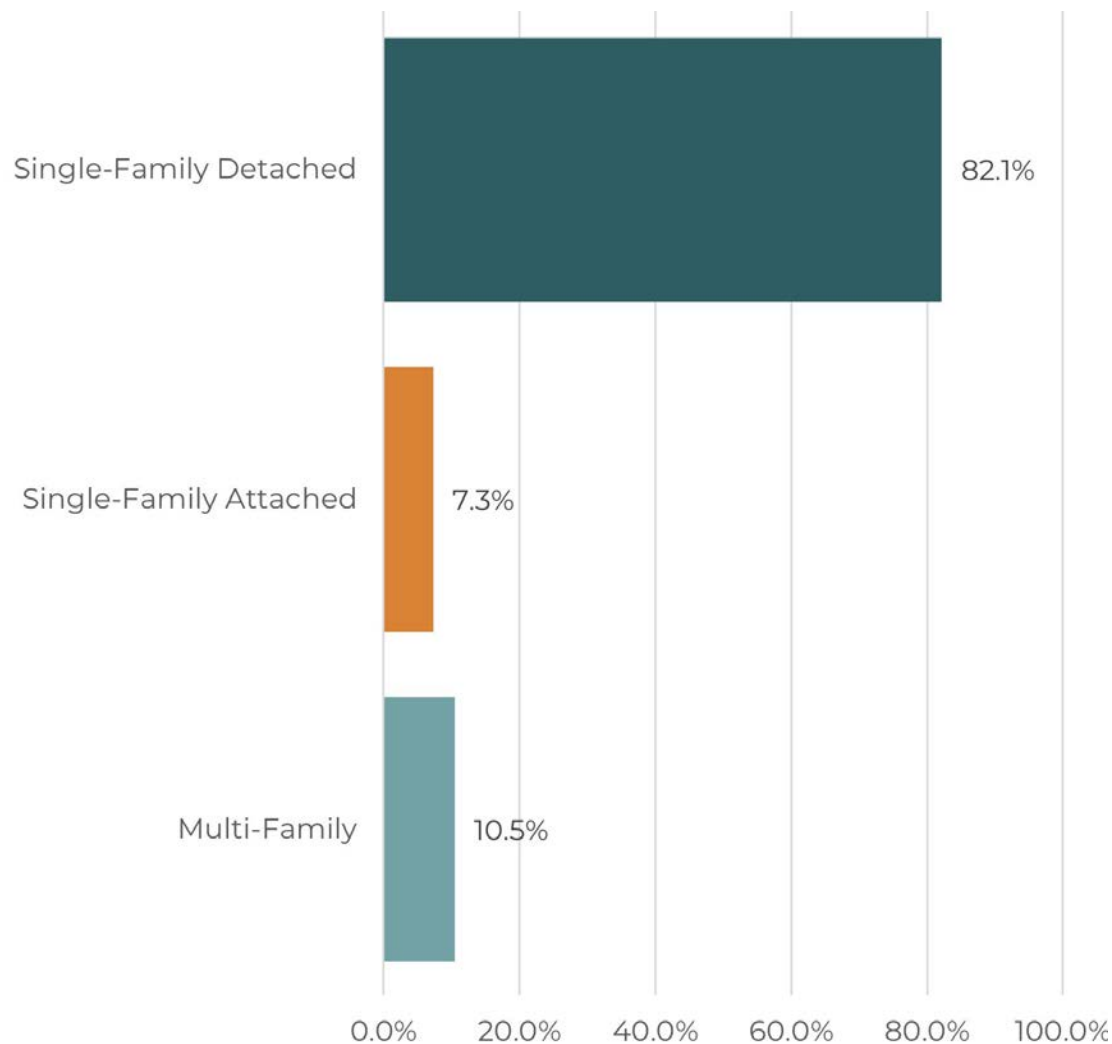


Figure 23: Units in Structure (2023)

Source: Confluence, with inputs from Cherokee County

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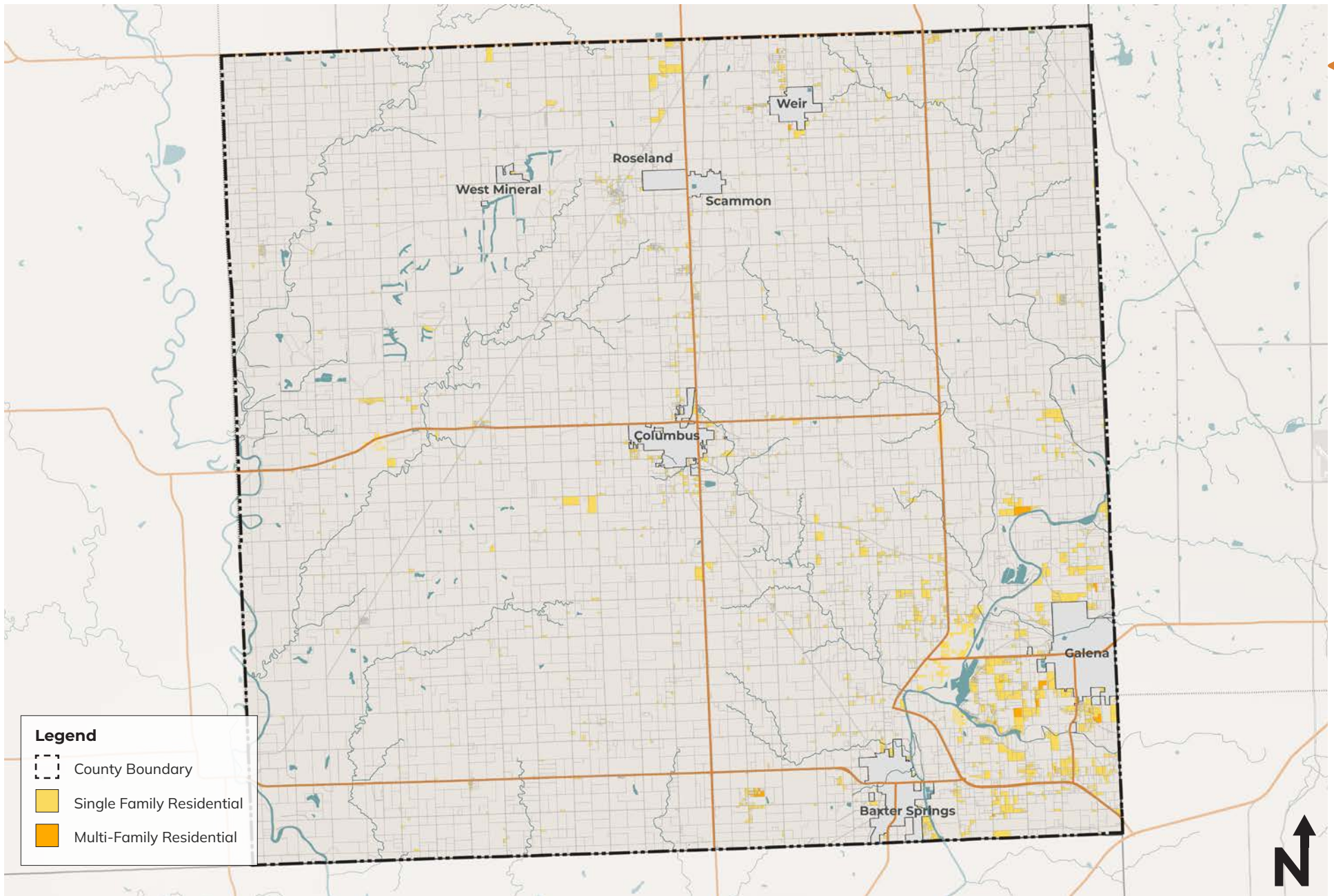


Figure 24: Housing Overview

Source: Confluence, with inputs from Cherokee County





Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Year Structure Built

Figure 25 displays housing in Cherokee County by year built. Over 66.9% of Cherokee County housing was built prior to the 1980s.

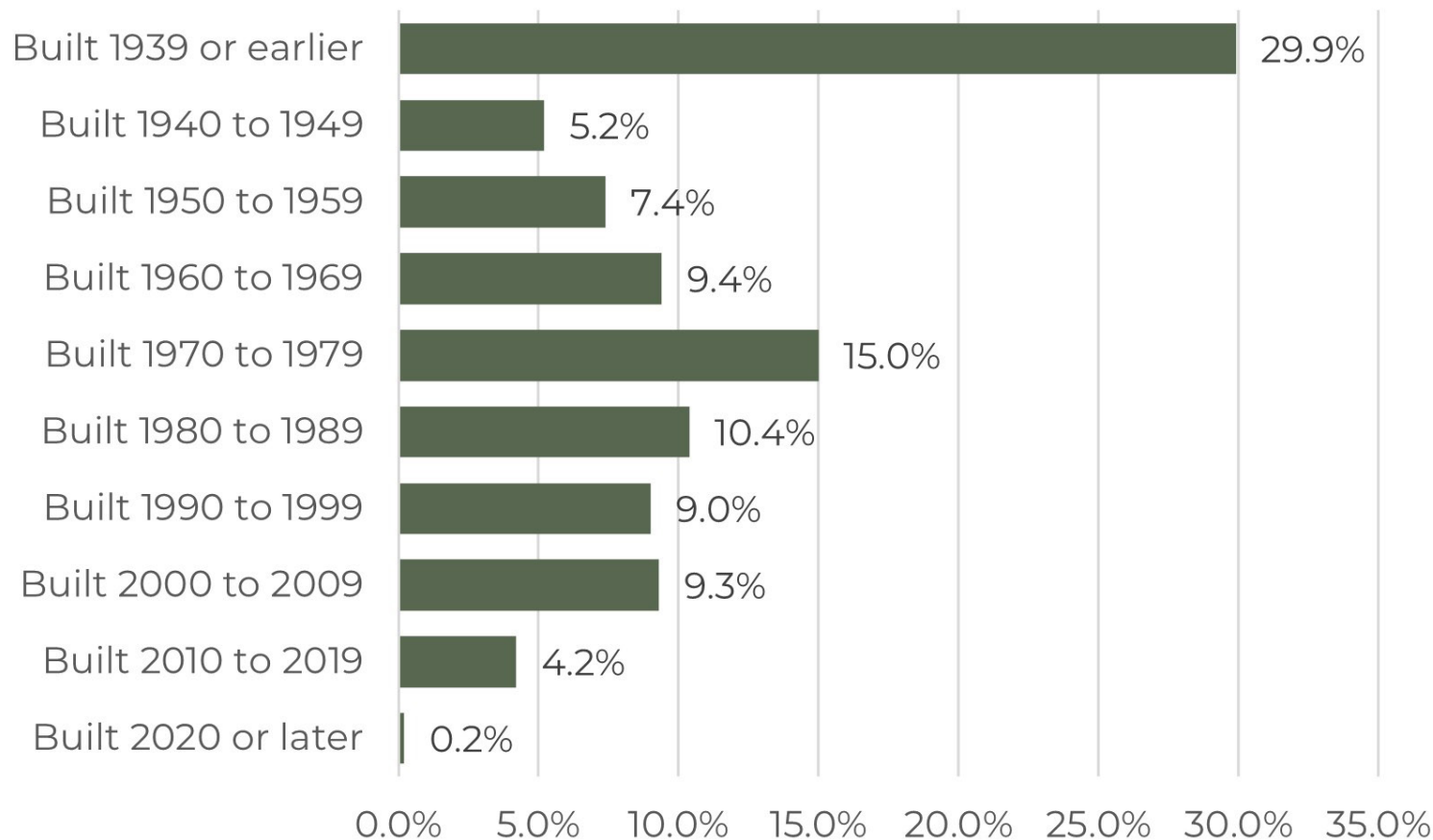


Figure 25: Year Structure Built (2023)

Source: Confluence, with inputs from Cherokee County

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Owner-Occupied Home Values

Figure 26 showcases the distribution of home values for owner-occupied housing in Cherokee County. The median owner-occupied home value is \$99,400. \$9.7% of homes are valued above \$100,000.

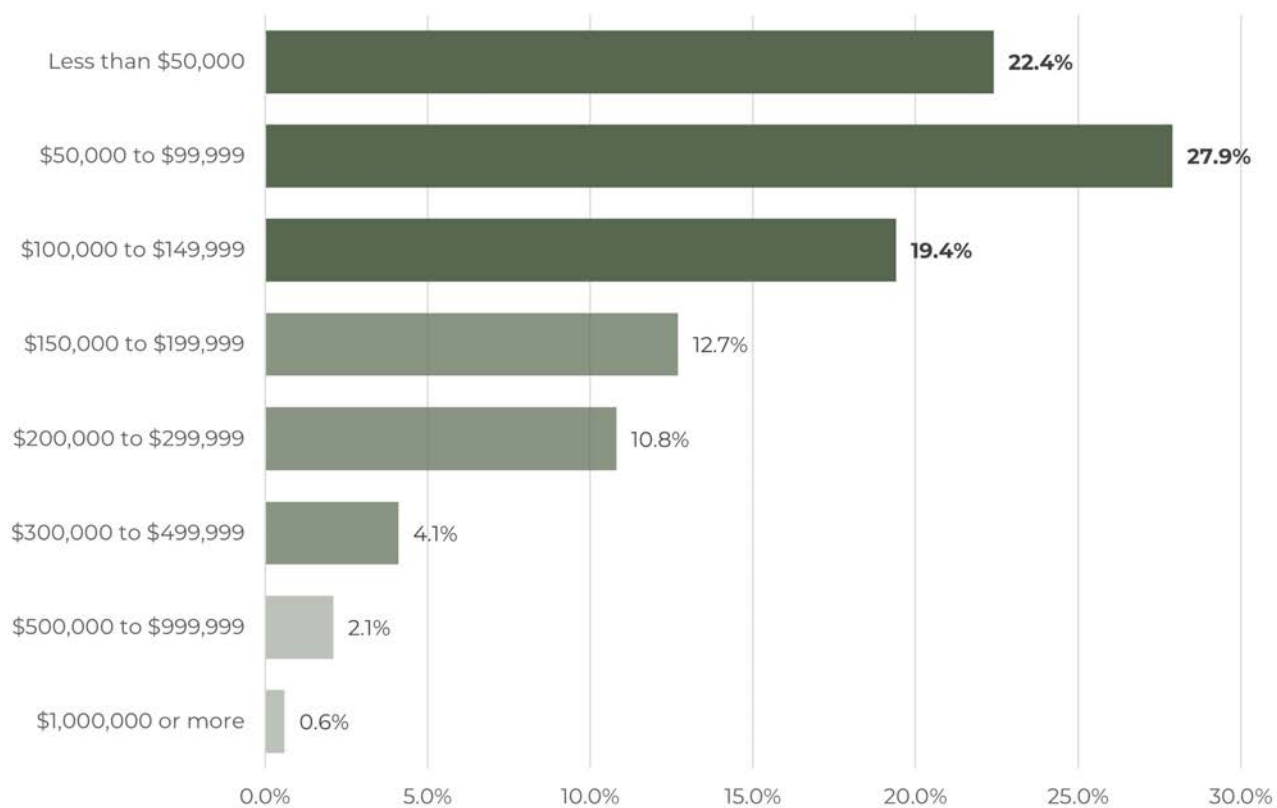


Figure 26: Owner-Occupied Home Values (2023)

Source: Confluence, with inputs from Cherokee County

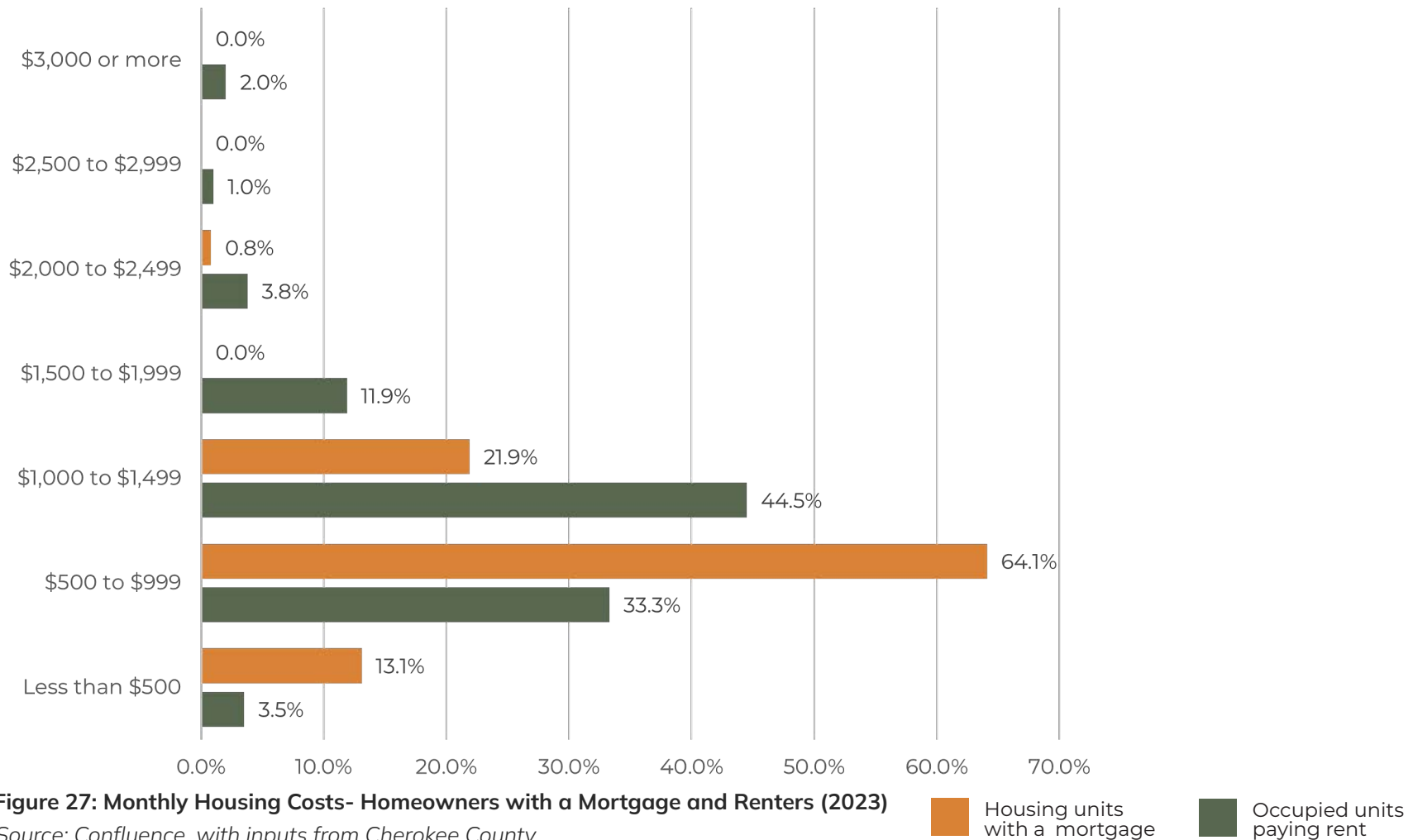


Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Monthly Housing Costs

Figure 27 displays the median monthly costs for homeowners with a mortgage and renters in Cherokee County. The median monthly cost for homeowners with a mortgage \$1,109. The median gross rent for renters in Cherokee County is \$483.



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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Housing Cost Burden

Figure 28 shows what percent of households are cost-burdened in Cherokee County, for housing units that pay rent and housing units with a mortgage. The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines cost-burdened households as those spending 30% or more of monthly income on housing costs, including rent/mortgage and utilities. 23.6% of homeowners with a mortgage in Cherokee County are considered cost-burdened. This is lower than the national rate (27.6%) and about the same as the Kansas rate (23.1%). 43.2% of renters in Cherokee County are considered cost-burdened. This is lower than the national rate (50.4%) and about the same as the Kansas rate (43.4%).

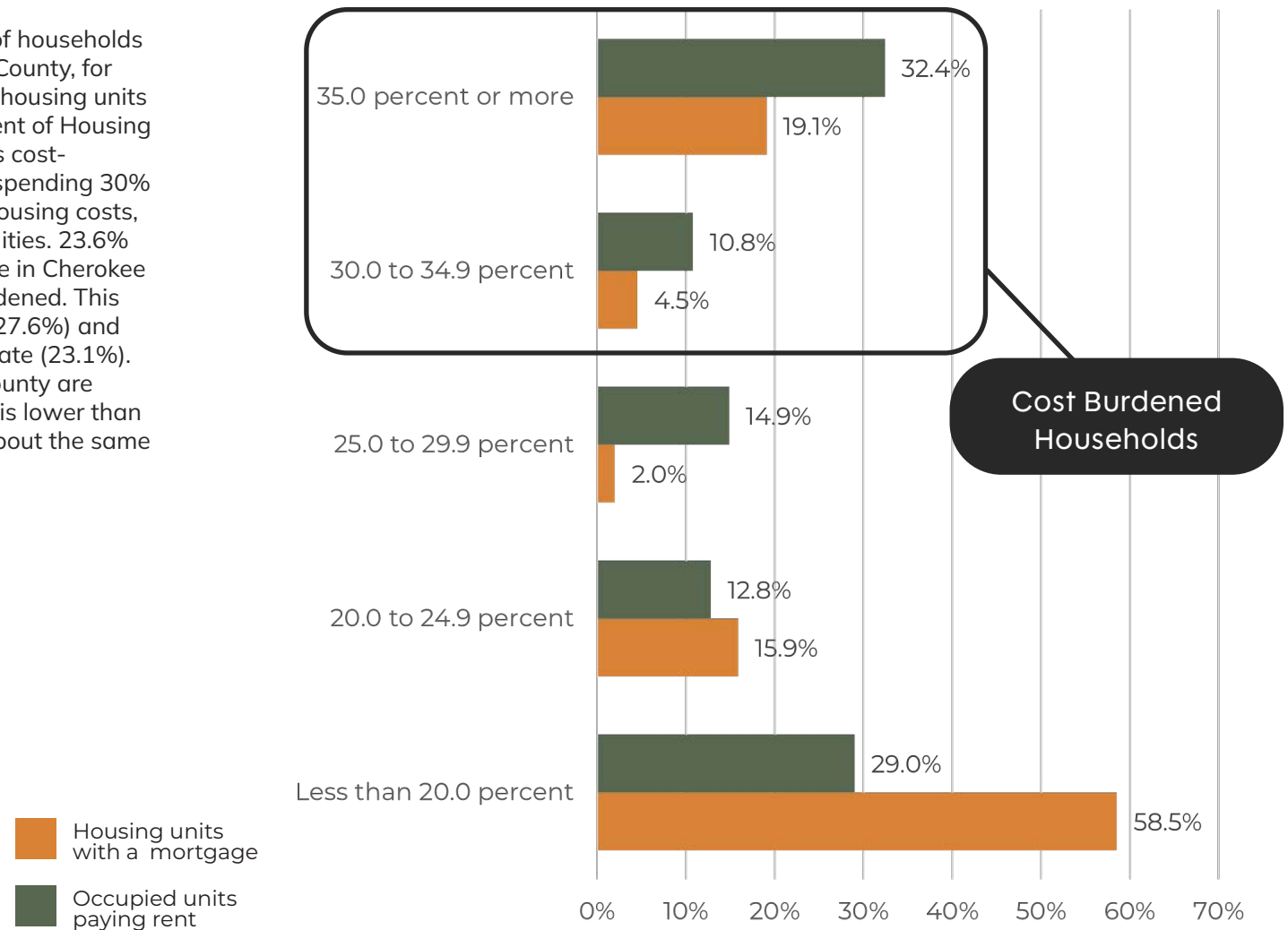


Figure 28: Housing Cost Burden - Homeowners with a Mortgage and Renters (2023)

Source: Confluence, with inputs from Cherokee County

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Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Employment

Total Jobs in Cherokee County

Figure 29 is a map that highlights where people are employed in Cherokee County. Most people work in the incorporated areas of the County, while there are some hotspots in the unincorporated areas.

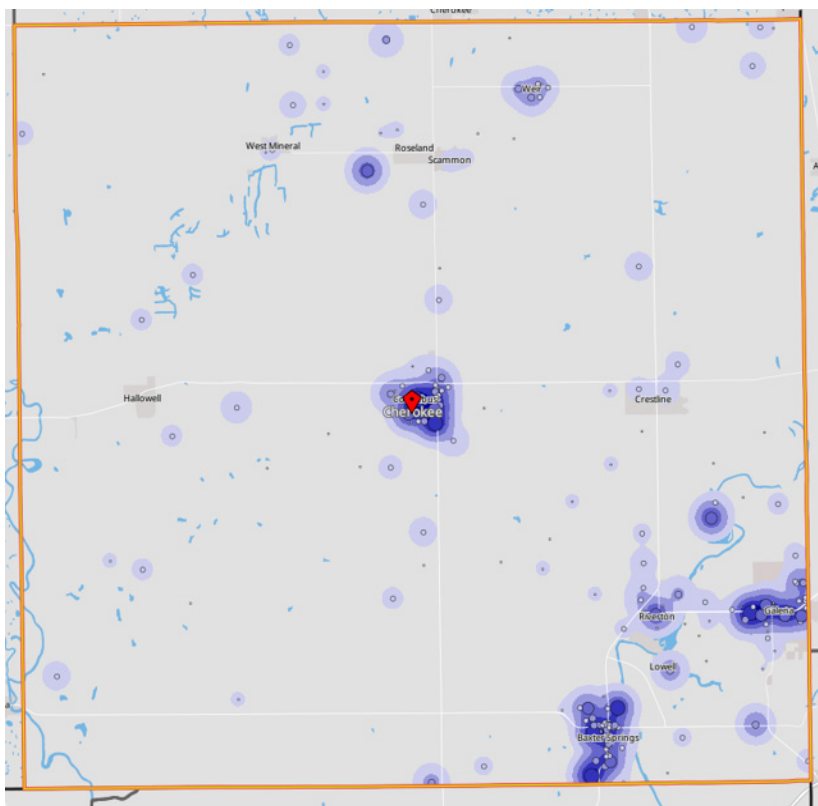


Figure 29: Map of Total Jobs in Cherokee County

Source: U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap LEHD 2022 Estimates

Employment for Cherokee County Residents

Figure 30 highlights where Cherokee County residents are employed. Pittsburg and Joplin are the two highest destinations for job centers outside of Cherokee County. There are some residents that commute as far north as Fort Scott, Humboldt, and Iola and as far west as Independence, Coffeyville, and Parsons.

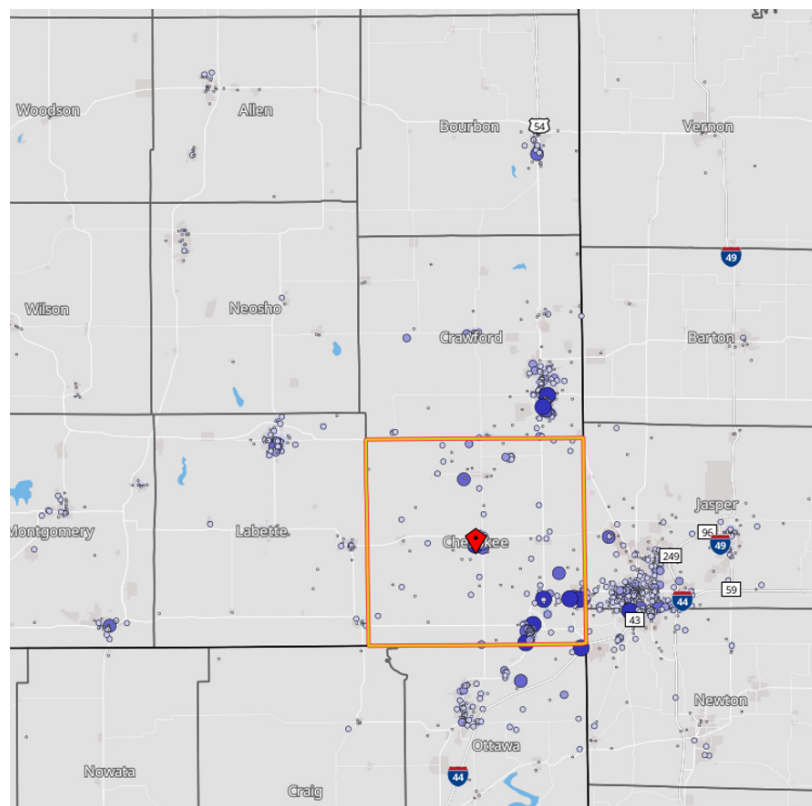


Figure 30: Map of Employment for Cherokee County Residents

Source: U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap LEHD 2022 Estimates

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Commuting Trends

There are 5,512 total estimated jobs in Cherokee County. Cherokee County attracts 2,918 workers into the County. Over 2,594 people both live and work in the County. On any given day, the County may contain a population of over 16,000 including residents and workers.



Figure 31: Commuting Trends - Cherokee County (2022)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap LEHD 2022 Estimates



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Top Industries

Figure 32 displays the top 10 industries in Cherokee County. As of 2022, the largest industries in Cherokee County include Manufacturing (31.1%), Educational Services (13.1%), and Health Care and Social Assistance (9.2%).

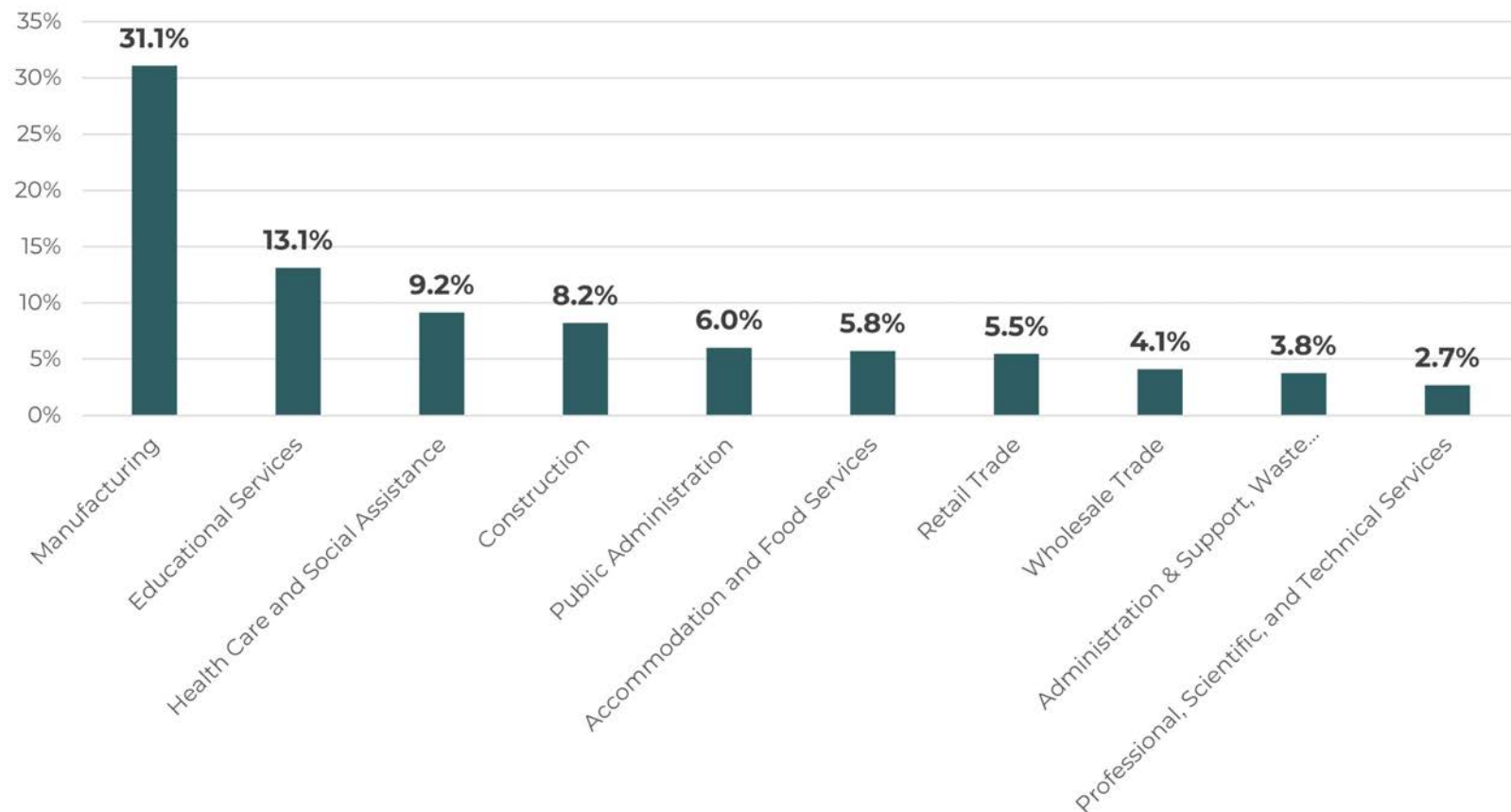


Figure 32: Top 10 Industries in Cherokee County (2022)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap LEHD 2022 Estimates

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Job Change in Top Industries

Figure 33 displays job change for the top 10 industries in Cherokee County from 2002 to 2022. There has been an increase in Manufacturing and Construction jobs in recent years. There has been a decline in Health Care and Social Assistance jobs.

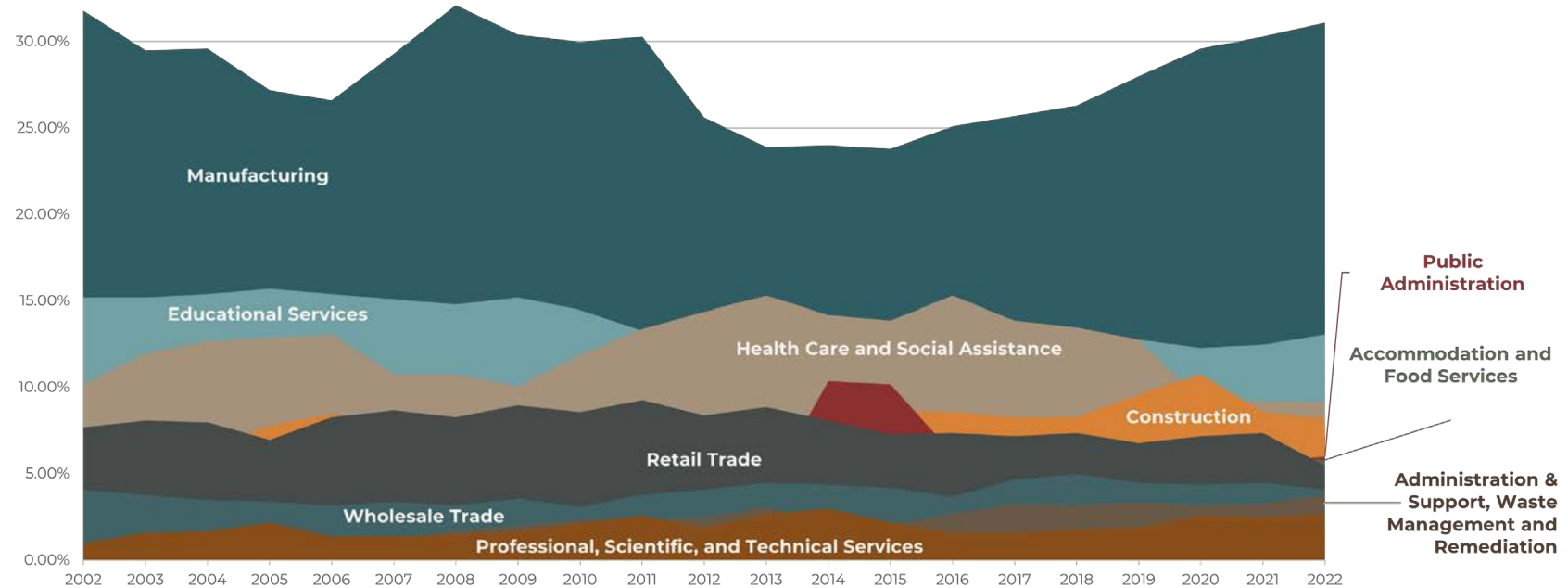


Figure 33: Job Change in Top 10 Industries 2002-2022

Source: U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap LEHD 2022 Estimates



Chapter 2

Existing Conditions Report

Location Quotient

Figure 34 shows location quotients of the top industries in Cherokee County. Location Quotient (LQ) is a way to evaluate in what industries an area has a competitive advantage or specialization. The analysis compares the share of total jobs in an industry within a smaller geographic area to that of the United States' share of the same industry. An LQ higher than 1.0 indicates a competitive advantage or specialization and a number less than 1.0 indicates the industry may not be as strong in this area. Industries with high location quotients and employment numbers are what define the local economy. Manufacturing (2.61) remains a competitive industry in Cherokee County despite decline in total jobs. Construction (1.70), Educational Services (1.30), and Public Administration (1.17) are also competitive. Each industry is also labeled with its percentage growth/loss from 2002 to 2022.

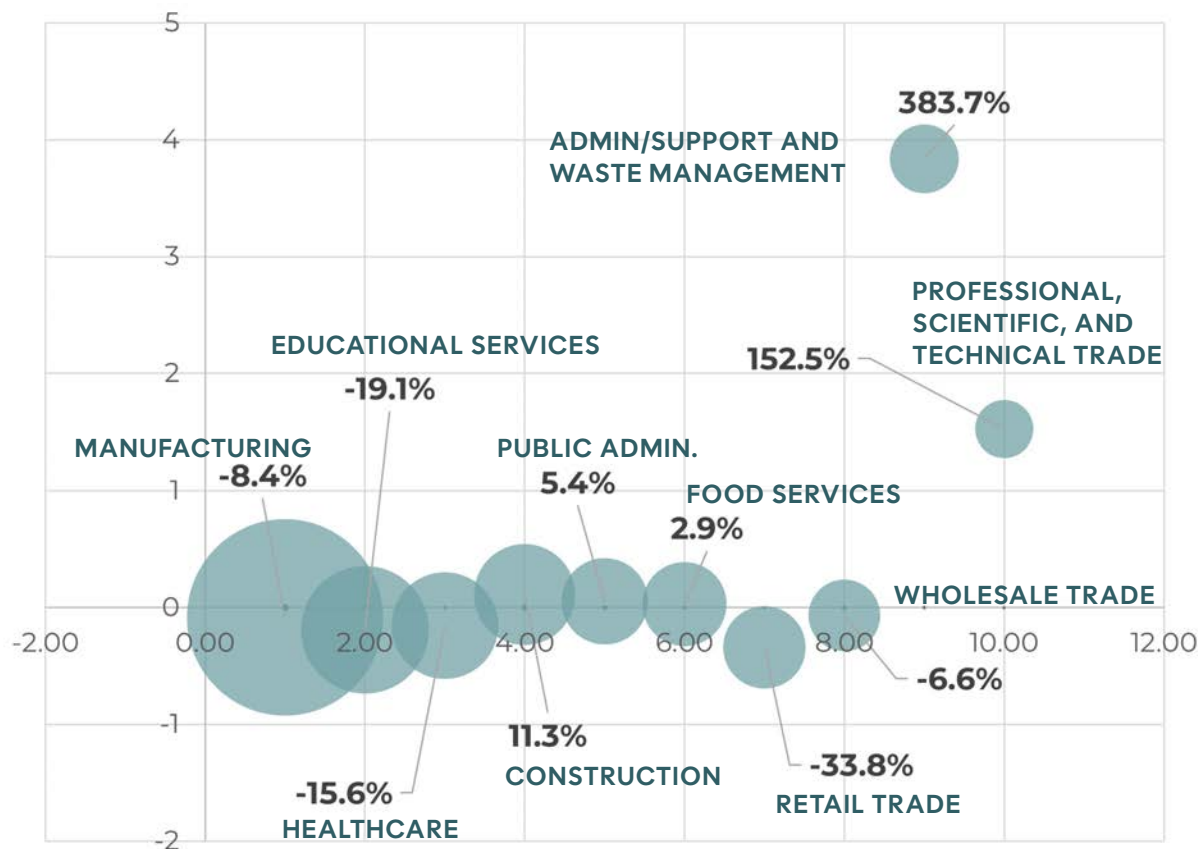


Figure 34: Location Quotient - Cherokee County (2022)

Source: Confluence, with inputs from U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap LEHD 2022 Estimates

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Total Industry Job Gain/Loss

Figure 35 shows total industry job gain and loss between 2002 and 2022 for industries in Cherokee County. Administration and Waste Management has had the largest gain in jobs (+165). Educational Services has had the largest loss (-171).



Figure 35: Total Industry Job Gain/Loss (2002-2022)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap LEHD 2022 Estimates



Chapter 3

Public Input Summary

Overview

Gathering and analyzing public input is a critical component of the comprehensive planning process. Public engagement helps establish a shared vision for the future that reflects the values, priorities, and concerns of Cherokee County community members and stakeholders.

This chapter summarizes feedback collected through public workshops, stakeholder interviews, and online engagement tools. The findings presented in this chapter inform the goals, policies, and strategies that will guide development and decision-making throughout the Comprehensive Plan.

About the Engagement Process

Multiple engagement methods were used to gather input from community members across Cherokee County. These methods included in-person public workshops, one-on-one stakeholder interviews, an online interactive engagement website, and targeted outreach and marketing efforts.

The engagement process is summarized in this chapter, including engagement activities and key themes developed.

Marketing Strategies

Raising awareness of the comprehensive planning process was essential to encourage participation from across Cherokee County. Multiple marketing strategies were used during the public input phase, including QR code handouts, social media posts, an interactive engagement website, word-of-mouth outreach, and in-person public workshops.



Figure 36: Public Workshop Engagement

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Engagement Methods

Interactive Engagement Website

To assist in gathering of public input, an interactive engagement website was built. This website helped community members access project information, provide feedback, and find engagement activities. The website also had virtual activities community members could take part in. This method, in addition to in-person meetings, allowed community members the opportunity to engage with material, access information, and voice feedback that helps shape the comprehensive planning process.



Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder input was gathered throughout October 2025 through a series of virtual conversations with individuals and organizations in Cherokee County. Participants represented a broad cross-section of community members, including agricultural interests, county leadership, development professionals, business owners, and other community stakeholders. Outreach was conducted to 46 stakeholders in total. Insights from these discussions were organized into overarching topic areas, such as opportunities, challenges, emerging ideas, and zoning considerations.



Public Input Workshop Series

Public Input Workshops are a great way to receive direct feedback with community members and help to understand the community from a local perspective. Three Public Input Workshops were held in October 2025 at various locations throughout Cherokee County to give residents access to these in-person meetings. These meetings provided community members with an understanding of comprehensive planning, the opportunity to share feedback, participate in interactive activities, and discuss priorities related to the County's future growth and development.



Public Open House Series

A Public Open House Series was held during the week of March 16, 2026. This series gave community members an opportunity to review the draft comprehensive plan and provide input. Goals and strategies were available for review where attendees could rank priority levels for implementation. After the Public Open House Series, feedback was analyzed and appropriate adjustments were made to the draft comprehensive plan.





Chapter 3

Public Input Summary Report

Interactive Engagement Website

An online interactive engagement website was used to provide an additional opportunity for community members to share feedback. The website launched on October 27th 2025, and received 700 views from 248 visitors. A total of 76 unique contributors submitted 95 comments related to future land use and development. The platform included the idea wall, mapping activities, visioning questions, and a survey allowing participants to provide both location-based and specific feedback.



726 Views



430 Visits



256 Visitors



95 Contributions



76 Contributors

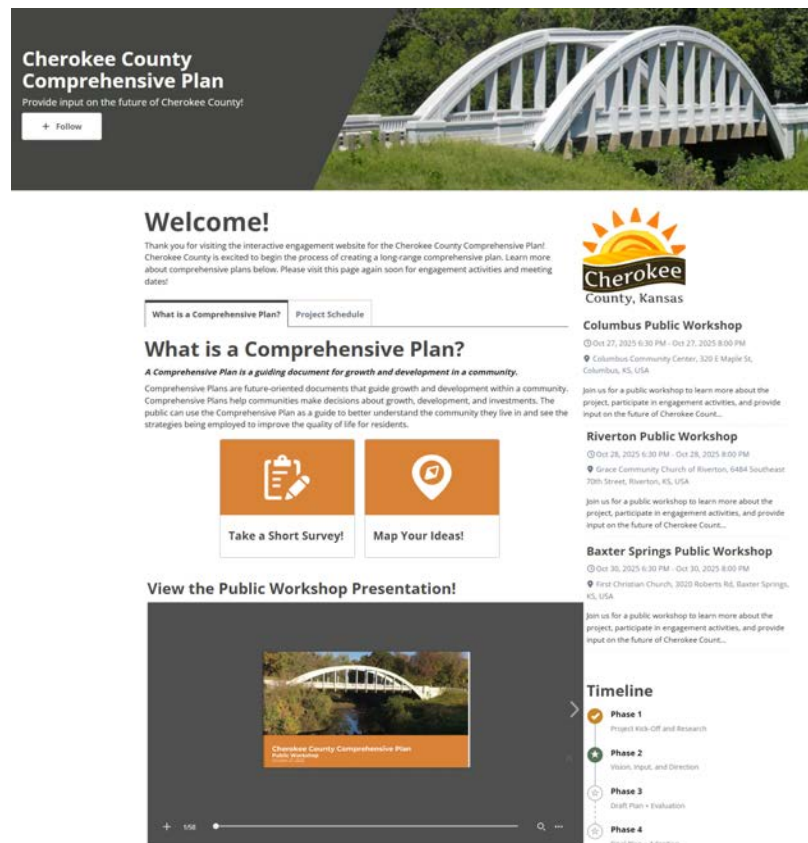


Figure 37: Interactive Engagement Website

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Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews were conducted in October 2025 as virtual one-on-one conversations with individuals and organizations actively involved in Cherokee County.

Stakeholders included community members, farmers, county officials, developers, business owners, and other key partners. A total of 46 individuals were contacted for interviews. Feedback from these interviews was organized into key topic areas including opportunities, concerns, ideas, and zoning considerations.

Stakeholder Interview Themes

Opportunities

Stakeholders identified several opportunities for Cherokee County, especially its location advantage. Cherokee County is located within approximately 30 minutes of the Joplin metropolitan area. Additionally, the County was frequently described as a desirable place to live and raise a family. Tourism was also noted as a key opportunity, particularly relating to hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation.

Concerns

Stakeholders expressed concerns related to regulations and zoning, tax rates, poverty and declining household incomes, and the loss of farmland and rural character. As Cherokee County grows, balancing development with the preservation of agricultural land and rural identity will be an important consideration for future planning efforts.

Ideas

Stakeholders shared a variety of ideas to support long-term community vitality. These included increased support for post-high school education opportunities, business incubation programs, and deep support for locally owned businesses. Additional ideas focused on regulating new mobile home parks, expanding tourism and marketing efforts, and improving or adding sports and recreational facilities.

Zoning Considerations

Feedback on zoning was mixed. Some stakeholders expressed support for zoning regulations, others opposed zoning, and some indicated conditional or situational support. Stakeholders also emphasized the need to address quarries, landfills, and other large-scale industrial uses to reduce impacts on surrounding properties while maintaining private property rights.



Chapter 3

Public Input Summary Report

Public Input Workshop Series

Three public workshops were held to help shape the recommendations within the Comprehensive Plan. Meeting locations were specifically selected to give community members from across the county opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas related to the future of Cherokee County. This Public Input Workshop series were hosted at the following locations:

- Public Workshop #1
 - October 27th, 2025
 - Columbus Community Center
 - Approximately 35 attendees
- Public Workshop #2
 - October 28th, 2025
 - Grace Community Church of Riverton
 - Approximately 35 attendees
- Public Workshop #3
 - October 30th, 2025
 - First Christian Church of Baxter Springs
 - Approximately 30 attendees

A variety of engagement tools were used during public workshops to gather actionable input. These activities included image voting, priority and preference ranking exercises, Mentimeter polling, and mapping activities. Results from these activities directly informed the development of the Comprehensive Plan.



Figure 38: Public Workshop Attendance

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Preference Scale Voting

Participants engaged in a preference scale voting exercise consisting of nine topics related to current and future conditions in Cherokee County. Topics included quality of life, utility-scale wind energy, utility-scale solar energy, growth and development, resiliency, economic development, housing options, sustainability, and community pride.

From the topics provided, sustainability, growth and development, and economic development received the highest preference rankings. These topics received ratings of 8.4, 8.0, and 7.4 out of 10 respectively. These topics being highest ranked could indicate that Cherokee County residents are interested in responsible economic growth and development, without giving away sacrificing character.

Community pride was ranked at 7.2, resiliency received a rank of 6.5, and quality of life was rated 5.6. While these topics are rated slightly lower than the high preferences, they still show deep community pride and an interest in improving Cherokee County through changes and development that will raise quality of life and general wellbeing.

Utility-scale wind, housing options, and utility-scale solar ranked lowest. These topics were ranked at 4.3, 3.9, and 3.4 out of 10 respectively. Community members were less inclined to vote in favor of solar and wind related items, oftentimes citing regulatory and visual concerns. Housing options were also ranked lower, indicating Cherokee County community members may be dissatisfied with the amount and quality of available housing at all income levels.

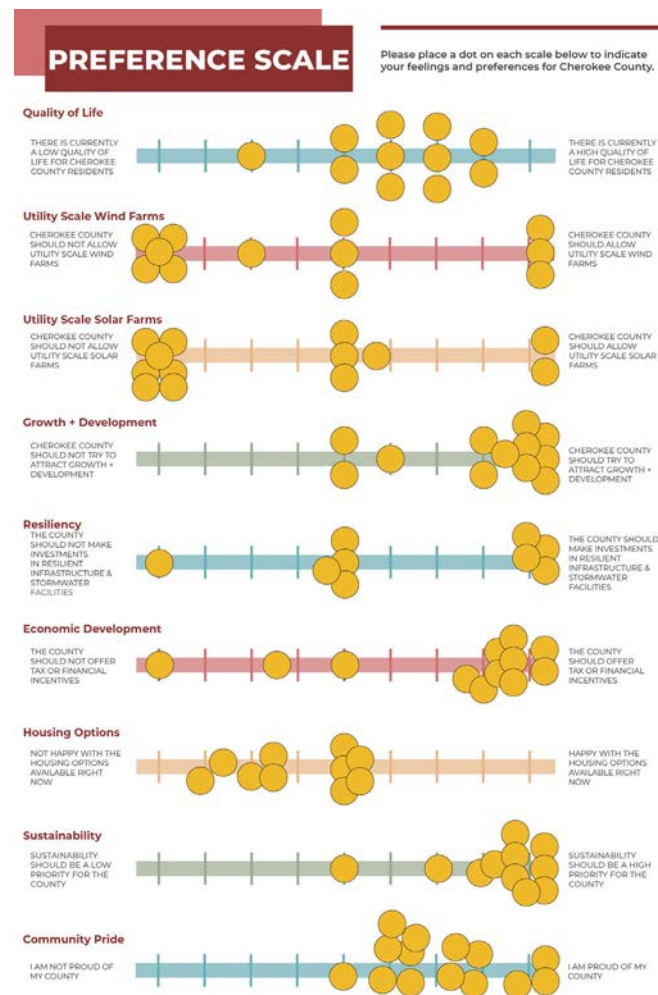


Figure 39: Preference Ranking Exercise



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Public Input Summary Report

Priority Ranking

The priority ranking activity asked community members to identify the most important development types, amenities, and programs for Cherokee County. In total, 28 responses were recorded and four categories were evaluated: housing, parks and trails, multi-modal transportation, and county programs.

- **Housing:** Entry-level single-family housing and senior housing were identified as high priorities.
- **Parks and Trails:** Community members emphasized improved maintenance of existing parks and facilities, as well as expanded trail access.
- **Multi-Modal Transportation:** Key priorities included enhanced pedestrian safety, conversion of abandoned rail corridors into regional recreational trails, and on-demand bus services.
- **County Programs:** Participants expressed interest in expanded economic development incentive programs and home improvement funding options.



Figure 40: Priority Ranking Exercise

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Wind and Solar Preference

Community members provided feedback on wind and solar energy options, including utility-scale and accessory-scale installations. Utility-scale wind energy received an average score of 2.24 out of 5, while accessory wind scored 3.6 out of 5. Utility-scale solar received a score of 3.3 out of 5, compared to 3.5 out of 5 for accessory solar. Overall, feedback indicated a preference for small, accessory-scale energy systems over large-scale utility installations.

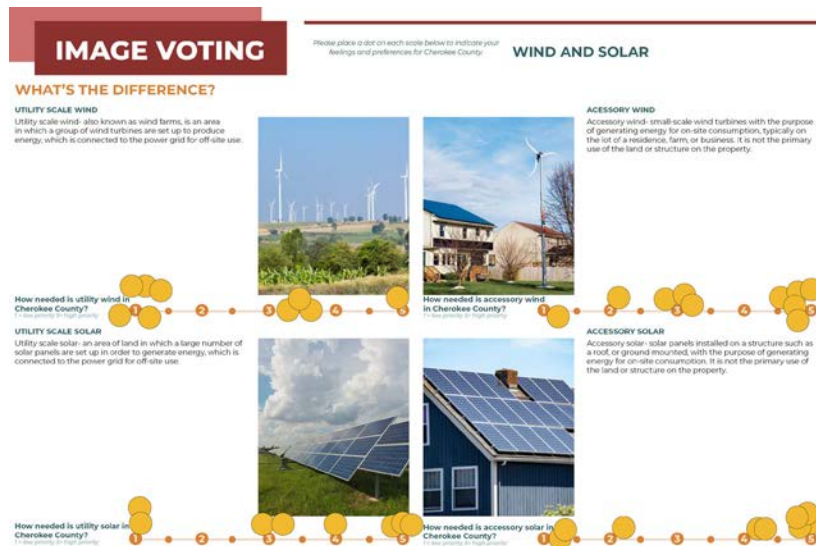


Figure 41: Wind and Solar Priority Ranking Exercise



Figure 42: Accessory Solar



Figure 43: Accessory Wind



Figure 44: Utility-Scale Solar



Figure 45: Utility-Scale Wind



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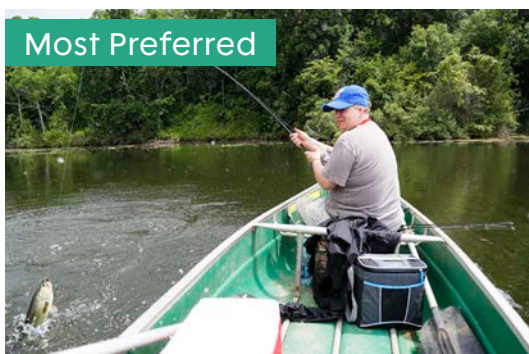
Public Input Summary Report

Image Voting

Community members participated in image voting exercises to identify preferred development patterns and amenities. Image categories included parks and recreation amenities and commercial development types.

Parks and Recreation

Parks and recreation was identified as an area of preference for Cherokee County. The highest rated preferences were wildlife tourism, nature/wild parks, and picnic shelters. The lowest preferences involved trails, large open space, and prairie preserves.



Wildlife Tourism



Nature/Wild Park



Picnic Shelter



Trails



Large Open Space



Prairie Preserves

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Commercial Development

Commercial development was also identified as an area of preference. The highest rated preferences were small scale commercial development, neighborhood commercial developments, and industrial - manufacturing developments.

The lowest preferences included industrial developments with outdoor storage, industrial developments with no outdoor storage, and industrial - large business park development.



Most Preferred

Small Scale Commercial



Neighborhood Commercial



Industrial - Manufacturing/Distribution



Least Preferred

Industrial - with Outdoor Storage



Industrial - no Outdoor Storage



Industrial - Large Business Park



Chapter 3

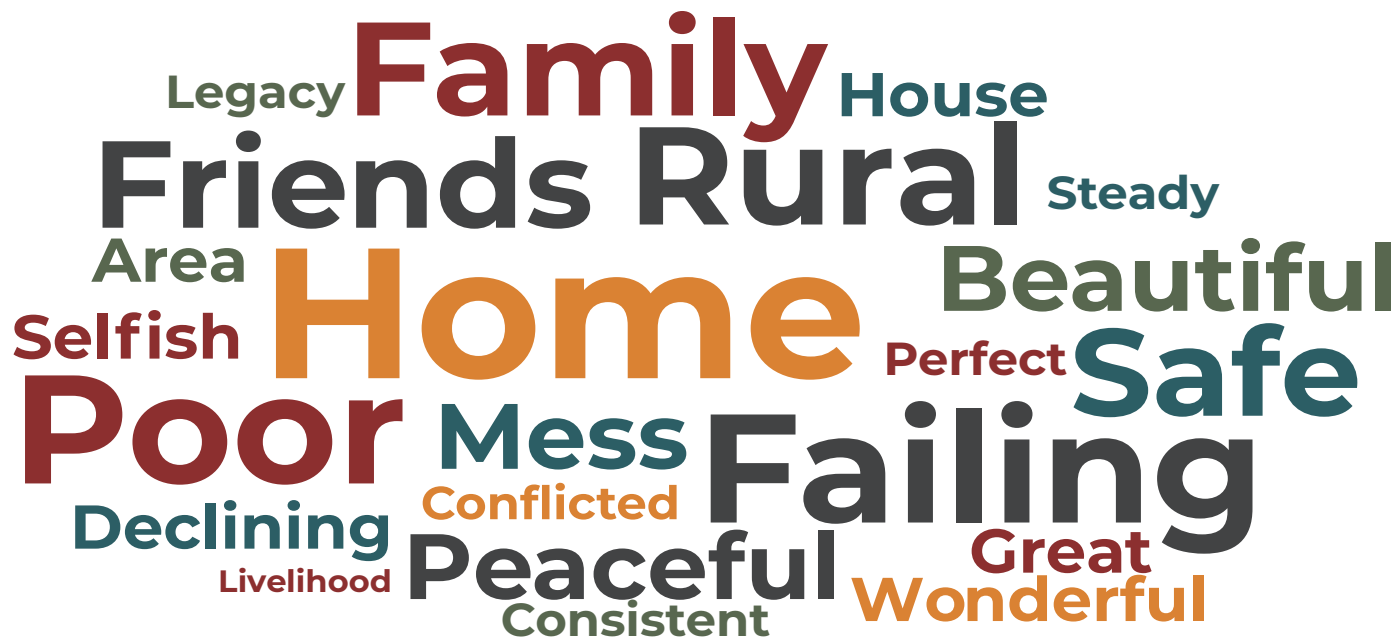
Public Input Summary Report

Mentimeter Results

During every public workshop, an online survey was utilized to visualize results for community members. Mentimeter polling asked 10 questions of attendees, including current feelings about Cherokee County and discussing topics related to wind and solar installations. Results from these exercises are summarized below.

What is one word to describe Cherokee County today?

The most commonly submitted words included home, rural, family, poor, failing, and safe. This seems to show community pride while understanding that future improvements in development and safety are needed.



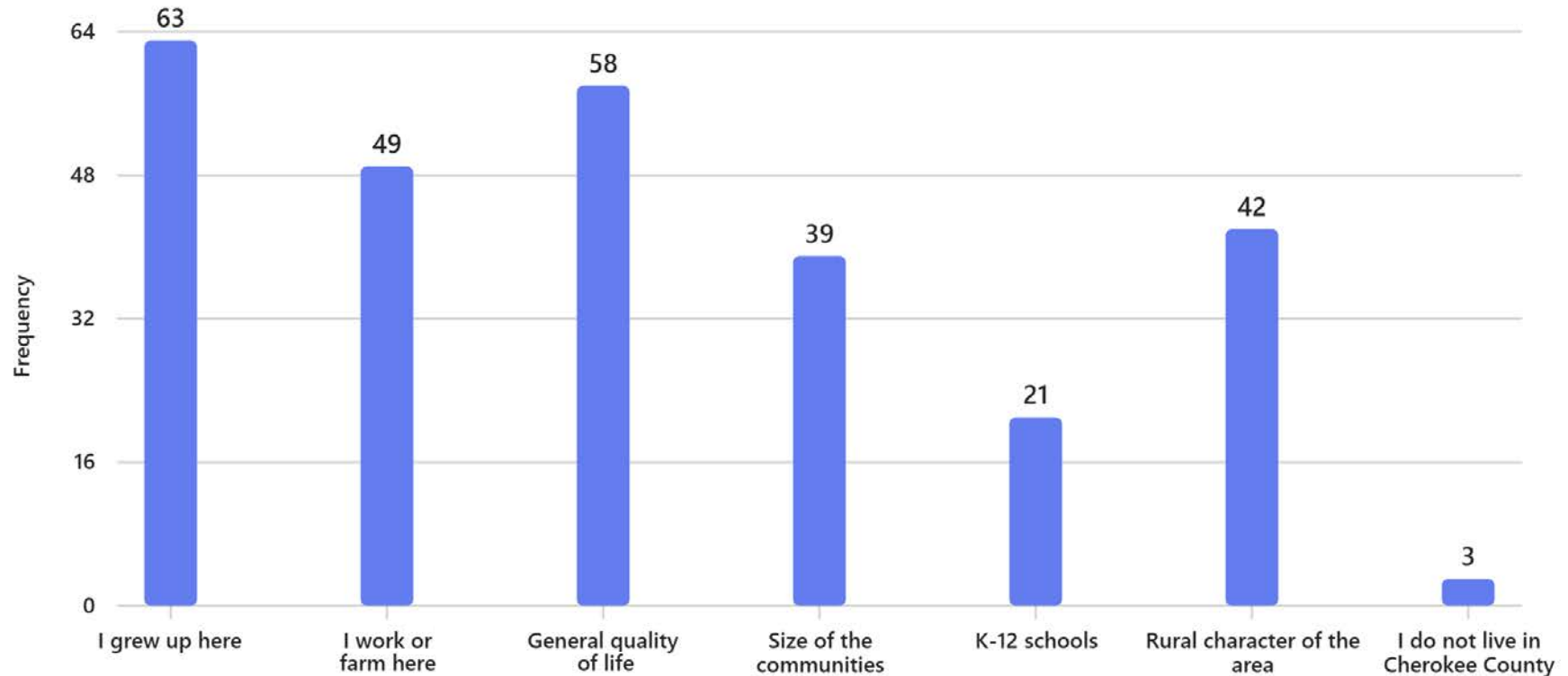
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What are the reasons you live in Cherokee County? Select all that apply.

The most common answer represented community members who grew up in Cherokee county, at 63 answers. General quality of life was also ranked highly with 58 responses. The two lowest rated reasons for living in Cherokee County included K-12 schools at 21 responses, and those who do not live within Cherokee County, representing 3 community members.



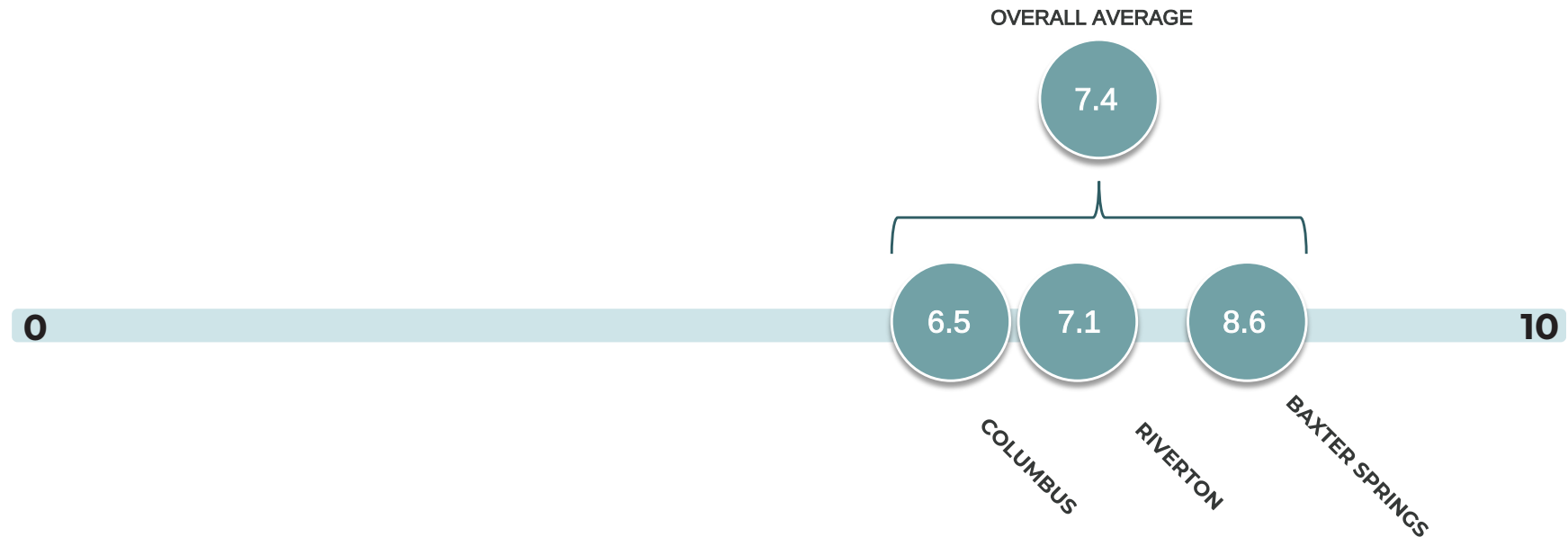


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Public Input Summary Report

How would you rate the quality of life in Cherokee County today?

Average quality of life rating received a score of 7.4 out of 10, with Baxter Springs ranking Cherokee County at 8.6, Riverton ranking Cherokee County at 7.1, and Columbus ranking Cherokee County at the lowest at 6.5 out of 10.



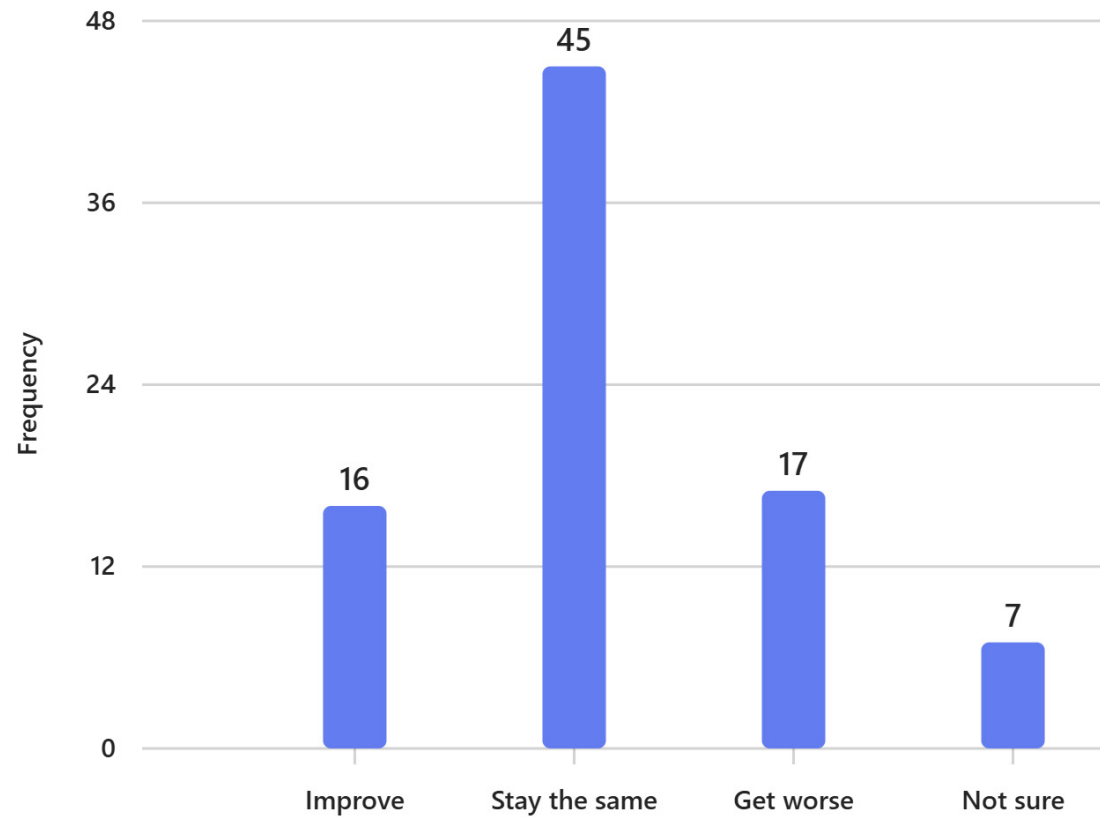
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Overall, do you expect your quality of life in Cherokee County to...

When asked how community members expect their quality of life to change in the future, 45 community members responded that they see quality of life staying the same. 17 community members think the community will get worse, and 16 think it will improve.





Chapter 3

Public Input Summary Report

What are the biggest opportunities in Cherokee County?

Key themes from responses included:

- Opportunities in maintaining rural living and lifestyles, small communities, generational living, and a safe place to raise a family.
- Proximity to nearby urban centers such as Pittsburg and Joplin.
- High prioritization of family-oriented community and quality of life with many attendees noting hometown values, low cost of living, good schools, and safety as important factors in choosing to live in Cherokee County.
- There was interest in attracting new businesses and industries in the county but still would place priority on preserving the County's agricultural identity.

What are the biggest challenges in Cherokee County?

Key themes from responses included:

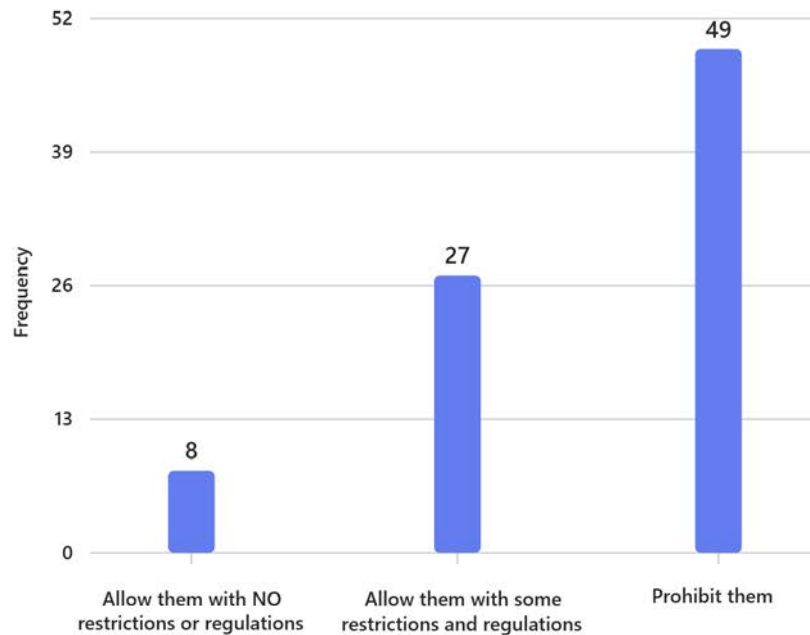
- Proximity to lower taxing entities reduces competitive edge for new development and industry. Taxes in general were a recurring theme in commentary.
- There are consistent challenges faced in trying to bring new jobs, employment, and industry to the area. Many community members need to commute to other urban centers for their jobs.
- Population decline and low tax bases were frequently noted as a challenge in bringing about changes to the county.
- General uncertainty to changing development conversations, especially around utility-scale solar and wind.
- Social challenges and mixed attitudes involving landowner rights and land preservation.

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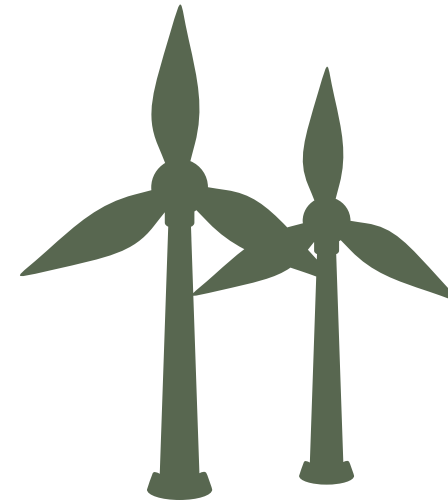
Regarding wind farms, the County should...



If allowed, what aspects of wind farms should be regulated in Cherokee County?

Key themes from responses included:

- Decommissioning Plans: Ensuring there are plans for if/when it closes, surety/bonds to cover decommissioning expenses if needed, and restoration of pre-existing land uses.
- Setbacks and distance to neighboring properties: Distances ranged but minimum distance was typically 1-mile.
- Noise, light, and aesthetic impact: Suggested use of the FAA-approved lighting systems to reduce “the red blinking lights.” Shadow flicker and other aesthetic impacts were also noted.
- Environmental and location considerations: Ground cover, environmental impacts, loss of productive agriculture land, and restrictions on locations of wind farms should be addressed.

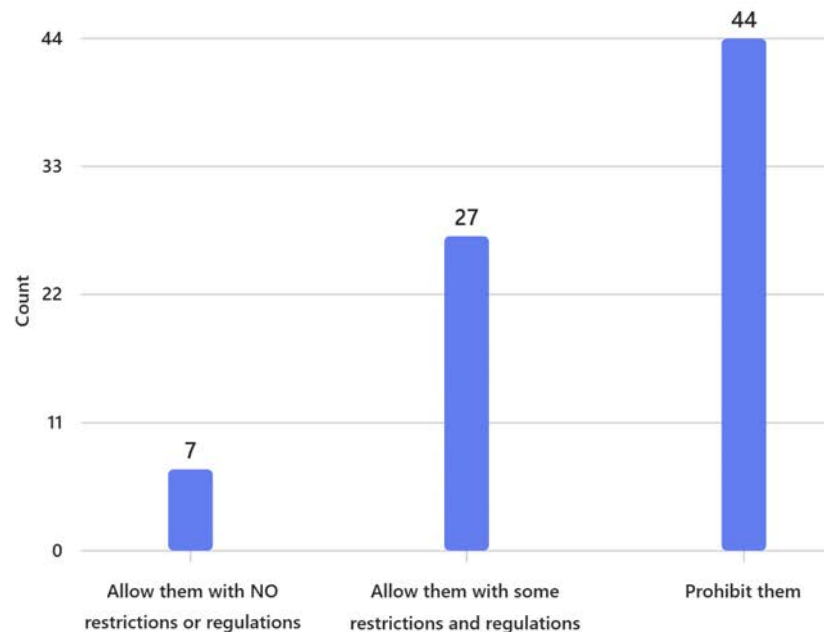




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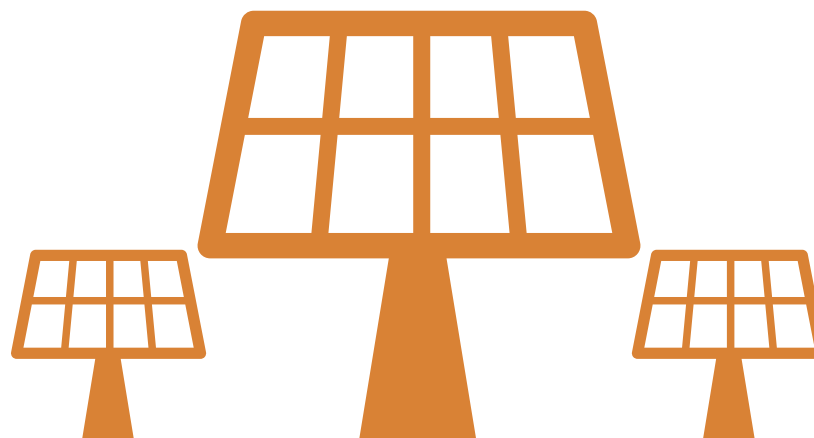
Regarding solar farms, the County should...



If allowed, what aspects of solar farms should be regulated in Cherokee County?

Key themes from responses included:

- Decommissioning Plans: Ensuring there are plans for if/when a solar farm closes, surety/bonds to cover decommissioning expenses if needed, and restoration of pre-existing land uses.
- Setbacks and distance to neighboring properties: Distances ranged but minimum distance was typically 1-mile.
- Size restrictions and taxation impacts: Consideration to limit the size of the solar operation, impacts to tax base and how it is regulated.
- Environmental and location considerations: Ground cover, environmental impacts, water run-off, loss of productive agricultural lands, restrictions on locations of solar farms, and visual screening should all be considered.



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Key Guiding Principles from Public Input

Based on feedback collected through public workshops, stakeholder interviews, and online engagement, several recurring themes emerged that were identified as key guiding principles for the Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan.

Each key guiding principle received a code (QL/BD/PL) and a corresponding number in respect to the order listed below. These codes are used in the Recommendations chapter to provide reference back to the key guiding principles.

Quality of Life (QL)

- Many view Cherokee County as a great place to live and raise a family. (QL-1)
- Maintaining the rural character and quality of life is a top priority. (QL-2)
- There is some concern with maintaining the rural character and quality of life in Cherokee County. (QL-3)
- The wildlife areas and open spaces positively contribute to the character of Cherokee County. (QL-4)
- Housing availability and improvement programming was identified as a need in the county. (QL-5)

Business Development

- Many view Cherokee County as a great place to live and raise a family. (BD-1)
- Maintaining the rural character and quality of life is a top priority. (BD-2)
- There is some concern with maintaining the rural character and quality of life in Cherokee County. (BD-3)
- The wildlife areas and open spaces positively contribute to the character of Cherokee County. (BD-4)
- Housing availability and improvement programming was identified as a need in the county. (BD-5)

Preservation of Ag Land

- Many noted the need to protect and preserve the existing agriculture land in unincorporated Cherokee County today. (PL-1)
- A desire to focus new housing within the existing incorporated areas (infill development) to reduce potential for sprawl and loss of productive agriculture land. (PL-2)
- There is concern for the loss of agriculture land due to the development of utility scale wind and/or solar farms and its potential impact on the character of the county. (PL-3)
- Concern with any loss of property rights due to zoning regulations and the impact of new wind/solar farms. (PL-4)
- Concerns for impact from other intensive industrial uses such as landfills, quarries, and data centers. (PL-5)



Chapter 3

Public Input Summary Report

Public Open House

As part of Phase 3 of the planning process, three Public Open Houses were hosted throughout the county to present the draft of the Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan. At these events, community members were given an opportunity to provide feedback on the draft, review the planning process completed to date, and assign priority levels to the strategies included in the plan.

About the Public Open House Series

Between March 16-19, 2026, three Public Open Houses were held. These come-and-go events were held at Columbus Community Center, Grace Community Church of Riverton, and First Christian Church of Baxter Springs, respectively.

After the Public Open House Series was complete, feedback was analyzed and appropriate adjustments were made to the Plan.

Welcome

to the Public Open House for the Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan!

What should I expect at this event?

- This is a casual come-and-go event
- Visit each board to learn more about the draft chapters
- Provide input on the implementation strategies
- Please make comments and return any comment cards related to the draft Plan



SCAN ME!



SCAN THE QR CODE TO VIEW THE INTERACTIVE ENGAGEMENT WEBSITE



CONFLUENCE



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Results of the Public Open House Series

The Public Open House Series offered an opportunity for community members to see and comment on aspects of the draft comprehensive plan. In total, almost 150 comments, votes, and ideas were shared between the three events.



25+ Attendees



14 Comment Cards



5 Additional Notes



125+ Implementation Votes





Chapter 3

Public Input Summary Report

IMPLEMENTATION VOTING

Give us
Your Input!



This strategy is a high priority
for the community!



This strategy is a medium
priority for the community!



This strategy is a low
priority for the community!

Goal #1 Cherokee County should support future growth and development through best practices and strategic planning.

Strategy LU-4.1	Maintain the County's agricultural character through the preservation of agricultural and open space and parks and conservation land as identified in the Future Land Use Map.	
Strategy LU-4.2	Discourage the construction of housing or businesses within the floodplain and floodway to limit potential losses from flooding.	
Strategy LU-4.3	Enforce the floodplain development ordinance to limit development within the floodplain and floodway.	
Strategy LU-4.4	Consider the development and adoption of a zoning code to address potential high impact land uses as identified within this Plan.	
Strategy LU-4.5	Limit potential negative conflicts with high impact land uses by following the buffering recommendations in Figure 48.	
Strategy LU-4.6	Utilize the Future Land Use Map to help guide the location of new development in Cherokee County.	
Strategy LU-4.7	Adopt subdivision regulations to guide the platting of land in unincorporated Cherokee County.	
Strategy LU-4.8	Support residential development near existing developed areas that can be adequately serviced by infrastructure and utilities to preserve agricultural land.	

Goal #2 Cherokee County should address the potential impacts of utility-scale wind and solar energy along with other high impact land uses.

Strategy RE-4.1	Consider the development and adoption of a zoning code to provide guidelines and regulations tied to the location, operation, and other related factors associated with utility-scale wind and/or solar energy uses and other high impact land uses.	
Strategy RE-4.2	Require a detailed decommissioning plan and agreement to ensure there are proper next steps outlined for the decommissioning and closing of high impact land uses including utility-scale wind and solar energy.	

Public Open House Series



IMPLEMENTATION VOTING

Give us
Your Input!



This strategy is a high priority
for the community!



This strategy is a medium
priority for the community!



This strategy is a low
priority for the community!

Goal #3 Cherokee County should continue to support quality infrastructure and roadways.

Strategy T-4.1	Explore rural-specific funding opportunities to help support the costs for transportation-related improvements, such as the FTA Section 5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas.	
Strategy T-4.2	Continue to contact the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) to seek opportunities for safety and transportation improvements on roadways owned and operated by the KDOT.	

Goal #4 Cherokee County should continue to support and expand opportunities for parks, recreation and tourism.

Strategy PT-4.1	Identify opportunities to share resources with the incorporated communities. These could include shared sheriff/police services, infrastructure to support new business development, or parks and recreation facility maintenance and operations.	
Strategy PT-4.2	Continue to work with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to support the natural and conservation spaces located in Cherokee County.	
Strategy PT-4.3	Explore feasibility for the development of Rails to Trails or general trail locations in Cherokee County. As part of this feasibility assessment, identify preliminary funding mechanisms and potential joint partnerships for the construction of these facilities.	
Strategy PT-4.4	Consider formalizing an Ad Hoc Committee that investigates opportunities to draw in economic development uses to Cherokee County. As part of this Committee, tasks and responsibilities would need to secure resources for grant writing support, historians and narratives related to the county's history, and other important skills to apply for and obtain funding and support.	
Strategy PT-4.5	Continue to highlight business opportunities along Route 66 as part of tourism and economic development in Cherokee County. This could include a map of business vacancies, incentives for facade improvement programs, and local business support to support a healthy and significant corridor in the county.	

Public Open House Series



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Public Open House Series Feedback

Feedback gathered from the Public Open House Series was carefully considered. Edits to the draft comprehensive plan were completed to reflect the general consensus of public input received during Phase 3 and primarily revolved around the following topics:



Support for Zoning and Regulation

Participants generally supported the use of zoning and land use regulations as tools for management of growth and protecting community interests. Some community members expressed concern about over-regulation, property rights, and potential restrictions on land use flexibility. Overall, zoning was viewed favorably when applied to prevent incompatible or undesirable development, particularly large-scale industrial uses.



Opposition to Utility-Scale Renewable Energy and Data Centers

Consistent input expressed concern towards utility-scale renewable energy facilities (wind and solar farms) and large data centers. Participants frequently cited concerns related to visual impacts, noise, land consumption, environmental effects, as well as loss of rural land use. Many community members supported prohibiting these uses entirely or implementing strict regulations, including setbacks, buffering requirements, and limitations on location and scale.



Infrastructure and Safety Improvements

There was strong support for improving infrastructure, particularly transportation systems and road networks. Community members identified road maintenance, traffic safety, and connectivity as key concerns. Coordination with Kansas Department of Transportation will be important to help address regional transportation needs. Safety improvements, like roadway redesigns and traffic management, were also priorities.



Preservation of Rural and Agricultural Character

Preserving the county's rural identity and agricultural base was highlighted as a key priority. Community members emphasized the importance of protecting farmland, maintaining open space, and limiting development that could alter the area's character. This includes minimizing suburban-style expansion, preserving agricultural lands, and ensuring that new development is compatible with existing rural uses.



Recreation and Tourism

While some community members supported increased recreational opportunities and recognized potential economic benefits, these topics were generally viewed as lower priorities compared to land use regulations and rural preservation. Support for recreation and tourism was typically conditional on compatibility with the county's rural character and limited public investment.



Chapter 4

Future Land Use

Overview

The Future Land Use chapter serves as a guide for decision-making related to growth and development within Cherokee County. The chapter's key feature is the Future Land Use Map. This map identifies potential land patterns for development that reflect the preferred uses and characteristics of the County. The Future Land Use Map takes the following factors into consideration:

- Existing land use composition;
- Natural features and character elements; and
- Potential High Impact Land Uses.

Future Land Use Planning

The Future Land Use Map identifies possible development patterns for the County's future growth. Accompanying the map is a series of Future Land Use category definitions, defining the types of land uses for each category.

Relationship to Zoning

The Future Land Use Map serves as the basis for determining the appropriate zoning and improvements for property being developed. Cherokee County does not have any zoning regulations at the time of writing this plan and therefore, this Comprehensive Plan and its supporting elements are setting the stage to support and allow for zoning regulations to be introduced if that is the desired direction of the County leadership and its residents.

K.S.A 12-747 requires cities and counties to establish comprehensive plans to adopt zoning. Prior to considering zoning decisions, such as adoption of a zoning code, a rezoning request, or zoning code amendment, the County should consult this Comprehensive Plan to ensure decisions and actions are consistent with the goals and policies provided herein, as well as the land use categories outlined in the Future Land Use Map.

Amending the Comprehensive Plan

The Future Land Use Map for Cherokee County provides a general layout for future land use patterns. However, this does not mean that there will not be circumstances where the Future Land Use Map should be updated or changed. When circumstances change and reveal a conflicting land use, the Future Land Use Map should be amended to appropriately reflect the updated conditions of the community.

Key Considerations for Determining Future Land Uses

Existing Land Use Composition

In Phase 1, an inventory of existing land uses was completed to understand pre-existing land patterns and characteristics of Cherokee County. These existing land uses are illustrated in Figure 46 and reveal a heavy agriculture focus and identity in the overall county; supported by the single-family residential uses located in and around the incorporated and unincorporated communities.

This map was used to help guide the direction of the Future Land Use Map. In most instances, the pre-existing land use type was maintained to support the desire for maintained character of the County and feedback from the residents during Phase 2 of the planning process.

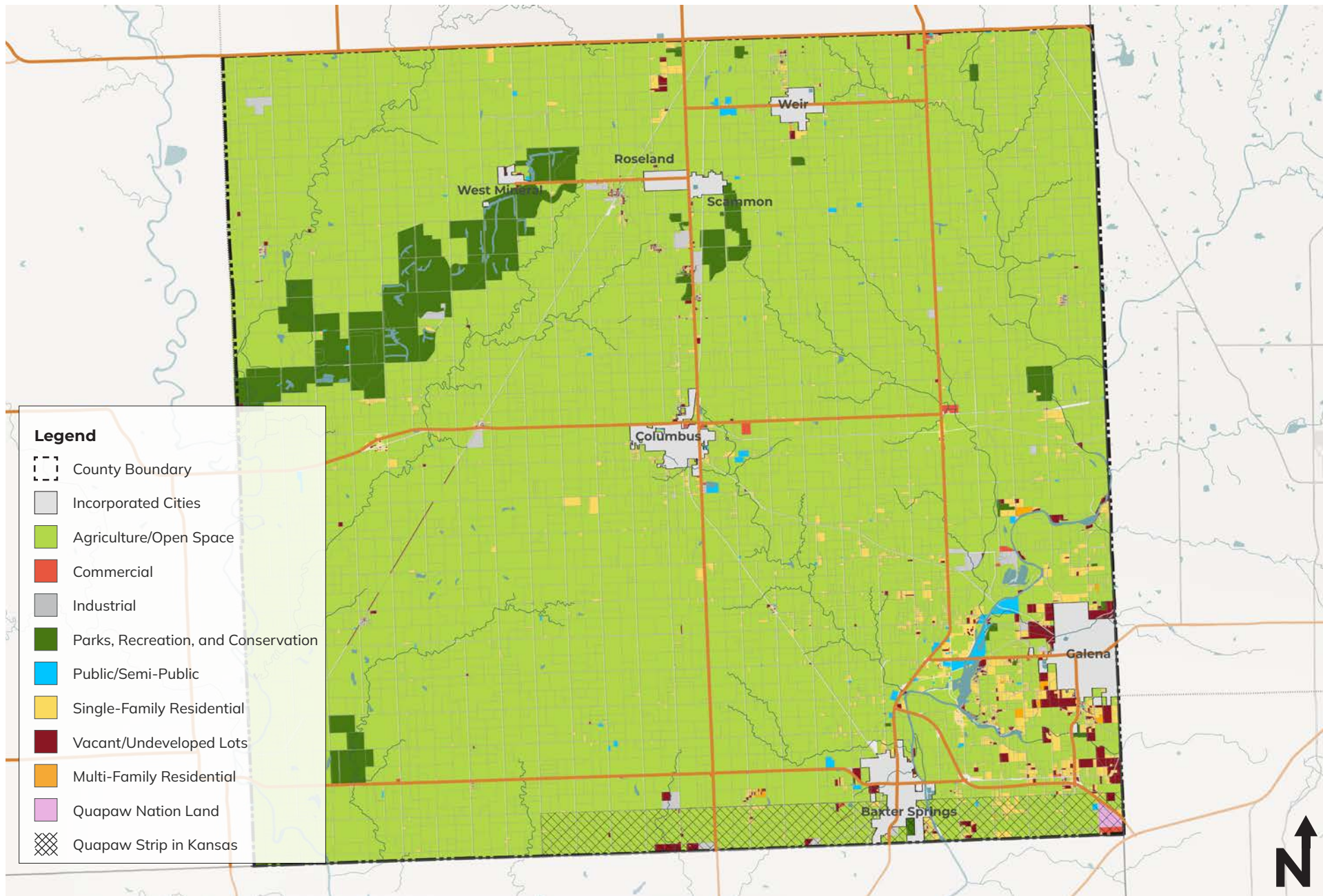


Figure 46: Cherokee County Unincorporated Land: Existing Land Use Map

Source: Confluence with inputs from Cherokee County



Chapter 4

Future Land Use

Natural Features and Character Elements

Natural features and elements contribute to much of the character and identity of Cherokee County today. These features and elements include some key factors:

- Parks, recreation, and conservation land;
- Floodplain, streams, and waterbodies; and
- Route 66 and tribal land.

Parks, Recreation, and Conservation

A long history of mining activity has contributed to a vast areas of parks, recreation, and conservation land as noted in the Existing Land Use Map. Much of this land is located on retired quarry sites and is now operated by the Kansas Department of Wildlife.

Chapter 7. Parks, Recreation, and Tourism discusses these facilities in more depth to highlight how this land has evolved in its use and function.

Floodplain, Streams, and Waterbodies

The 100-year floodplain, streams, and various waterbodies are illustrated in the map in Figure 47. These features are integral to maintaining the scenic views, aesthetics, wildlife, and natural landscapes in Cherokee County. These landforms are also sensitive to any development and should be preserved and left natural as much as possible.

Route 66

Near Riverton and Baxter Springs, a portion of the Route 66 corridor winds its way through Cherokee County. Route 66 is a notable contribution to tourism in the county and to American history. Local economies and landmarks are located on and along the corridor that should be maintained long-term to support local and regional tourism and economic activity.

Quapaw Nation

In the southeastern corner of Cherokee County, a section of land is managed by the Quapaw Nation. This land is utilized in support of the Downstream Casino Resort located in Quapaw, Oklahoma. Additional documents from the Federal government and Quapaw Nation identify a strip of land along the southern edge of the County as the Quapaw Strip in Kansas. The Quapaw Nation should be consulted when considering any development that may occur in this area.

Recommendation for Future Consideration: Continue to Enforce the Floodplain Development Ordinance

The County should continue to enforce its Floodplain Development Ordinance to help protect property owners from inadvertently building within a designated floodplain or floodway. Floodplain Development Ordinances allow property owners with existing structure(s) in the floodplain or floodway to obtain flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program. Without such an ordinance, property owners are unable to access insurance through this program.

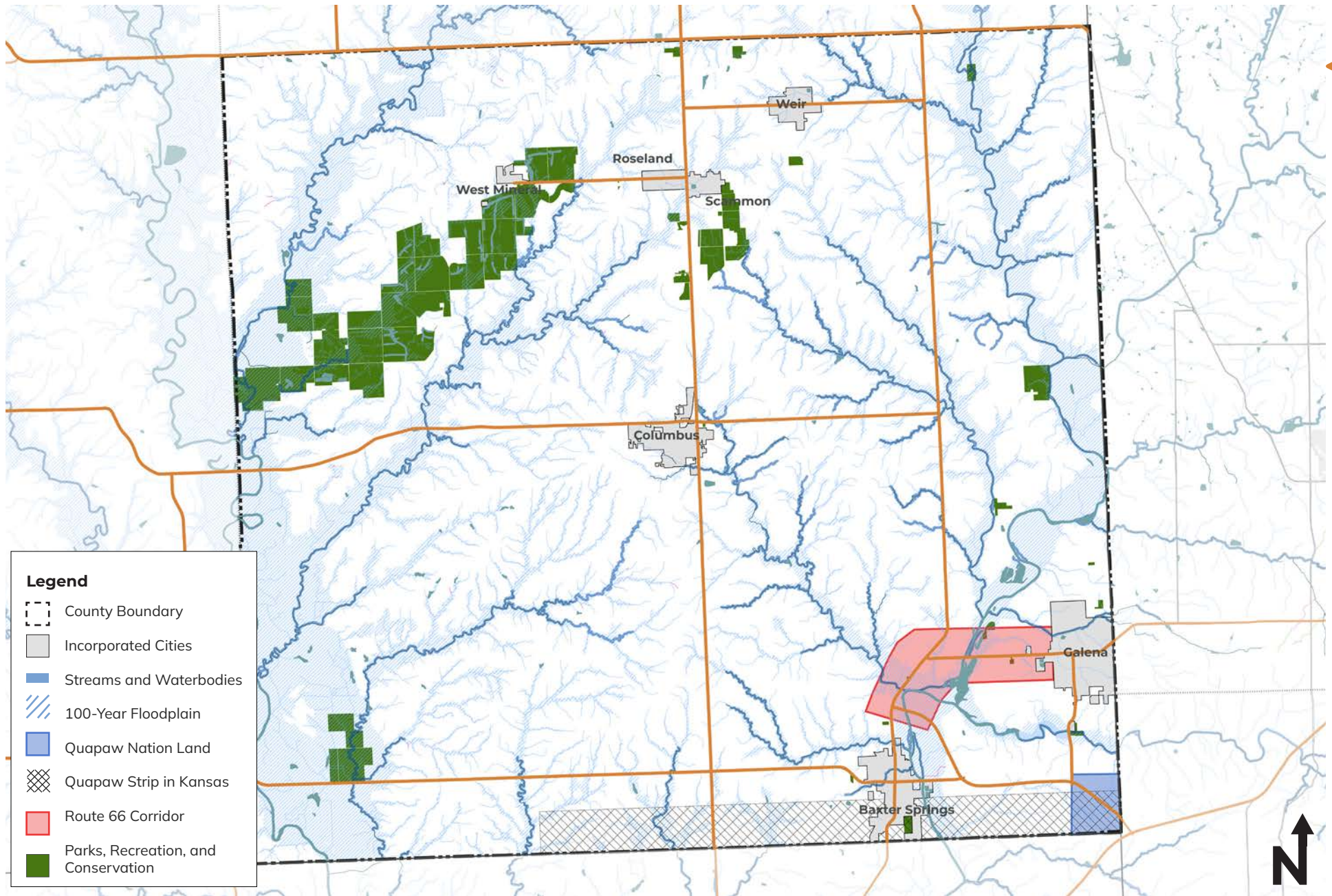


Figure 47: Cherokee County Natural Features and Character Elements Map

Source: Confluence with inputs from Cherokee County and KDWP



Chapter 4

Future Land Use

Potential High Impact Land Uses

High impact land uses are operations that may increase noise, pollution, or visual disruptions to the landscape and that may significantly increase traffic or have impacts on roads, utilities, or emergency services. These types of operations include the following and other similar uses:

- Landfills
- Quarries
- Data Centers
- Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)
- Sewage Lagoons and Storage Ponds
- Utility-Scale Wind Farms
- Utility-Scale Solar Farms
- Other Power Generation Facilities

These uses, among others, were identified by the Planning Commission, residents, and stakeholders during Phase 2 to help identify potential impacts to land and Cherokee County if it were to develop into a different use.

It is important to consider opportunities where high impact land uses would and would not be appropriate throughout the County. The map in Figure 48. presents a map of areas for consideration and exclusion. These are detailed below:

Incorporated Cities and Growth Areas - 1/2-1-Mile Buffer

The incorporated cities and their respective growth areas are less suitable lands for high impact land uses. These areas should defer to that county's long-range plans for further guidance. The map in Figure 48 presents two scales of buffers for an assumed growth area and buffer depending on if the area is incorporated or unincorporated.

Parks, Conservation, Floodplain, and Quapaw Nation - 1-Mile Buffer

The areas noted in the Existing Land Use Map as Quapaw Nation, 100-Year Floodplain or Floodway, and Parks, Recreation, and Conservation lands should be maintained and appropriately buffered from any high impact land uses to protect the aesthetics of the land within these designations.

Rural Residential Buffering

Many rural estates and acreages exist today in Cherokee County to support current farm operations and country-living. To continue to support these lifestyles and desire to maintain an agriculture focus in the County, any proposed potential high impact land uses should be setback a reasonable distance from any existing residential dwellings.

Key Corridors - 1/4-Mile Buffer

As noted in **Chapter 6: Transportation** and **Chapter 7: Parks, Recreation, and Tourism**, there are many key corridors that contribute to the economics and aesthetics of the county. It is important to note that if any of the high impact land uses are to be developed, they will need roadway access to connect to the key corridors, such as Highway 169, Highway 160, U.S. Route 400 and others. These corridors currently support the economic drivers in the county today and should therefore have a minimum 1/4-mile buffer from the roadway's centerline to ensure appropriate distances.

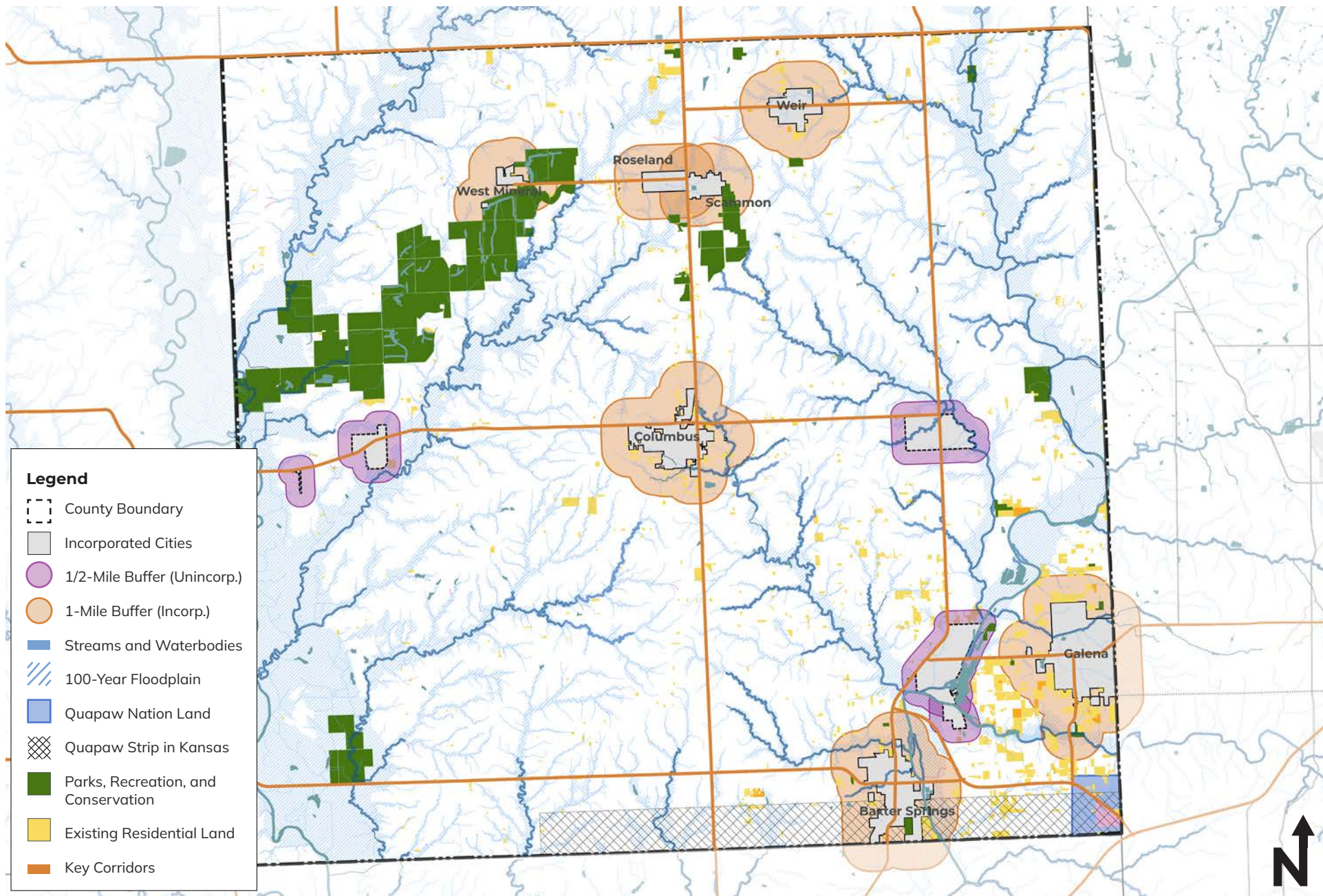


Figure 48: Cherokee County Unincorporated Land High Impact Land Uses Suitability Map

Source: Confluence with inputs from Cherokee County and KDWP



Chapter 4

Future Land Use

Future Land Use Categories

To support development and individual property rights within Cherokee County, a series of land use categories have been created for the Future Land Use Map. These land use categories are broad and intended to help identify possible options for zoning classifications of properties (should some form of zoning be established for the county) as well as to help identify areas for future development. The categories are detailed in the following sections.



Parks and Conservation

The Parks and Conservation category includes public and private recreational uses such as state and county parks, campgrounds, ball and recreational fields, trails, golf courses, and historical sites open to the public.



Agricultural and Open Space

The Agriculture and Open Space category is set aside for agricultural land, conservation land, undeveloped land, floodplain, stream corridors, greenways, and areas with significant tree cover. This land use category may include farm residential dwellings and businesses.



Public and Semi-Public

The Public and Semi-Public category includes land owned or operated by the state or county, a city, school district, public or private school, fire department, or similar public agency. Cemeteries, airports, and public utility facilities are also included in this category.

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Residential

The Residential land use category includes land for any residential developments located within unincorporated Cherokee County. This would include single-family units, duplexes, and manufactured homes as these exist in the county today.



Commercial

The Commercial land use category accommodates retail and commercial business development that provides services to highway traffic, agricultural related retail services, and other services essential to rural residential and rural businesses.



Quapaw Nation Land

The Quapaw Nation Land category includes the existing land managed by the Nation today in the southeast corner of the county. Additional areas for Quapaw Nation Land was not identified as part of the County's Future Land Use Map at this time.



Business Park and Industrial

The Business Park and Industrial land use category is intended to designate land that is near highways or railways, has access to water service, and is ideally located for development with various business and industrial uses including manufacturing, shipping and distribution facilities, and other business and industrial uses, especially those uses that may be best located in a rural setting outside an urbanized area.



Chapter 4

Future Land Use

Cherokee County Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map for Cherokee County is shown in Figure 49. The map identifies potential land uses for all unincorporated parcels for Cherokee County and excludes all land located within incorporated cities in the county.

The dominant future land use remains as Agriculture and Open Space, consisting of agricultural land reserved for row crop production or other agricultural operations, as well as open space of floodplains or other natural amenities and features.

As noted in the Key Considerations section, there are three critical components to consider when land development and uses are under question:

- Existing land use composition;
- Natural features and character elements; and
- Potential High Impact Land Uses.

These three categories will help the County's leadership to evaluate current operations and whether or not to maintain the status quo; any nearby natural features or character elements that may be impacted; and the appropriate locations for high impact land uses.

These land uses will only guide future operations of individual parcels within the County should the property owner wish to rezone or develop on their land.

Recommendation for Future Consideration: Adoption of Subdivision Regulations

The County should consider adopting a basic set of subdivision regulations to ensure any parcel splits and subdivisions of land meet a basic set of considerations to ensure each parcel has access to a public street and the infrastructure necessary to adequately serve the property.

Recommendation for Future Consideration: Regulating Potential High Impact Land Uses

The County should consider adopting a basic zoning ordinance to address potential high impact land uses such as data centers, quarries, landfills, utility-scale wind and solar farms and other similar uses. Zoning regulations can help reduce impacts by limiting the location and setting minimum development standards that address impacts.

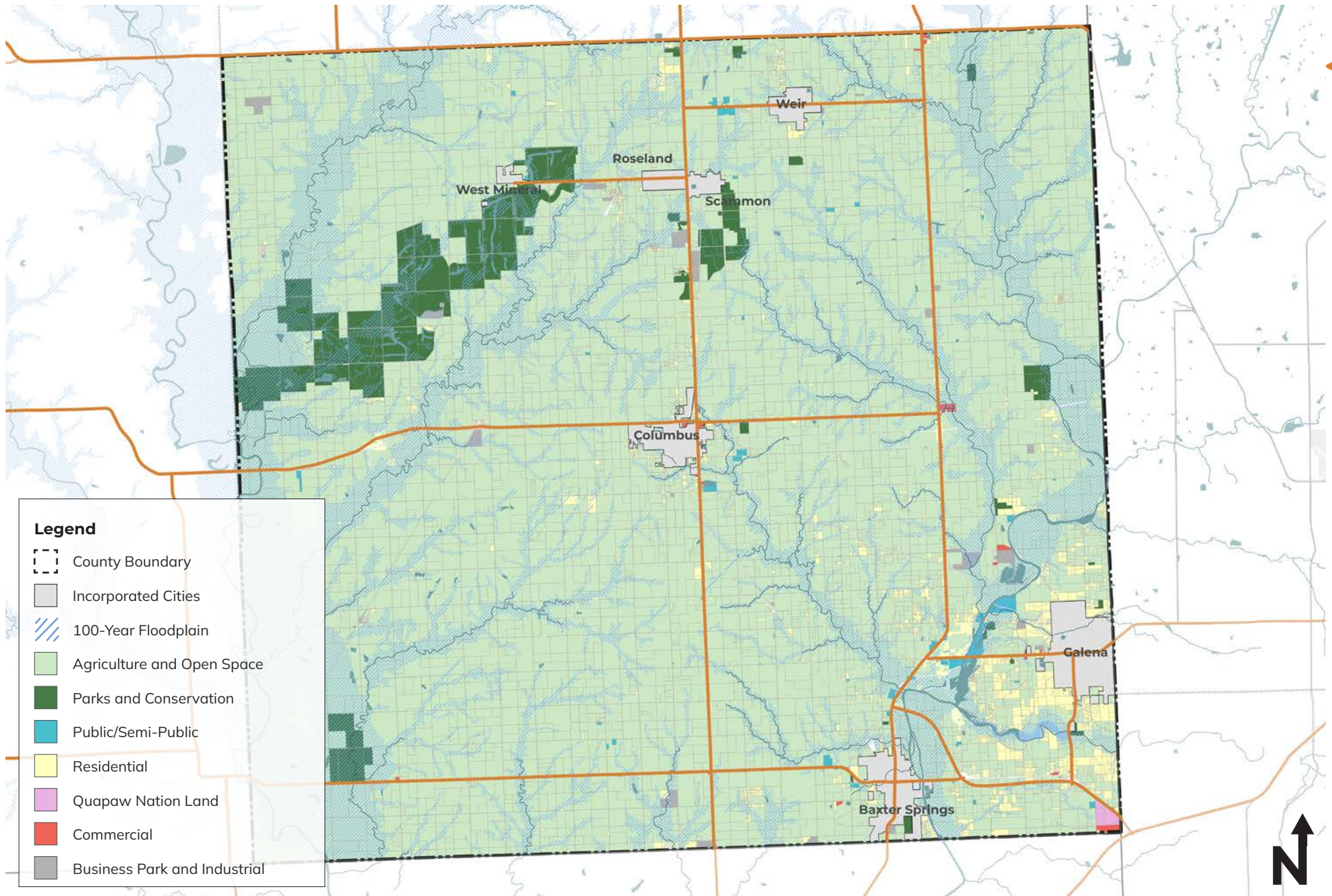


Figure 49: Cherokee County Future Land Use Map

Source: Confluence



Chapter 5

Renewable Energy

Renewable Energy Overview

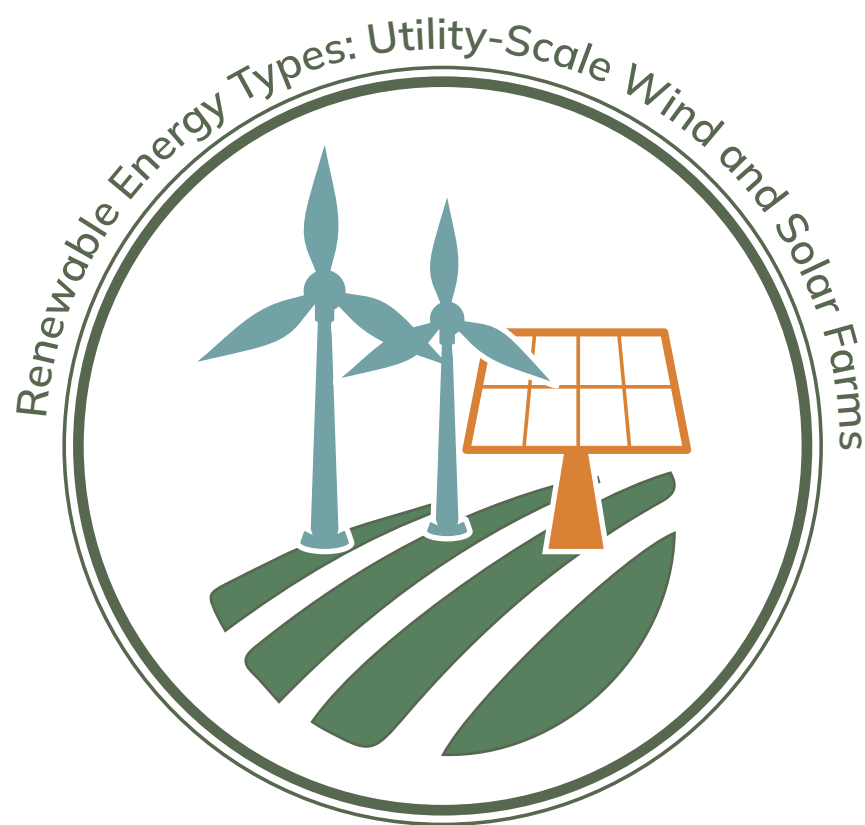
Renewable energies include anything that is continuously resupplied or is an inexhaustible resource, such as geothermal energy. These power sources are growing at a rapid rate in a variety of scales, requiring attention and consideration specific to the desired future of renewable energies in Cherokee County.

A common application in the State of Kansas is renewable wind energy or solar power through the use of utility-scale wind or solar farms. According to the Kansas Department of Commerce, wind-powered energy is the top source of electricity production in Kansas; for the first time ever passing coal produced energy sources.

Utility-Scale Energies

These alternative methods of energy collection help reduce pollution and emissions into the atmosphere. The two types of renewable energy producers discussed in this chapter include utility-scale solar (solar farms) and utility-scale wind (wind farms). Utility-scale simply means that the installation is intended to generate power for off-site use and is connected to the power grid.

Due to Cherokee County's sizable amount of open space and agricultural land, the area is conducive to alternative energy producers. Renewable energy developments can bring economic benefits to the county, such as attracting supportive industries or expanding job opportunities within the area. However, it does come with the risk of losing natural land and scenic views throughout the County. This chapter considers the opportunities and obstacles associated with utility-scale wind and solar energy production and the role it could play in Cherokee County.



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Renewable Energy Types

There are two levels of classification for the development of wind and solar energy conversion systems. These typologies include accessory and utility scales. Accessory use is typically defined as “a use or structure subordinate to the principal use or building on the same lot and serving a purpose customarily incidental to.” Accessory scale produces strictly for on-site use. Utility-scale is interconnected with the greater electricity grid and produces electricity for off-site use. ***For this chapter, all recommendations will be in relation to utility-scale wind and solar developments.***



Figure 50: Accessory Solar



Figure 52: Utility-Scale Solar



Figure 51: Accessory Wind



Figure 53: Utility-Scale Wind



Chapter 5

Renewable Energy

Utility-Scale Solar Farms

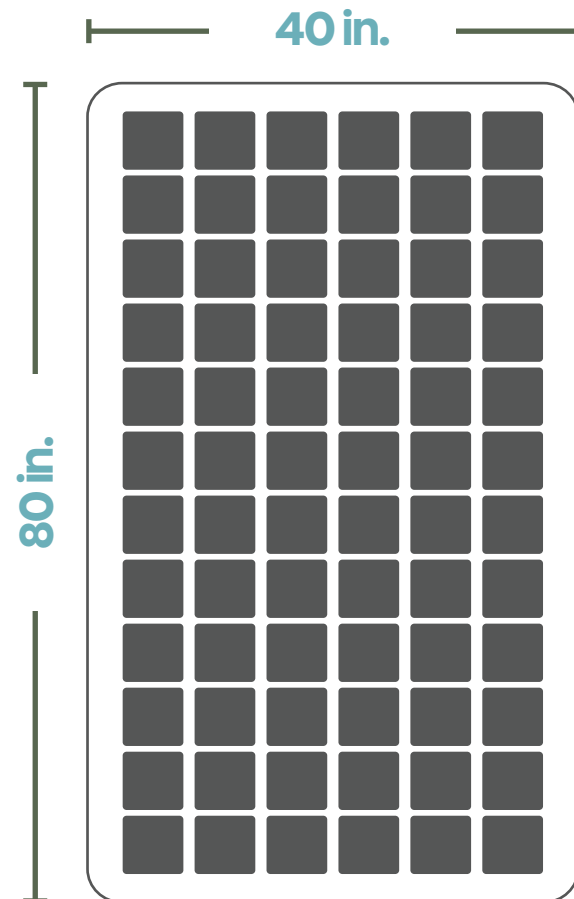
Key Components

Solar farms typically utilize photovoltaic (PV) solar technology to convert solar energy into electric power.

To protect both the solar farm and surrounding neighbors, the perimeter of the operation has a security fence. Interior access roads allow maintenance workers to reach the panels as needed for repairs and service. On site, there are central power inverters and step-up transformers to convert and transfer the power to the electrical grid. Lastly, the key component to a solar farm - the solar panels. The PV panels are typically set up in a single axis row with the ability to rotate with the sun throughout the day.

Land Impacts

The true impact on the land is a key difference between wind farms and solar farms. Solar panels are typically less than 15 feet tall, supported by steel piles driven into the ground. These piles are less impactful to the land than the concrete bases used with wind farms. Whereas wind farms have turbines that can be several hundred feet tall and require intense, structural components to anchor into the ground.



Solar panel sizes are kept moderately small to allow a single worker to be able to perform maintenance as necessary.

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- 1 Central power inverter and step-up transformer
- 2 Interior access road
- 3 Single axis tracker row
- 4 Driven steel piles
- 5 Perimeter security fence
- 6 PV panels

Figure 54: Components of Utility-Scale Solar Farms



Chapter 5

Renewable Energy

Key Benefits

The operations of solar farms highlight some of the key benefits of this renewable energy. These include:

- No operational waste
- No water discharge
- No air emissions

Life Cycles of Solar Farms

The lifetime of solar panels is estimated to be 25-40 years. Following the retirement of the panels or farm, the operation must follow a decommissioning plan.

Decommissioning Plans

A decommissioning plan identifies the steps necessary to bring the land as close to its natural state as possible. These plans are required as part of the approval process for a solar farm to account for its operations from construction to deconstruction.

The solar panels are made out of recyclable materials, such as glass and aluminum. This recyclable component is part of reducing the footprint of the total farm operation.

Zoning and Participation

The intent of zoning regulations for solar farms is to balance the interests of both the “participating” and “non-participating” landowners. Participating landowners are those that enter into leases, easements, or other agreements with solar developers. Those that do not partake in such activities are classified as non-participating landowners. Ensuring the code is clear and concise reduces the potential for disputes or negative impacts on the property owners.

Prior to the approval process for any solar farm, the County must determine where they will allow solar farms to be constructed. Typically, these users are allowed in agricultural, transitional agricultural districts, and some industrial or commercial districts.

The approval process for solar facilities is recommended to utilize conditional use permits. These permits are used in place of rezonings for the greater flexibility they provide. Best practices for solar farms include conditional use permits to allow the governing bodies to analyze each instance of application to ensure it meets standards and will not negatively impact the greater county or residents.



Decommissioning plans
are required



Site is restored



Solar panels are
recycled

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Setbacks

Setbacks are part of the regulations for any land development practice. These are not exclusive to solar facilities, and can be found in everything from a residential block to an industrial park. These guidelines identify the amount of distance a building or structure must be from a road or property line. Setbacks act as a regulatory tool to protect adjacent properties from the proposed development; however, setbacks should not be so large that they infringe on a landowner's ability to develop their property.

Related to solar farms, counties and cities should specify setbacks from the following:

- Non-participating property lines and/or residences
- Participating property lines and/or residences (typically no setback)
- Public rights of way
- Sensitive areas such as parks and lakes
- City boundaries

Visual Screening

Visual screening is the practice of using fences, walls, berms, or landscaping to obstruct the view of the solar facilities, typically from non-participating residences. Regulations for visual screenings should authorize the use of natural features, topography, and vegetation for cost efficiency and aesthetics.

Cherokee County should consider the likely impact of property line screening requirements. Agricultural parcels can have a property line extending a half-mile or more. This is well beyond

the residence to be screened. Therefore, limit the screening requirements to a necessary area. If not reduced to a necessary screening area, the requirement may become overly burdensome, disturb land, and/or discourage development.

Stormwater Management and Ground Cover

Any ordinance regulating solar farms should include a requirement that a stormwater management plan be developed to protect the site from soil erosion and ensure stormwater runoff is properly addressed to limit impact on downstream properties. Requirements to protect the agricultural value of the soil along with details for vegetation and establishment of ground cover are additionally important components.



Chapter 5

Renewable Energy

Utility-Scale Wind Farms

Key Components

Wind farms use large-scale turbines to convert the kinetic energy of wind into power that is supplied to the electrical grid.

Oftentimes, wind turbines stand several hundred feet tall, being composed of a tower, rotor and blades, and nacelle, which houses the generator. An access road leads to the wind turbine which allows maintenance workers to make on-site repairs.

Key Benefits

Wind farms have several key benefits over conventional means of energy production, including:

- No water consumption
- Economic benefits for communities
- Job creation

Life Cycle of Wind Farms

Wind turbines have an approximate lifespan of 30 years. Though many of the individual components that makeup the turbine will need replaced or repaired during this time.

Shadow Flicker

At times, a wind turbine may cause a shadow flicker when the blades of the turbine pass between the sun and the observer, this affect can only be seen from a distance of less than 4,600 feet during certain seasons and times of day.

Any ordinance regulating wind farms should include requirements to conduct shadow flicker studies and limit shadow flicker on existing structures.

Obstruction Lights

The flashing red lights that can be seen on top of wind turbines at night are known as obstruction lights. Although these lights can be seen as a nuisance, they play an important role in protecting both the wind turbine and pilots traveling during nighttime and are mandated by the Federal Aviation Administration on structures exceeding 150 feet.

Subject to both FAA, it may be possible for towers to utilize an aircraft detection lighting system (ADLS) where the aircraft safety lighting is only activated when an aircraft is in proximity to the wind farm.

Noise

Unlike solar panels, wind turbines have moving parts, both externally and internally. While in operation, there is noise generated by the blades of the wind turbine moving through the air and by generator within the structure.

Noise levels from wind turbines at distances greater than 1300 feet is typically less than 40 decibels, which is comparable to the lowest limit of ambient sound in an urban environment.



Setbacks

Setbacks are an important regulation to protect non-participating property owners - those who have not entered into leases, easements, or other agreements with wind developers - from sound and visual impacts during the development and operation of wind farms.

Related to wind farms, counties and cities should specify setbacks from the following:

- Non-participating property lines and/or residences
- Participating property lines and/or residences (typically no setback)
- Public rights-of-way
- Sensitive areas such as parks and lakes
- City boundaries

Decommissioning Plans

Once at the end of their lifespan, wind turbines must either be removed or replaced by a new turbine. Decommissioning plans layout how the owner of the turbine will handle this transition, how this work will be funded, and to what extent the land is returned to its original state. It is important to require some sort of financial security to ensure removal of the wind farm at the end of its lifespan.

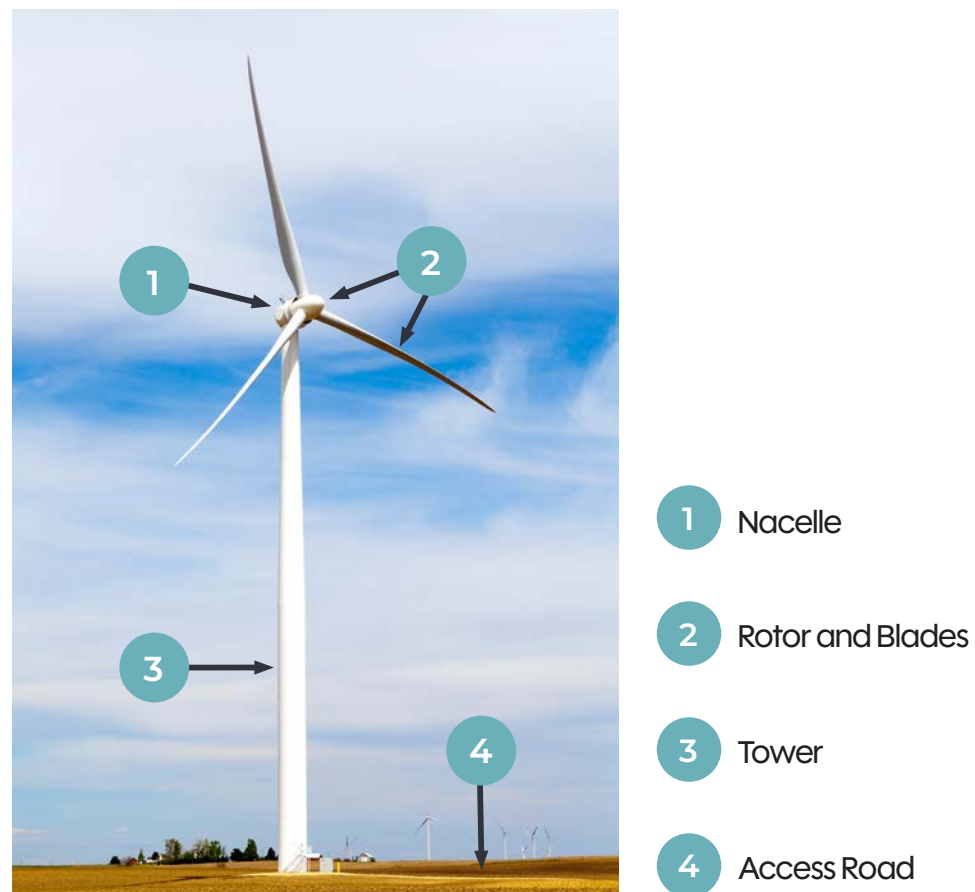


Figure 55: Components of Utility-Scale Wind Turbines



Chapter 5

Renewable Energy

Public Input

Three Public Input Workshops were held throughout a week in October 2025 across Cherokee County. At these meetings, the consultant team included information and questions for the public related to utility-scale renewable energy uses and their potential options for regulation. There were approximately 30-35 participants at each of the workshops. Those in attendance were asked to provide feedback on utility-scale wind and solar farms through a series of visioning questions, voting boards, and a mapping activity. Participants were also directed to an online engagement website which included information on the Comprehensive Plan and a series of similar engagement activities.

If allowed, what aspects of wind farms should be regulated in Cherokee County?

Responses from the public primarily included:

- **Decommissioning Plans:** Ensuring there are plans for if/when it closes, surety/bonds to cover decommissioning expenses if needed, restoration of pre-existing land uses.
- **Setbacks and distance to neighboring properties:** Distances ranged but minimum distance was typically 1-mile.
- **Noise, light, and aesthetic impact:** Suggested use of the FAA-approved lighting systems to reduce the red blinking lights'. Shadow flicker and other aesthetic impacts were also noted.
- **Environmental and location considerations:** Ground cover, environmental impacts, loss of productive agricultural land, restrict locations of where wind farms should go.

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If allowed, what aspects of solar farms should be regulated in Cherokee County?

Responses from the public primarily included:

- **Decommissioning Plans:** Ensuring there are plans for if/when it closes, surety/bonds to cover decommissioning expenses if needed, restoration of pre-existing land uses.
- **Setbacks and distance to neighboring properties:** Distances ranged but minimum distance was typically 1-mile.
- **Size restrictions and taxing impacts:** Consideration to limit the size of the solar operation, impacts to tax base and how this is regulated.
- **Environmental and location considerations:** Ground cover, environmental impacts, water run-off, loss of productive agricultural land, restrict locations of where solar farms could go, visual screening.

Stakeholder Feedback:

Primary concerns about wind and solar were:

- Loss of farmland
- Change in rural character
- Aesthetics
- Abandoned facilities

Stakeholders had mixed feelings on zoning. Many don't want zoning regulations, but also don't want wind/solar or otherwise want them regulated. Some of the stakeholder opinions on zoning were:

- Should also address: quarries, landfills, and other major industrial uses that impact immediate neighbors.
- Any regulations should be very limited so not to otherwise restrict business growth or infringe on property rights.

Stakeholders thought that if regulating wind and solar farms, the following need to be addressed:

- Decommissioning (ensure the sites are maintained, appropriately operated, restored after closing, and address abandonment).
- Include an environmental impact assessment.
- Consider if new overhead powerlines will be needed to cross non-participating property.



Chapter 5

Renewable Energy

Regional Comparisons

As of December 2025, Crawford County, Labette County, and Wilson County all had zoning regulations regarding renewable energy. Crawford County has zoning for only a portion of the county and requires a conditional use permit for utility scale wind. It does not have zoning for solar or battery energy storage systems (BESS). Labette County requires a conditional use permit for utility scale wind, utility scale solar, and BESS.

Montgomery and Neosho County do not have any zoning regarding renewable energy.



Surrounding Counties Renewable Energy Zoning Status

County	Zoning Status	Details
Crawford County	Zoning for portion of the county	Utility scale wind requires a conditional use permit. Does not include anything on solar or BESS.
Labette County	Has Zoning	Utility scale wind and utility scale solar both require a conditional use permit. BESS requires a conditional use permit.
Montgomery County	No Zoning	-
Neosho County	No Zoning	-
Wilson County	Has Zoning	Unable to find specific regulations.

Table 2: Surrounding Counties Zoning Status

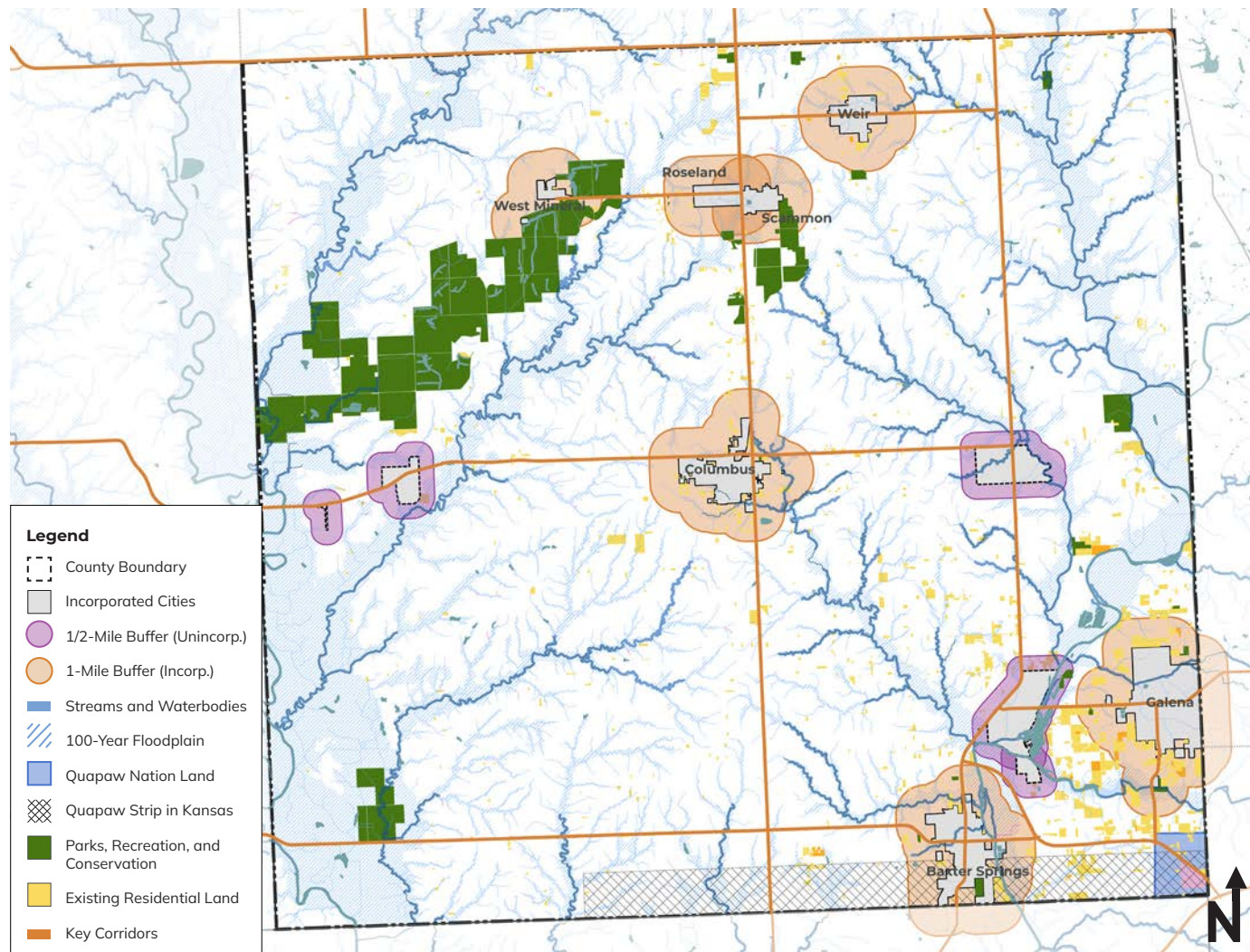


Recommended Next Steps

Following the analysis of public input and regional best practices related to renewable energy regulations, this section examines recommendations and next steps for Cherokee County.

Cherokee County should consider developing a zoning ordinance that addresses utility-scale wind and solar along with other identified potentially high impact land uses. These could include, but are not limited to:

- Landfills
- Quarries
- Data Centers
- Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)
- Sewage Lagoons and Storage Ponds
- Utility-Scale Wind Farms
- Utility-Scale Solar Farms
- Other Power Generation Facilities





Chapter 6

Transportation

Overview

Transportation provides a means to growth and connectivity as a community grows. Adequate planning for future transportation is necessary to ensure that the growth of a community is serviced adequately. The contents of this chapter will cover current transportation conditions and explore future needs for the community.

Figure 57 shows a map of U.S. and Kansas State Highways in Cherokee County.

Roadways

Cherokee County is served by a network of both federal and state roadways. The U.S. Highways traversing Cherokee County are Hwy 69, Hwy 160, Hwy 166, and Hwy 400. Additionally, several Kansas State Highways, specifically K-26, K-66, K-102, and K-103, provide vital connections throughout the county.

Route 66

The historic highway, Route 66 (or U.S. Highway 66), was one of the original highways in the United States Numbered Highway System and features many historic and scenic segments and stops along it. Route 66 has since been decommissioned (lost its designation as a U.S. Highway in favor of Interstates) but still has great impact.

There are 13.2 miles of Route 66 that run through Kansas, passing through Baxter Springs, Riverton, and Galena in Cherokee County. Cherokee County is the only county in Kansas to include any of Route 66, being the southeasternmost county in Kansas, it makes the connection from Missouri to Oklahoma. Baxter Springs features a Route 66 Visitor's Center, a historic gas station and monument to the historic Route 66. The visitors center is in a restored 1930 Phillips 66 Service Station and is on the National Register of Historic Places.



Figure 56: Baxter Springs Visitors Center

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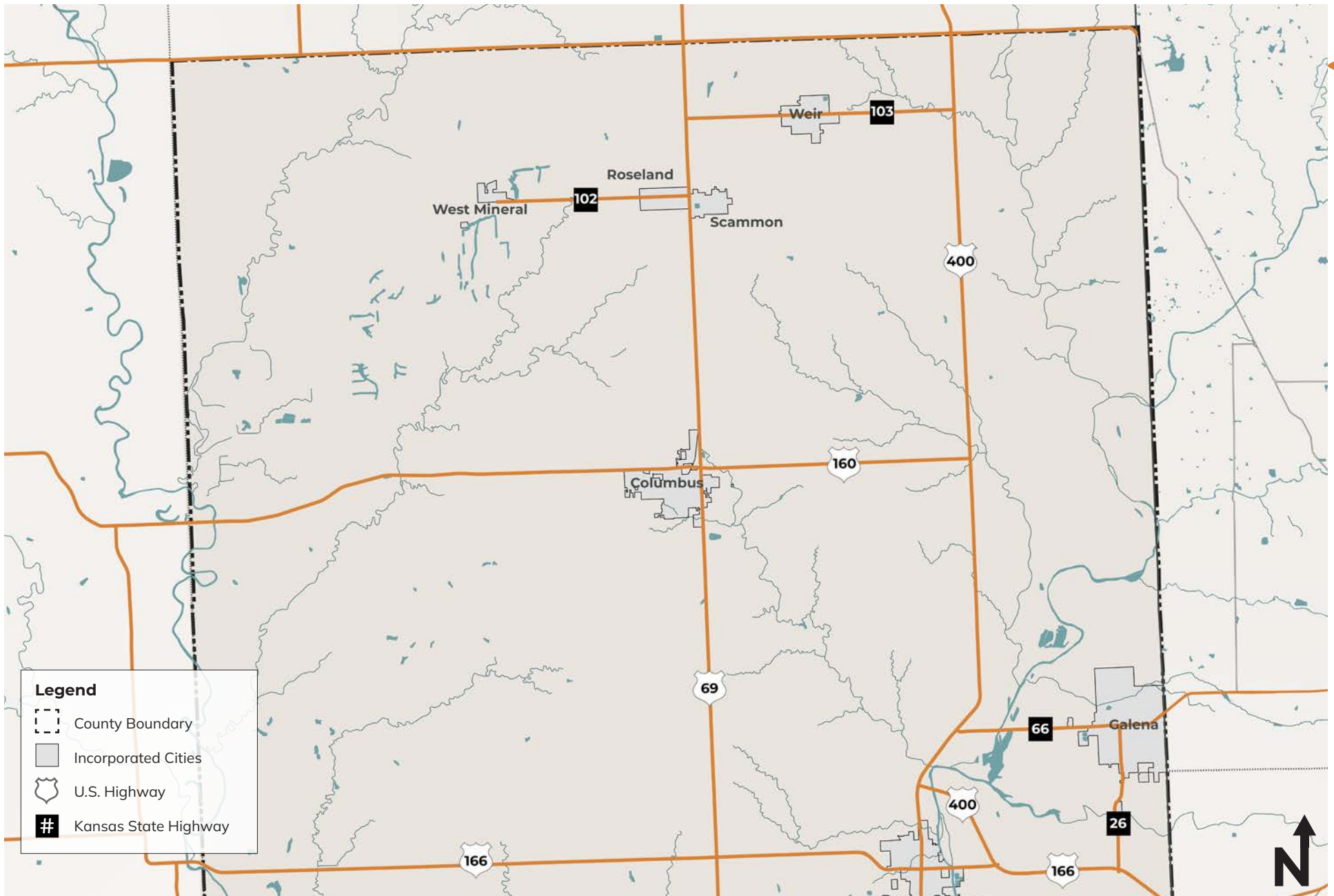


Figure 57: Cherokee County Roadways

Source: Confluence



Chapter 6

Transportation

Crashes on State Highways

2,547 total accidents have been reported in Cherokee County in the last 10 years. Half of these accidents were caused by a collision with an animal, with an addition 30% colliding with other vehicles and 11% with fixed objects.

Of all the accidents, 2202 resulted in property damage, 320 resulted in injury, and 25 were fatal. These results are shown by location in the map to the right.

Cherokee County should work with the Kansas Department of Transportation to reduce crashes, especially fatal ones.

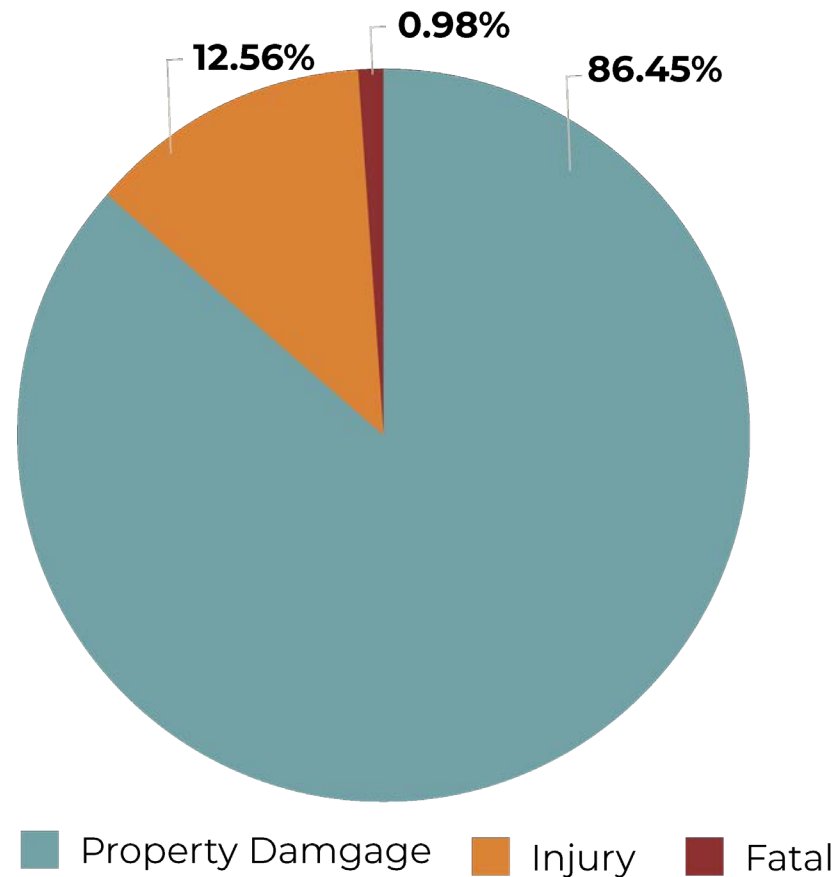


Figure 58: Cherokee Crash Outcomes

Source: Confluence with inputs from Kansas DOT

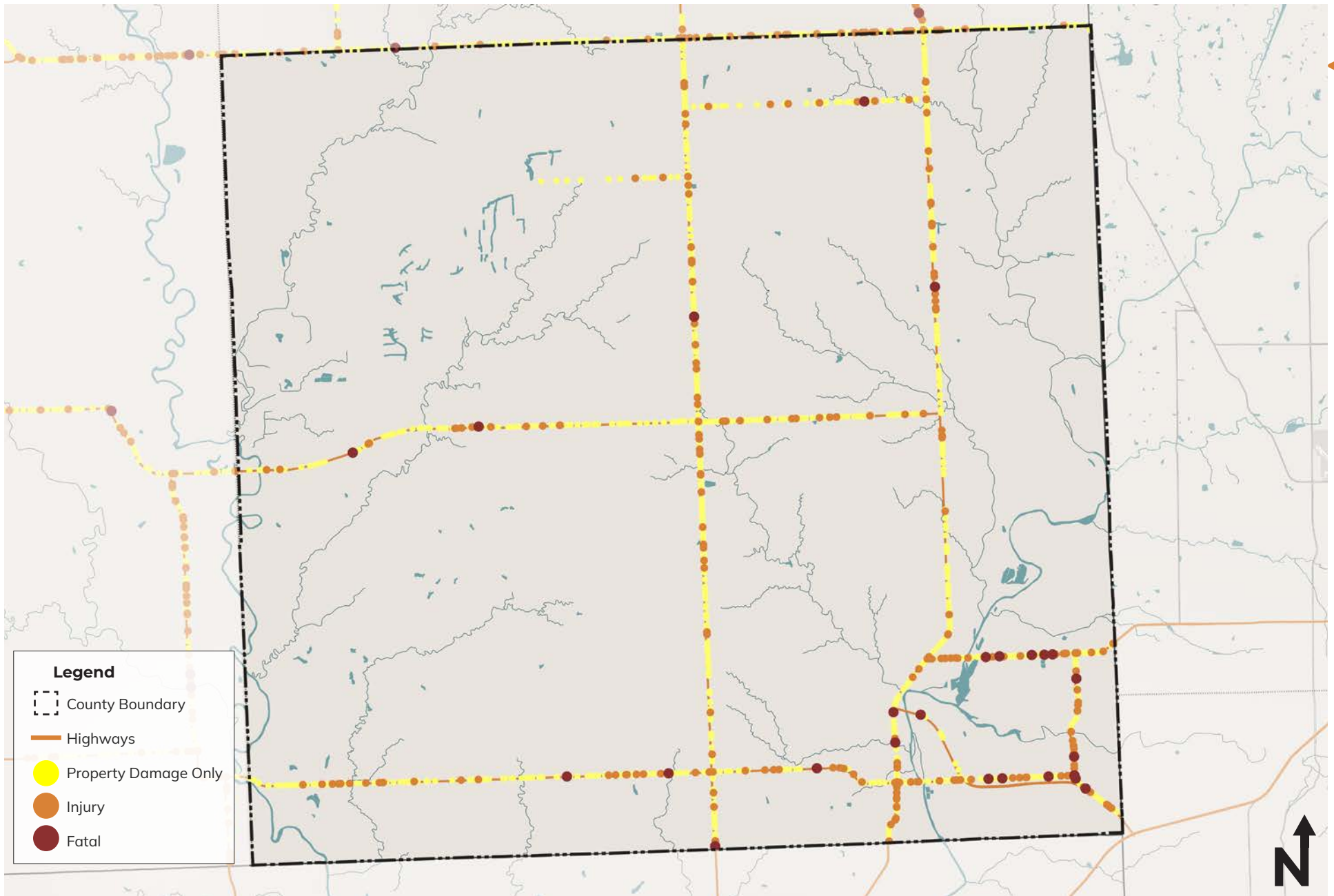


Figure 59: Crashes on State Highways

Source: Confluence with inputs from Kansas DOT



Chapter 6

Transportation

Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT)

Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) is a measure of how busy roads are. It is calculated by taking the total vehicle volume on a road over a year, and dividing by 365 days to provide an average of vehicle flow. This metric can aid decision-making about allocation of funding for maintenance and improvement of highways.

Roads near Baxter Springs and Columbus tend to be busier, with traffic for those cities, as well as close proximity to Joplin, Missouri.

What is Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)?

The average number of vehicles on a road per day over a year. This gives the average 24-hour traffic volume at a specific location over a full year.

AADT = Total Yearly Traffic on a Road / 365



Informs budgeting and prioritization of transportation budgets and projects



Helps retailers find high traffic locations



Used in accident analysis

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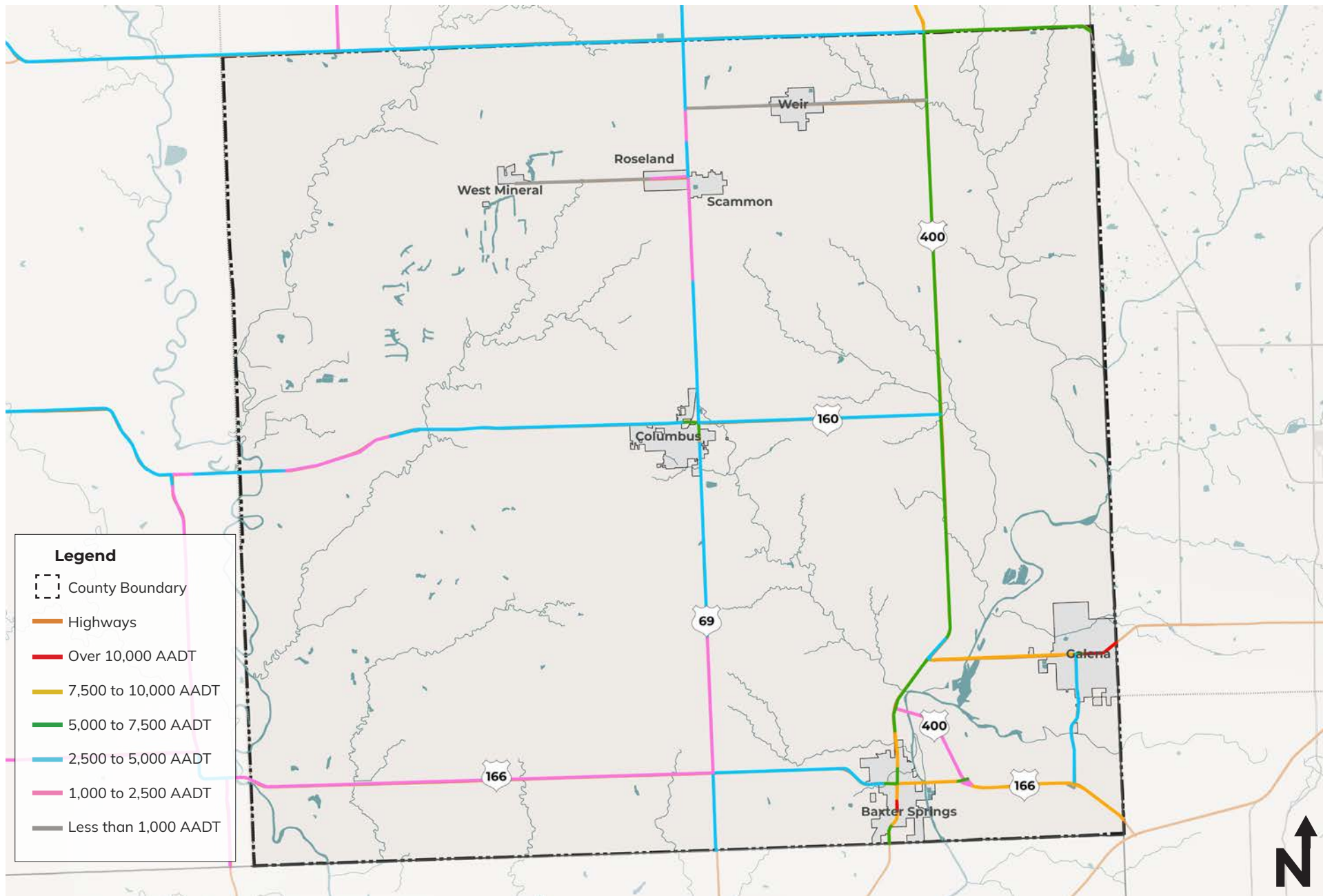


Figure 60: Average Annual Daily Traffic (2024)

Source: Confluence with inputs from Kansas DOT



Chapter 6

Transportation

Opportunities

The Kansas Department of Transportation offers many programs that assist with funding for enhancing transportation in Kansas. A few of the relevant programs are highlighted below.



Kansas Local Bridge Improvement Program

The Kansas Local Bridge Improvement Program provides funds to local public authorities for replacing or rehabilitating locally owned bridges with a National Bridge Inventory inspection rating of poor.



Highway Safety Improvement Program - High Risk Rural Road Program

This program is a federal-aid initiative aimed at enhancing safety and reducing crash rates on rural roads. It targets roads with crash rates higher than the statewide average or those with the potential to exceed this average. The funds can be used for safety improvements such as pavement markings, rumble strips, tree removal, enhanced signage, and roadside barrier improvements.

Scan this QR code to explore more KDOT programs



Off-System Bridge Program

The Off-System Bridge Program is a federal program that replaces or rehabilitates bridges located on roads that are not the federal-aid system. Eligible bridges must be located on a road functionally classified as a rural minor collector, rural road, or urban local and have a National Bridge Inventory inspection report rating of poor.

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Cost Share Program

The KDOT Cost Share Program provides financial assistance to local entities for transportation projects that improve safety, support job retention and growth, improve access or mobility, relieve congestion, and improve the state transportation system.



Economic Development Program

The KDOT Economic Development Program helps fund transportation improvements that attract new businesses to Kansas and support the growth of existing ones.



Surface Transportation Block Grant Program

This program provides flexible federal funding to preserve and improve the condition and performance of federal-aid highways; construction or rehabilitation of a bridge or tunnel on a public road; pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure; and transit capital projects.



FTA Section 5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas

The Federal Transit Administration Section 5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas provide funding to support transportation projects in rural and small urban areas (under a 50,000 population).



Chapter 7

Parks, Recreation, and Tourism

Overview

Cherokee County's parks, recreation, and tourism resources are valuable community assets that enhance quality of life, support public health and well-being, attract visitors, and contribute to the local economy. This chapter provides a comprehensive assessment of existing recreational infrastructure, natural areas, cultural sites, and tourism drivers, such as hunting. Its purpose is to guide investment, policy, and land use decisions that will ensure access to recreational opportunities and strengthen Cherokee County's identity as a vibrant destination for both community members and visitors.

Community Context

Cherokee County is defined by its blend of small-town communities, scenic natural landscapes, and history. Its parks and open spaces are not only important for daily recreation but also contribute to attracting visitors interested in hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and heritage tourism.

The county's outdoor recreation assets include state fishing lakes, wildlife areas, green spaces reclaimed from former industrial uses, and an abundance of publicly accessible hunting lands. These natural features serve both community members and tourists, reinforcing Cherokee County's reputation as an inviting destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

Parks and Recreation

Cherokee County has a rich cultural and industrial history rooted in coal mining and other industries dating back to the early 20th century. As a result, former coal mines and related sites are scattered throughout the county, many of which have since been reclaimed and transformed into lakes, nature preserves, or

informal recreation areas. These sites offer unique opportunities to blend recreation with education and heritage tourism. With thoughtful preservation, and access improvements, cultural sites can help community members understand Cherokee County's past while serving as meaningful recreational and learning spaces for current and future residents.

Culture, Natural Heritage, and Tourism

Identification of historical and ecological assets that contribute to recreational and tourism opportunities, including former mining landscapes, Route 66 heritage, wildlife areas, and state fishing lakes.

Together, these elements form a cohesive framework for guiding future public and private investments, coordinating land use decisions, and enhancing the county's overall recreational and economic vitality.

Location Advantage

Cherokee County's location to nearby metropolitan areas like Joplin, Missouri and Pittsburg, Kansas provides additional access to recreational amenities. These amenities do require vehicular travel to access and therefore limit overall levels of service. Developing strategies and long-term plans for regional recreational connectivity through bicycle and trail connections should be a goal of Cherokee County.



Recreation Access in Cherokee County

Cherokee County offers a range of recreational amenities that contribute to quality of life and support community health, tourism, and economic activity. The following paragraphs take into account parks and amenities located in incorporated and unincorporated Cherokee County. These amenities include city parks, destination parks, natural areas, greenways, and cultural sites that reflect the county's unique landscape and history.

Preserving quality amenities requires continued investment through maintenance, enhancement, and expansion of recreational access. This should remain a priority to ensure that community members of all ages and abilities can safely and equitably enjoy these resources.

City Parks

There are a mix of neighborhood, community, and special use parks located within incorporated limits of Cherokee County communities. Park amenities vary, with amenities generally including restrooms, picnic shelters, and sports fields. These facilities provide quick access to small and large scale parks to respond to level of service needs.

Destination Parks

Destination parks are recreational assets that attract visitors from across the region or state due to their natural beauty, recreational offerings, or unique character. In Cherokee County, parks such as Scherhorn Park serve this role by offering scenic landscapes and opportunities for outdoor recreation beyond what is typically

found in neighborhood parks. These parks have the potential to support tourism, local business activity, and regional identity. Strategic investments in trail systems, signage, amenities, and marketing could further strengthen their appeal while preserving their natural character.

Greenways and Natural Habitats

Cherokee County contains a variety of natural habitats, including forests, waterways, and reclaimed lands, that contribute to ecological health and outdoor recreation opportunities. Greenways and natural corridors can play an important role in connecting parks, neighborhoods, and destinations while supporting wildlife habitat and water quality. Expanding and formalizing greenway networks, including multi-use trails along rivers, streams, or former rail corridors and could improve non-motorized transportation options and provide additional recreational opportunities for walking, biking, and nature observation.



Figure 61: Former Strip Pit Mine



Chapter 7

Parks, Recreation, and Tourism

Wildlife Tourism Opportunities

Cherokee County is already recognized as a destination for recreational hunting and fishing, and these activities form a strong foundation for broader wildlife tourism. According to the Cherokee County Economic Development Office, the county's open spaces, lakes, and streams attract serious hunters and anglers from across the region. Deer, pheasant, and wild turkey are common game species pursued by visiting hunters, while bass, trout, walleye, and other sport fish thrive in local water bodies including reclaimed mining pits and natural streams.

These natural resources provide outdoor experiences that could be further packaged and promoted through targeted tourism initiatives, such as guided hunts, fishing tournaments, and seasonal angling festivals.

In addition to larger wildlife areas, smaller publicly accessible sites like Cherokee State Fishing Lake provide accessible angling and wildlife viewing close to communities. This 85-acre lake is managed for a variety of game fish (including largemouth bass, channel catfish, and crappie) and offers shoreline access that appeals to families and casual outdoor visitors. Local organizations such as the Cherokee County Sportsmen's Fish and Game Association also support community engagement in outdoor recreation, offering opportunities to promote safe, educational experiences related to hunting, fishing, and marksmanship, which in turn can feed into broader tourism programming.

Despite these assets, wildlife tourism in Cherokee County is not yet fully defined or integrated into regional tourism strategies. With the county already drawing thousands of visitors annually

for outdoor recreation and historic attractions like Route 66, strategic investment in wildlife tourism experiences could extend visitor stays and increase their economic impact. Examples include developing interpretive trails and wildlife viewing platforms around key habitats, enhancing signage and maps that connect public hunting and fishing areas to lodging and dining, and creating promotional campaigns that highlight seasonal hunting, bird migrations, and family-friendly fishing opportunities.

Current Wildlife Areas

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks manages several public wildlife areas in and around Cherokee County that supports diversity of wildlife and recreation amenities. In southeast Kansas alone, there is roughly 14,500 acres of these wildlife areas.

The Cherokee Lowlands Wildlife Area spans multiple tracts totaling over 2,500 acres along the Neosho River floodplain and supports waterfowl, white-tailed deer, eastern turkey, rabbit, dove, and other species, as well as fishing opportunities in Fly Creek and Cow Creek, and unique paddlefish snagging during season.

The map on the right shows parks and conservation areas throughout Cherokee County. These preserves are ideal for game hunting, fishing access, and general recreation access for Cherokee County Residents.



Former Strip Mines

Historically, Cherokee County was long at the heart of Southeast Kansas's mining boom, with rich deposits of coal, lead, and zinc drawing industrial activity from the late 19th century through much of the 20th century. Mining fueled the growth of towns like Galena and Baxter Springs and brought thousands of tons of ore to market. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency eventually designated much of the county as part of a Superfund cleanup site, with ongoing efforts to address lead, zinc, and cadmium contamination in soil and water.

As mining declined and eventually ended in the 1970s, large tracts of abandoned mining land in Cherokee County have transitioned towards natural reclamation and recreational use. A prime example is the Mined Land Wildlife Area, a 14,500-acre former strip mine landscape now managed by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, where hundreds of water-filled pits have become lakes stocked with fish and surrounded by native grasslands, forests, and wetlands that support diverse wildlife from deer and turkey to migratory waterfowl. Other state and local lands, including Spring River Wildlife Area and Scherhorn Park near Galena, provide habitat, hunting, fishing, hiking, and wildlife observation opportunities, helping to reclaim landscapes into the county's outdoor recreation network.

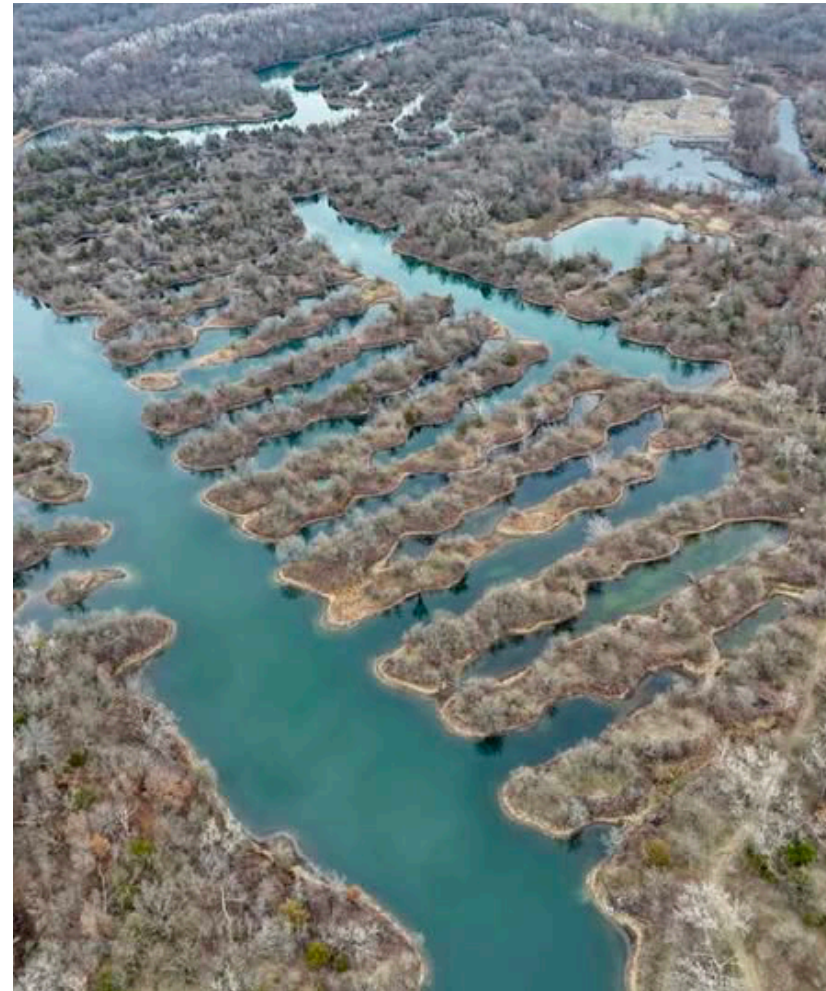


Figure 62: Former Strip Pit Mine

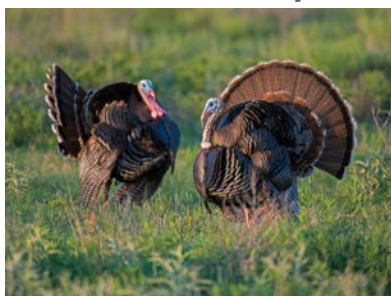


Parks, Recreation, and Tourism

Game Hunting in Cherokee County



Whitetail Deer



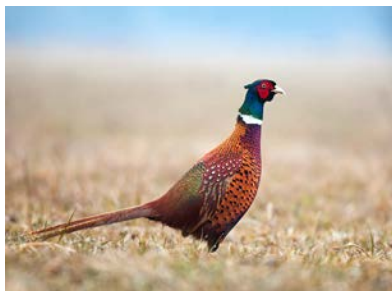
Eastern Turkey



Smallmouth Bass



Canadian Geese



Pheasant



Quail

Figure 63: Recreational Hunting Game in Cherokee County

Benefits of Wildlife Tourism

Recreational hunting is a significant economic and cultural asset in Cherokee County, supported by the county's diverse wildlife habitat. Expanding access to recreational hunting would further strengthen this asset by attracting additional visitors during peak hunting seasons. Increased participation supports local businesses such as lodging, restaurants, fuel, sporting goods retailers, and outfitters. Hunting-related travel also helps stabilize seasonal economies in rural areas by extending visitor activity beyond traditional summer tourism months.

Improved recreational hunting access can also contribute to broader land maintenance and conservation goals. Well-managed hunting areas encourage partnerships between public agencies, private landowners, and conservation organizations, promoting habitat enhancement, wildlife population management, and responsible land use practices. Increased access, when paired with clear regulations and education, can help balance wildlife populations, and support long-term ecosystem health. These outcomes align with countywide objectives related to sustainable land management and preservation of natural resources.

Supporting hunting access reinforces Cherokee County's rural identity and outdoor heritage while creating opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with the landscape in meaningful ways. Hunting access can be integrated with other recreational uses, such as wildlife viewing and trail systems, to create multi-purpose outdoor destinations. By expanding and managing recreational hunting opportunities, Cherokee County can enhance quality of life, support economic resilience, and position itself as a regional destination for outdoor recreation rooted in conservation and tradition.

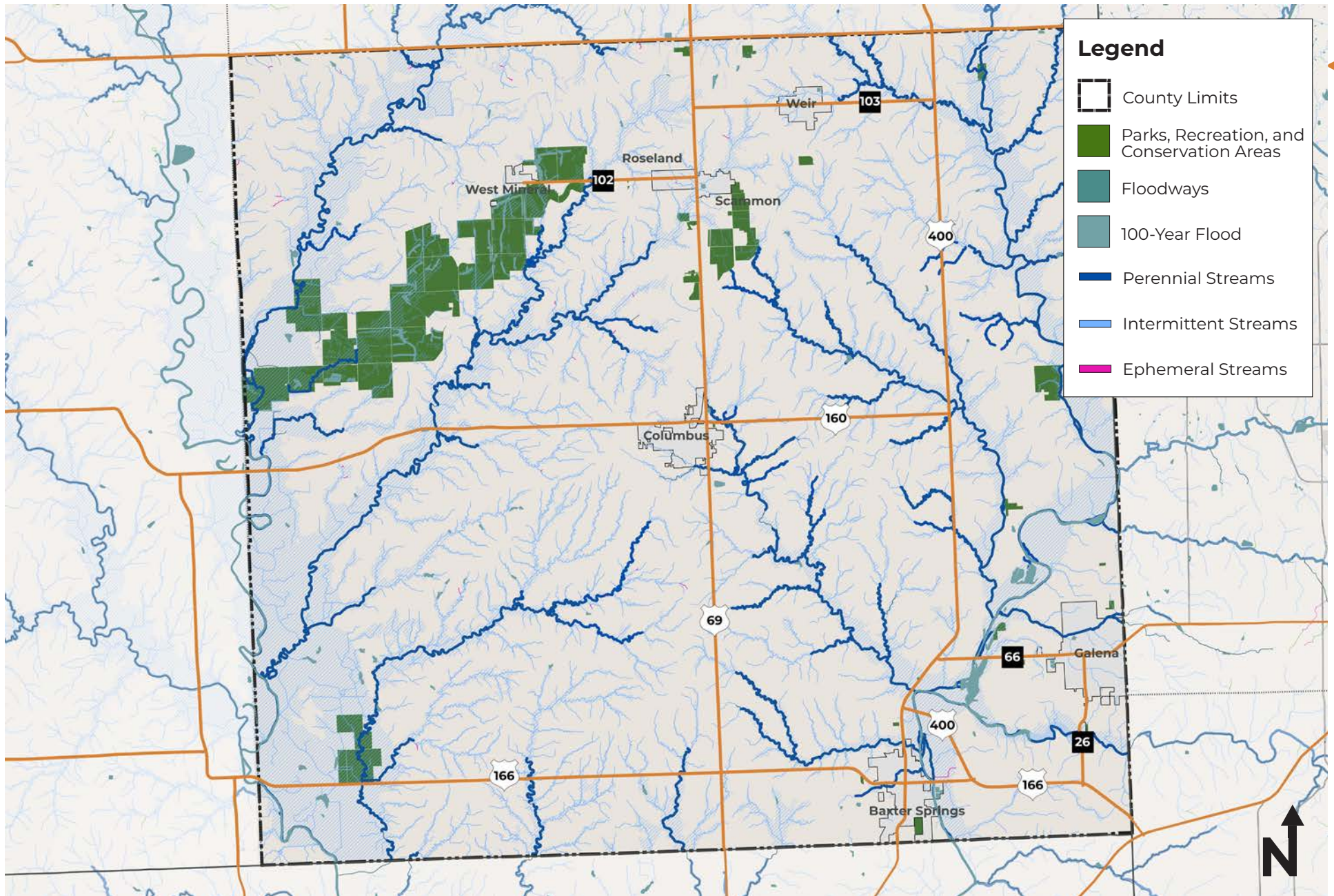


Figure 64: Conservation Areas including Streams and Floodways

Source: Confluence, with inputs from Cherokee County



Chapter 7

Parks, Recreation, and Tourism

Bicycle Infrastructure

Existing Trails

Current Local Bicycle Infrastructure within Cherokee County itself is generally sparse and not well connected. These paths are typically on former railroad rights-of-way or local trail segments, but they don't yet form an extensive county-wide network and often serve more as local recreation corridors rather than a connected system for commuting or longer bike travel.

The Kansas Active Transportation Plan also highlights goals and toolkits for expanding safe cycling and walking infrastructure statewide, emphasizing support for communities of various sizes and planning resources that help local areas implement bike facilities. While this statewide framework exists, its practical implementation in Southeast Kansas remains modest so far, and Cherokee County's trail network is not yet well integrated into these larger regional or state-level bicycle systems.

Benefits of Bicycle Infrastructure Access



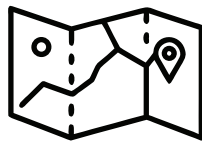
Public Health



Social Aspects



Alternative Method of Transportation



Tourism Draw

Route 66 Context

Cherokee County has a unique opportunity to capitalize on regional and statewide attraction to Historic Route 66 Highway stretching from Joplin, Missouri to Riverton, Kansas, a span of about 11 miles. Route 66 is an iconic U.S. highway established in 1926 connecting Chicago to Los Angeles.

While parts of this road network are decommissioned, Cherokee County is home to the only segment of Route 66 in Kansas. This section of highway helps further Cherokee County's draw, particularly if the recreational and biking opportunities are utilized. This area can serve not only bicycle recreation, but history and transit enthusiasts as well.

Cherokee County presently has signage, and decorative aspects paying homage to Route 66's history, but furthering activities, opportunities, and access to this historic network can help Cherokee County further its tourism draw. There is currently no bicycle infrastructure along Route 66 between Joplin and Riverton, representing an opportunity for the county.



Figure 65: Route 66 from Chicago to Los Angeles

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Biking Across Kansas 2026 Route

Biking Across Kansas is an annual, non-competitive bicycle tour that has attracted visitors and cycling enthusiasts to the state for more than half a century. Founded in 1974, the event emphasizes community connection, outdoor recreation, and benefits to the local small-town economies. Each year, hundreds of riders travel through communities, creating a unique opportunity for local interaction and nationwide visibility.

The 2026 Biking Across Kansas is scheduled to pass through Baxter Springs and along a stretch of the Historic Route 66 corridor. The event provides economic benefits to Baxter Springs and local communities along the route through demand for lodging, dining, fuel, and services. These short-term visits help support local businesses while showcasing community amenities, trails, parks, and cultural assets.

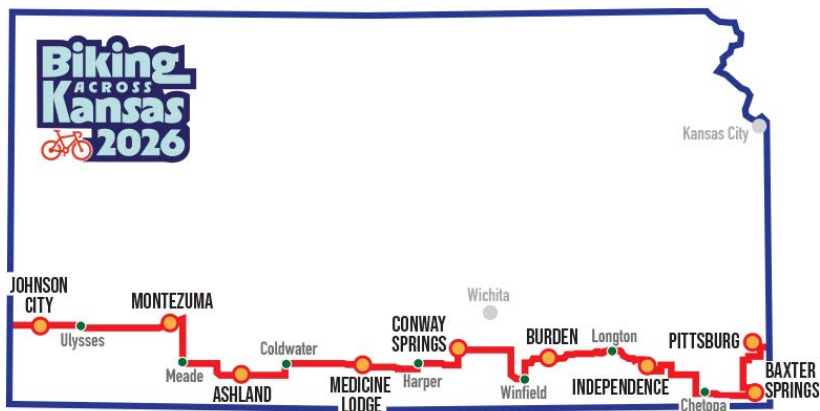


Figure 66: Biking Across Kansas 2026 Route

Regional tourism events such as Biking Across Kansas support Cherokee County's broader goals of attracting visitors, promoting recreation, and enhancing quality of life. By continuing to market and invest in tourism and recreational amenities, Cherokee County can strengthen its position as a hub for outdoor activity and heritage tourism that lines up with long-term tourism goals. These sort of organizations will help Cherokee County stand out as model county for recreational draw relating to historic ties and access to bicycle infrastructure.



Figure 67: Historic Photo of Biking Across Kansas 1975 Group



Chapter 7

Parks, Recreation, and Tourism

Rails to Trails Opportunities

At the state level, Kansas has been actively developing rail-to-trail projects and updating its active transportation planning to support cycling and walking. Across Kansas, there are over 250 miles of completed rail-trails, with more in planning and development through organizations like the Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy and the state's Active Transportation Plan. These longer rails-to-trails projects, such as the Prairie Spirit Trail and Flint Hills Trail, provide significant cycling resources elsewhere in the state, but none currently extend directly into Cherokee County's main population centers.

Nearly every town in Cherokee County is serviced by railroads, which are either currently or formerly in use. Railroads that see little to no use would be good candidates for Rails to Trails conversion.

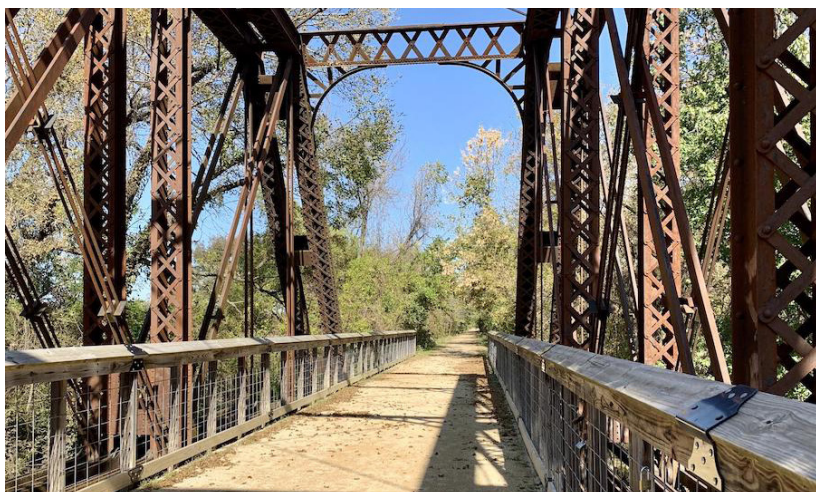


Figure 68: Converted Train Bridge

Southwind Rail Trail Case Study

Rails to Trails programs are a great way to create regional draw, promote healthy lifestyles, and utilize underused land with a positive community impact. Opened in 2013, the Southwind Rail Trail was built on an underutilized railroad corridor. Today, the system connects Iola to Humboldt, about a 10-mile trek. The Southwind Rail Trail system is an extension of the Prairie Spirit Trail system that accounts for about 55 miles of a converted railroad network between Ottawa and Iola, passing through several small towns along the route.

Cherokee County can utilize programs like Rails to Trails to better connect itself with surrounding communities and create a regional draw to the county.



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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan

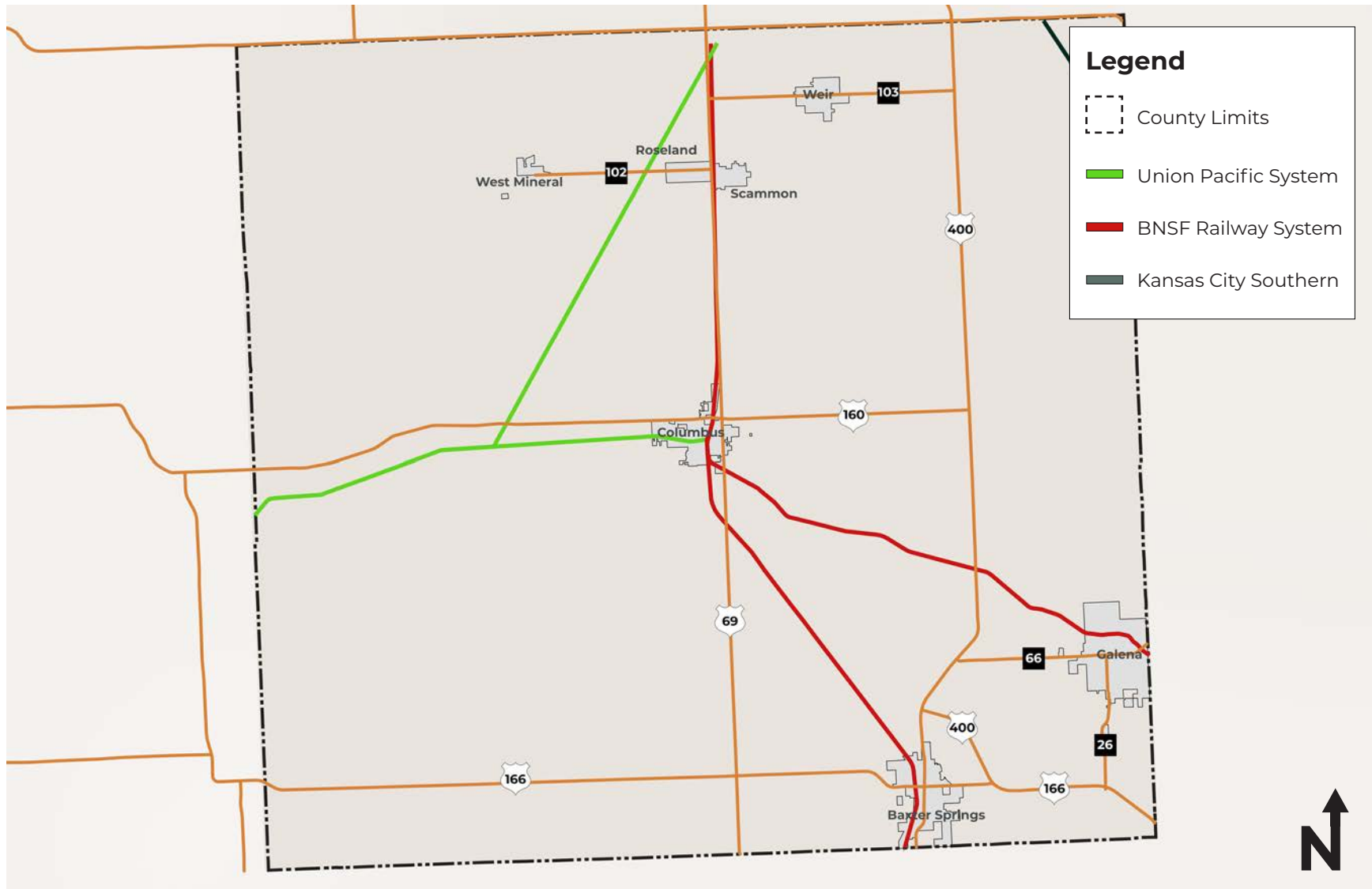


Figure 69: Railroad Infrastructure in Cherokee County

Source: Confluence, with inputs from Kansas Department of Transportation



Chapter 8

Recommendations

Recommendations for Cherokee County

The Future Land Use chapter included a series of observations and recommendations for Cherokee County to consider for future implementation. These recommendations, and those found in subsequent core chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, are summarized in tables at the end of each chapter. A key for these tables and how to use them is provided below.

Goal #1 A goal is a broad statement in which the County should aim to achieve.		
		Key Guiding Principle(s)
Strategy XX-1.1	Strategies are steps or guidelines the County should work to implement to support the Key Guiding Principles identified from the Chapter 3: Public Input Summary. Strategies are categorized by chapter title and sequentially numbered in order of chapter appearance. <i>Ex: LU-4.1= Chapter 4. Future Land Use, Strategy 1.</i>	Key Guiding Principles were identified from the results of the public input gathered in Phase 2. These principles and the key for each category are detailed more in Chapter 3: Public Input Summary.

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Goal #1 Cherokee County should support future growth and development through best practices and strategic planning.		
		Key Guiding Principle(s)
Strategy LU-4.1	Maintain the County's agriculture character through the preservation of agriculture and open space and parks and conservation land as identified in the Future Land Use Map.	PL-1; PL-2; PL-3; PL-4; PL-5
Strategy LU-4.2	Discourage the construction of housing or businesses within the floodplain and floodway to limit potential losses from flooding.	QL-2; QL-4
Strategy LU-4.3	Enforce the floodplain development ordinance to limit development within the floodplain and floodway.	QL-3; QL-4; PA-1
Strategy LU-4.4	Consider the development and adoption of a zoning code to address potential high impact land uses as identified within this Plan.	QL-1; QL-2; QL-3; QL-5; PL-1; PL-2; PL-3; PL-4; PL-5
Strategy LU-4.5	Limit potential negative conflicts with high impact land uses by following the buffering recommendations in Figure 48.	PL-5
Strategy LU-4.6	Utilize the Future Land Use Map to help guide the location of new development in Cherokee County.	QL-1; QL-2; QL-3; QL-5; PL-1; PL-2; PL-3; PL-4; PL-5
Strategy LU-4.7	Adopt subdivision regulations to guide the platting of land in unincorporated Cherokee County.	QL-1; QL-2; QL-3; QL-5; PL-1; PL-2
Strategy LU-4.8	Support residential development near existing developed areas that can be adequately serviced by infrastructure and utilities to preserve agricultural land.	PL-2



Chapter 8

Recommendations

Goal #2 Cherokee County should address the potential impacts of utility-scale wind and solar energy along with other high impact land uses.		Key Guiding Principle(s)
Strategy RE-4.1	Consider the development and adoption of a zoning code to provide guidelines and regulations tied to the location, operation, and other related factors associated with utility-scale wind and/or solar energy uses and other high impact land uses.	PL-3; PL-4; PL-5
Strategy RE-4.2	Require a detailed decommissioning plan and agreement to ensure there are proper next steps outlined for the decommissioning and closing of high impact land uses including utility-scale wind and solar energy.	PL-3; PL-4; PL-5

Goal #3 Cherokee County should continue to support quality infrastructure and roadways.		Key Guiding Principle(s)
Strategy T-4.1	Explore rural-specific funding opportunities to help support the costs for transportation-related improvements, such as the FTA Section 5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas.	QL-1; QL-2; BD-2
Strategy T-4.2	Continue to contact the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) to seek opportunities for safety and transportation improvements on roadways owned and operated by the KDOT.	QL-1; QL-2; BD-2

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Cherokee County Comprehensive Plan



Goal #4 Cherokee County should continue to support and expand opportunities for parks, recreation and tourism.		
		Key Guiding Principle(s)
Strategy PT-4.1	Identify opportunities to share resources with the incorporated communities. These could include shared sheriff/police services, infrastructure to support new business development, or parks and recreation facility maintenance and operations.	QL-1; BD-1;BD-2; BD-3; BD-4
Strategy PT-4.2	Continue to work with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to support the natural and conservation spaces located in Cherokee County.	QL-1; QL-2; QL-3; QL-4
Strategy PT-4.3	Explore feasibility for the development of Rails to Trails or general trail locations in Cherokee County. As part of this feasibility assessment, identify preliminary funding mechanisms and potential joint partnerships for the construction of these facilities.	QL-1; BD-1;BD-2; BD-3; BD-4
Strategy PT-4.4	Reengage the Economic Development Corporation to help draw in economic development uses to Cherokee County. The Committee should consider tasks and responsibilities to secure resources for grant writing support, historians and narratives related to the county's history, and other important skills to apply for and obtain funding and support.	QL-1; BD-1;BD-2; BD-3; BD-4
Strategy PT-4.5	Continue to highlight business opportunities along Route 66 as part of tourism and economic development in Cherokee County. This could include a map of business vacancies, incentives for facade improvement programs, and local business support to support a healthy and significant corridor in the county.	QL-1; BD-1;BD-2; BD-3; BD-4

