

# Johnson County Citizens' Visioning Committee (JCCVC) Final Report

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# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Johnson County Citizens' Visioning Committee (JCCVC) was appointed in January 1996 by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) to develop a 20-year vision for Johnson County and to recommend a future role for County government. The JCCVC is composed of 23 members, representing a broad range of constituent groups and geographic areas of the county. A listing of members appears on page 17. The JCCVC met on a biweekly basis from January 1996 through mid-July 1997. Our process included three phases:

1. Exploration: In this first phase, the Committee studied the history of the county, the current role and functions of County government, and surveyed their constituent groups to identify and prioritize key issues.
2. Analysis: In the second phase, the Committee invited panels of experts with different perspectives on each issue to present information and engage in dialogues. An "issue analysis model" was used to ensure uniformity in the approach to each issue. Preliminary recommendations around a desired future and County government role were developed as each issue was completed.
3. Synthesis: In the final phase, the Committee conducted a citizen survey, involving over 1000 households, to elicit public opinion on these issues, as well as an overall vision for the county and its government. Two community forums were also held to expand citizen input. Finally, the Committee spent several months synthesizing the work of all three phases into a final report.

This report is divided into four sections plus an Appendix:

- I. This Executive Summary presents summaries of the overall vision and ten issues, including guiding principles and recommendations for action and follow up.
- II. The JCCVC Process describes the three phases in more detail, including key findings from the citizen survey.
- III. Future Trends summarizes demographic, economic, technologic and lifestyle trends for the future.
- IV. Issues Analysis provides a more in-depth look at each issue and the rationale behind the Committee's recommendations.

## **A. JOHNSON COUNTY IN 2020**

### VISION

In 2020, Johnson County is a vibrant community with a national reputation for excellence. Despite the aging of its population and infrastructure, the county has preserved and enhanced its quality of life, as measured by ten key indicators. The county is a safe and attractive residential and business community sheltered by ample green space and providing excellent educational and cultural opportunities. Bold initiatives have revitalized older areas of the county, ensured orderly growth, linked the county through a multi-modal public transportation system, and fostered a premier community arts center and cultural foundation. Human service needs are addressed through innovative partnerships with the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors and a resurgence of volunteerism. The county is a strong partner in metropolitan initiatives focusing on the environment, transportation and economic development. Responsible yet creative financing approaches and a consistently healthy economy have enabled Johnson County to earn its reputation for "affordable excellence."

Twenty years of cooperative, innovative and visionary leadership have earned the governments of the county respect as trustworthy communicators and policy advocates. To facilitate consistent leadership, county government abandoned its rotating chair of the BOCC in lieu of a single full-term chairperson. Through fidelity to its vision and guiding principles, the County has followed an ongoing course to excellence, grounded in the strengths of the past and present but reaching for an even brighter future.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The county must continue to evaluate the form of its government to assure that its governance provides the leadership necessary to achieve its vision, both within the county and throughout the region. County leadership is recognized as a significant contributor to "the good life" in 2020 through service as a convener of and catalyst for important issue identification and resolution within the county and region. This leadership is characterized by three principles: stewardship, visionary thinking and dynamic action. The BOCC monitors the quality of life indicators in collaboration with the cities, school districts, business community and not-for-profit sector and initiates corrective actions as necessary to maintain the county's excellence. The county will be recognized for its commitment to the delivery of its services efficiently and economically.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Restructure the BOCC to enhance the opportunities for county leadership that will be necessary to achieve this vision for the future. Among changes that must be considered are the at-large selection of at least one county commissioner; selection of the chairperson (possibly by direct election of the

voters) who will serve a full term as chair; and the abandonment of the annual rotation of the chair among the members of the BOCC.

2. A key element of county leadership includes education of the public about the critical importance of continuing investment in our schools, county infrastructure, human services and amenities.
3. The County must consider and compare the respective merits and costs of private vs. public service providers, and utilize the form that can best and most reasonably deliver the service.

## **B. EDUCATION**

### DEFINITION

Education includes the formal processes for grades K-12 and post-secondary students in private/parochial and public institutions, as well as opportunities for lifelong learning for all county citizens.

### VISION

By 2020, our public school systems have maintained their excellence and responded innovatively to changing times, building partnerships with local communities to better utilize school buildings and meet citizens' needs. The Johnson County Community College (which has remained autonomous), University of Kansas Regents Center and other institutions of higher learning have expanded through private funding, offering continuing education to the growing population and effectively serving business needs for a highly educated workforce. An integrated education/technical training system offers lifelong learning opportunities to everyone.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLE

While County government should not have a direct role in the education system, it should be supportive of efforts to maintain and enhance quality.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Participate in and support initiatives that enhance quality public education.
2. Encourage renovation and rebuilding of public schools in older neighborhoods.
3. Stimulate shared use of facilities among schools, local governments and businesses through planning and zoning policies.

4. Encourage continued dialogue among all educational institutions to ensure that lifelong learning opportunities are readily available to all citizens.
5. Support development of a coalition of education/training institutes to coordinate workforce needs.

## **C. PUBLIC SAFETY**

### DEFINITION

Public safety is the ability of citizens and their families to be secure in their persons and property and to have readily available state-of-the-art emergency services.

### VISION

By 2020, prevention, early intervention and a zero tolerance attitude toward criminal behavior have pushed crime, abuse and violence to a record low. Communications and cooperation among law enforcement and public safety agencies throughout the metropolitan area maintain a safer environment for all citizens. A highly coordinated community based network provides education and support services to families and children. Neighborhood community policing with supportive emergency services is the norm.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The County provides leadership for cooperation among law enforcement/public safety agencies, encourages increased prevention and early intervention efforts for families and children in the public and private sectors, and educates the public on crime and safety issues, building support for neighborhood involvement and maintenance/restoration of older areas.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Appoint a task force to study the further consolidation of county fire/EMS districts and resource sharing among public safety agencies.
2. Develop a computer system in cooperation with the cities to track individuals, particularly juveniles, entering the system and the services provided to them.
3. Encourage the cities to create an inter-city council of neighborhoods and neighborhood resource centers to support revitalization and redevelopment.

4. Expand the County's capabilities to provide cost-effective alternatives to incarceration.
5. Initiate countywide prevention and education programs to help reduce crime and the need for additional jails.
6. Ensure that state-of-the-art communications systems are available for all public safety agencies within the county.

## **D. LAND USE**

### DEFINITION

Land use is the blueprint for the way we will use our real property.

### VISION

By 2020, the hallmark of the County's stewardship of the land is well-managed growth and development coordinated with adjoining cities and supported by adequate infrastructure and open space. The County's long-term comprehensive plan has been implemented through the consistent and creative application of land use and subdivision regulations.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The County must consistently and carefully weigh the merits of each individual land use proposal to decide whether it is consistent with the County's land use plan and Zoning and Subdivision Regulations. The Commission should support development which is consistent with the comprehensive plan and Zoning and Subdivision Regulations.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Consolidate zoning boards to ensure consistent land use decisions across the unincorporated area.
2. Maintain and reinforce cooperation and collaboration on land use planning among all county jurisdictions.
3. Enhance the capabilities and resources of the professional staff to assure the best possible technical analysis of zoning and planning issues as well as consistent and timely code enforcement.

4. Mandate regular updates to the County's comprehensive plan and zoning regulations, supported by independent review and with consideration of national trends.
5. Encourage innovative land use design by developers and planners consistent with the comprehensive plan.
6. Ensure a fair and consistent balance between future development and the creation and preservation of open spaces, parks and recreation areas, and agriculture.

## **E. TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

### DEFINITION

Transportation and infrastructure include the systems which support the development and efficient operations of the county, including highways, roads, bridges, airports, public transit, water, sanitary and storm sewers.

### VISION

By 2020 the county's excellent transportation system stands out as one of the cornerstones of its continued economic growth and high quality of life. The K-7/K-10 corridors have provided a relief valve for Interstate 35, and the county has developed an east-west corridor connecting southern and western areas with Missouri and other parts of the region. The county's transit system has been developed in partnership with local businesses to connect workers with jobs, and commuter rail is operating between the county and the metro area.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The County should address capacity needs by upgrading its existing road system and ensuring that adequate funding is provided. Public multi-modal transportation system should be developed in response to business and public needs. The County needs to accommodate new development while continuing to upgrade existing infrastructure to head off decays of its older areas.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Continue the current CARS (County Assisted Road System) program, with funding directed toward roads and bridges, to include sidewalks and bike paths associated with such road and bridge projects.
2. Use CARS as a model for other projects such as public transportation/rail.
3. Take leadership in advancing a multi-modal public transportation system.
4. Accommodate increasing traffic demand throughout the county, utilizing, improving and extending the existing arterial system as much as possible and specifically recognizing the potential of the New Century Air Center as an important multi-modal transportation and intermodal freight hub.
5. Partner with cities to upgrade/maintain infrastructure.

## **F. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### DEFINITION

Economic development provides support for the growth and expansion of business, residential and public activities throughout the county and supports growth in the county's tax base.

### VISION

By 2020, substantial growth and innovative planning have enhanced our high quality of life. All areas have shared in the county's prosperity. Development to the south and west has been paced so infrastructure and government services have been maintained at a desirable level. Redevelopment and revitalization have ensured the continued attractiveness of older areas of the county.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The County can spend minimum time/money and take a secondary, yet supportive role because economic development efforts are being handled well by city and regional entities and various chambers of commerce.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Study the feasibility of disproportionate tax incentives or infrastructure spending to foster new development of older areas to maintain their desirability as places to live and work.

2. Support economic forecast and other programs that foster development of technology and industry.
3. Utilize the assets at New Century and Executive Airports to their full potential, with a particular focus on New Century as a full-feature airport and business center.

## **G. NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT**

### DEFINITION

Our natural resources include air, water, wildlife, trees, land and energy sources. Our environment is affected by our energy and resource use, and our resulting pollution and waste.

### VISION

By 2020, natural greenspace and wildlife habitats are valued and protected. Our parkland has increased, and we have multi-modal transportation options, including bike and pedestrian paths. We control run-off into our waterways to help ensure good water quality. While the percentage of farmland has decreased, we view it as a valuable natural resource.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The County should encourage environmental stewardship of our land and natural resources through role modeling, environmental advocacy and public education.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Acquire more parkland and plan for greenspace and recreational resources such as biking/hiking trails in advance of development.
2. Create an Environmental Advisory Council to bring citizens and staff together in support of a long-term view of environmental issues impacting the county.
3. Encourage greater cooperation among the Johnson County Conservation District, the Environmental Department and the Cooperative Extension Service to place more emphasis on environmental education.
4. Take a leadership role in state and metropolitan environmental initiatives.

## **H. HUMAN SERVICES**

### DEFINITION

Human services include activities and services, formal and informal, designed to protect, promote and restore the well-being of individuals throughout the life span.

### VISION

By 2020, the county has an integrated human service delivery system designed and supported through proactive, collaborative planning among the public, private and voluntary sectors. Prevention and early intervention are emphasized to build strong families, support success for children and teens, sustain lifelong health and independence, and promote self-sufficiency.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

County government's priority is the provision and funding of essential services to those residents who are financially unable to secure them elsewhere, and to provide those essential services not available through other resources. County government is the conduit for federal and state dollars devolving to local communities, but the County should determine the most efficient and effective method of service delivery. The County must constantly reevaluate its role in light of changing federal and state policy.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Encourage the business community to invest in workplace benefits such as health insurance, child and elder care, as well as encouraging employees to volunteer time in their home communities.
2. Place increasing priority on prevention and early intervention services to curb crime and reduce the need for other services.
3. Initiate a formal review of County-delivered services to eliminate and revise services which duplicate other efforts.
4. Plan with the voluntary and private sectors for the changing needs of older adults in response to their growing percentage within the county population.

## I. CULTURE, ARTS AND HUMANITIES

### DEFINITION

Culture includes performing and visual arts, events and informational resources which define and celebrate the community's shared values.

### VISION

By 2020, Johnson County will be the site of a premier community arts center, which hosts local, regional, national and international arts performances, in addition to community forums, festivals and other cultural events, and which complements other county and metropolitan facilities. The facility will be the central focus of a restaurant/retail area complementing the arts center. The center will be a defining symbol of the Johnson County community.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The County should take a leadership role in establishing a cultural arts foundation, which would support not only the arts center, but also underwrite local arts and humanities groups. The foundation would be a private/public partnership with strong support from the private sector and business community.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Convene private sector leaders within the metro arts and business communities to explore the concept of a cultural arts foundation.
2. Work in collaboration with major arts organizations in the metropolitan area to minimize duplication while improving access to cultural events for Johnson County residents.
3. Support and enhance the continued excellence of the County's libraries and museums consistent with the growth and evolving needs of our citizens.

## **J. COUNTY RELATIONSHIPS**

### DEFINITION

County relationships cover the interaction of County government with county leaders, residents, taxpayers and other governmental entities, including municipalities, neighboring counties and the state.

### VISION

By 2020, interaction between the County and other parts of the metropolitan area has greatly increased. The County is a leader in forming metropolitan-wide efforts to address metropolitan and regional issues. The County serves as a convener of Johnson County municipalities to address local issues and enjoys good working relationships with cities and counties throughout the metropolitan area.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The County should make decisions with awareness of their impacts and consequences on other parts of the metropolitan area. The County should lead in forming cooperative efforts among municipalities to address county wide issues. The County should build stronger relationships with Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Convene a council of city and county elected officials and appointed board members to discuss implementation of the vision.
2. Increase the involvement of both the Commission and County staff in metropolitan initiatives.
3. Continue to demonstrate strong county leadership in MARC.
4. Initiate an annual Hands Across the Metro forum to discuss metropolitan issues.

## **K. FINANCING AND TAXATION**

### DEFINITION

Financing and taxation include the means by which the County supports its infrastructure, services to citizens and provides efficient administration.

## VISION

By 2020, Johnson County has maintained and improved its older infrastructure while continuing to support new development. Through a bond-financing plan, the County has remained ahead of capital needs, resulting in increased property values, fewer social problems and lower costs. The ad valorem tax is now a less important revenue source, with fees for value-added services and user fees representing the highest percentage of revenue. The citizens voted a major infrastructure bond issue supporting hundreds of miles of improvements and paid it off in seven years.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The County leadership should be vigilant to prevent administrative bureaucracy. The County should recognize the immediate social and economic savings by stopping infrastructure decay now as opposed to spreading the costs over the next decade. The County should provide leadership modeled after the CARS program in addressing infrastructure improvements. A cooperative venture with cities should be created, enabling them to have larger projects. The County would use its debt limit so that the cost of the projects would not break the cities' debt lids. The cities would pay their pro rata share of the debt service. The County should also take initiative in working with our legislative delegation to ensure that we contribute a fair, but not excessive, share to state revenues and to participate in designing a more contemporary taxation system.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Study financial budgets and staffing on a periodic basis to prevent layering bureaucratic creep. This review should seek to justify the appropriateness and benefits for personnel every five years.
2. Advance a bond issue, if necessary, funded by a specifically dedicated tax to boldly prevent the decline of the county's older infrastructure. The County would serve as the catalyst for this initiative, which would require matching funds from cities and/or property owners.
3. Appoint a blue-ribbon panel by July 1, 1998, to recommend criteria for city/county infrastructure improvements and financing methods.
4. Publish the County financial statement annually, including a brief summary of revenues, expenses, cash flows, number of full and part-time staff, and the year-end population of the county, as well as a comparison to previous years.

## **L. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOWUP**

The Committee recommends the following steps be taken to ensure timely communications and follow-up to this report:

1. Establish a timeline for implementing recommendations within six months, in collaboration with County staff.
2. Work with the County Economic Research Institute (CERI) to establish indicators for the ten priority issues which should then be monitored by the BOCC on an ongoing basis.
3. Publish regular follow-up reports to the Committee and to the public, on a quarterly basis for the first year and annually thereafter.
4. Reconvene the Visioning Committee within the first six months and annually thereafter to discuss progress toward implementing the vision.
5. Make copies of the full report available to the public through County offices and libraries.
6. Continue the citizen survey on a regular basis to ensure ongoing public input into the long-range plans of the county.

## **II. THE JCCVC PROCESS**

### **A. Purpose of the Citizens' Visioning Committee**

The Board of County Commissioners appointed the Citizens' Visioning Committee in January 1996. Its purpose is to develop a 20-year vision for Johnson County and to recommend the future role of County government in achieving this vision. In carrying out this charge, the Committee followed these guidelines:

The timeframe was extended to the year 2020, slightly longer than the 20-year horizon originally suggested. The vision and priority issues address the county (lower-case "c") as a whole; however, they specifically focus on the role and actions of County (upper-case "C") government. Many of the recommendations suggest the involvement of other segments of the community, notably city governments, businesses and the not-for-profit sector. It is the Committee's hope that all of these segments work together toward the vision for 2020.

## B. Committee Membership

The Committee is composed of the following 23 members representing diverse constituent groups and geographic areas of the county.

Dwight Arn Fourth District	Gail Redmond Chambers of Commerce	Chuck Battey First District
Gus Ramirez Johnson County Community College	Clay Blair Commercial Development	Rod Richardson Third District
Pete Bunn Homes Associations	Paul Robben Homebuilders Association	Steve Byram Fifth District
Fred Schmidt Second District	Dave Davis Persons with Disabilities	Doug Smith County Management Team
Ed DeSoignie Heavy Constructors	Diane Stewart Sierra Club	Katie Hoffman Planning Commission
Myrna Stringer League of Women Voters	Barbara Neufeld Older Adults	Paul Styers Taxpayers Association
Dr. Marilyn Layman Education	Joan Wendel Northeast Development & Retention Council	Carl McCaffree Arts and Humanities
Karen Wulfkuhle Social Services	Ed Peterson Council of Mayors	

## **C. Process Description**

The Committee followed a three-phase process in its 18 months of deliberations, as depicted in the following diagram. Key activities in each phase were:

### **D. Phase 1: Exploration**

- An overview of the county and the current role of County government, provided by a series of panels with County administration representatives
- Preliminary visioning exercises to identify members' individual ideas about the desired future of the county
- A series of panels with "past visionaries" about the development of the county to date, and with media representatives to provide a broad overview
- An identification of critical issues for the future

### **E. Phase 2: Analysis**

- A constituent survey to prioritize issues, resulting in the selection of the ten issues presented in this report
- Adoption of an issue analysis model, depicted in the second diagram, to ensure uniformity in the analysis of each issue
- In-depth analysis, utilizing panels of experts representing diverse perspectives on each issue
- Supplementary materials, including articles, key data and written input from additional experts

### **F. Phase 3: Synthesis**

A citizen survey of 1,088 households by mail and telephone to obtain public input on the issues, perceptions and ideas about the future. Findings from the survey are presented within each issue analysis in Section IV, and a full report is contained in the Appendix.

Two community forums, held at Corinth Elementary School (northeast) and Olathe South High School (southwest), to elicit additional public opinion. The forums were publicized in the print and electronic media and through brochures distributed to over 300 community leaders and constituent groups. Sixteen citizens participated in the forums.

After the survey and forums were completed, the Committee spent its final months synthesizing its recommendations. This phase affirmed the observation throughout the process that the issues are highly interdependent, and that there are central themes woven among them. The next two sections set a future context for the county and then explore the priority issues in depth.

### **III. FUTURE TRENDS: Johnson County in 2020**

#### **A. Demographic Trends**

The population of Johnson County in the year 2020 is projected to be 525,000 to 600,000. Even at a population of 600,000, the rate of growth from 2000 to 2020 will be slower than in the previous 20 years from 1980 to 2000. The population center will continue to move southward, with 52 percent of residents living in the northeast, compared to 68 percent today.

By 2020, one in seven county residents will be 65 or over. There is anticipated growth in the non-white population, including an increasing number of immigrants, both legal and illegal. Almost half the county's households will be "upper income" (\$50,000+), but there is a projected decline in middle-income households and accompanying growth in lower income households.

These projections point to a larger, older and more diverse population, both socioeconomically and ethnically, in the year 2020.

#### **B. Economic, Technology and Lifestyle Trends**

Johnson Countians, like most Americans, will experience significant changes in the way we work, play and live by the year 2020. Here are eight trends likely to impact our county:

1. **Geographic Flexibility:** Technology will allow more of us to live where we want, and to work from home rather than commute. Quality of life will become a greater determinant of where we live, providing an advantage to communities with desirable amenities.
2. **Technological Options:** Increasingly sophisticated and accessible technology will allow us to do almost everything without leaving home. While some futurists predict greater isolation and the decline of retail stores, others believe people will still seek interaction and hands-on experiences.

3. **Desire for Community:** Paralleling the growth of technology will be an increasing interest in connecting to others through neighborhoods and a shared community spirit.
4. **Aging Baby Boomers:** The baby boom generation is expected to enter its later years with high expectations for leisure activities and lifelong learning opportunities. Although incomes will be higher in Johnson County than in other areas, there will be significant numbers of older people living with limited resources.
5. **Transportation Alternatives:** Increasing concerns over air quality coupled with population growth will push the development of more practical and cost-effective transportation systems, including ultra light autos, battery or electric-powered cars and public/private transportation systems.
6. **The Growth of Regionalism:** Although cities will be the focus of most local government, more issues will be addressed and resources shared on a regional basis. Environmental quality, transportation and economic development are examples of complex issues demanding regional solutions.
7. **Lifelong Learning:** The rapid changes in technology, coupled with more frequent job/career changes, and more time for older people to pursue new interests, will create an unprecedented demand for training and education throughout the lifespan.
8. **The Global Economy:** International business will be the norm in 2020, demanding greater understanding of other languages and cultures and also connecting Johnson County to the larger world.

### **C. Alternative Scenarios for the Year 2020**

Scenarios are stories about possibilities. They do not attempt to predict the future, but rather to suggest different events which could come together in different ways at a future time. They are intended to stimulate our thinking about what might happen and how we might respond. The following two scenarios paint two very different pictures of Johnson County in the year 2020. The first describes the future as if the County and its citizens do nothing differently, but rather maintain the status quo. The second scenario poses a different future summarizes the Committee's vision for Johnson County in 2020. Here are our stories:

#### **1. Scenario 1: The Status Quo**

By the year 2020, Johnson County's population has grown to almost 600,000. The cities have continued to annex land, so that only 25 percent of the county's land mass remains unincorporated. Because of the relative affordability of homes compared to other parts of the country, Johnson

County continued to attract new residents looking for larger lots and more open space. Piecemeal development resulted from inconsistencies in following the County's comprehensive plan, and from exceptions granted to developers and landowners. Traffic congestion is a major problem, and the additional cars have further deteriorated the region's air quality.

In the older parts of the county, deteriorated housing has become more common, particularly in neighborhoods where streets have not been improved. Many of these houses are now rental properties and are poorly maintained, causing further deterioration. Crime rates have escalated in these areas, and the perception is that the northeast is now an extension of the urban core. Property values both in and adjacent to these areas are decreasing rapidly, and the tax base has eroded.

Personal income has grown in the county, but there is a wider gap between upper middle class and low-income families. Service sector jobs pay little more than minimum wage, and the number of unskilled workers has increased. This increase in lower income residents, coupled with a significant increase in older residents has overstressed the social service and healthcare systems. Cost of activities outside their communities and lack of transportation have isolated seniors and created more health and mental health problems. Because of their own concerns, fewer older people support school bond issues, creating additional financing problems for the public schools and more challenges in maintaining their quality.

## 2. Scenario 2: Living Our Vision

By the year 2020, Johnson County's population has grown to 550,000. Through a well-coordinated and innovative approach to planning, the County and its cities have encouraged development of a variety of housing alternatives. In response to market demand around the turn of the century, many new developments were built with higher densities, neighborhood shopping and easy access to public transit. As a result, the use of private cars is more limited, and traffic congestion is manageable. Consolidated zoning boards have strictly enforced planning and zoning regulations, so that growth in the unincorporated areas has been contiguous.

The older areas of the county, particularly in the northeast, have been revitalized through a bold initiative started in the late 1990's. Infrastructure was repaired and upgraded, and schools continued to be renovated or replaced in older neighborhoods. Strong neighborhood associations encourage residents to maintain their properties and also attract new families. Property values have remained solid, and have even escalated to upper-bracket in some neighborhoods, as older, close-in housing has become more desirable.

The growth of the older population, coupled with more lower-income workers moving into the county, has focused more attention on social

services. Although County government plays a significant coordinating role, many services are delivered through the not-for-profit sector through contracts and public/private partnerships. Volunteerism is at an all-time high, as baby boomers have increased their community involvement in their later years. Most schools now share their buildings, so they can be used as community centers in off-hours. This encourages older people to maintain their interest and support of schools.

Efforts begun in the late 1990's to create a stronger sense of community have paid off in 2020. Participation in community arts events, festivals and forums is high. Citizens are involved in their government and recognize that they help shape the county's future through their participation.

## **IV. Issues Analysis**

### **A. EDUCATION**

#### Issue Analysis Summary

The quality of education in Johnson County has been a driving force in the county's very successful development. It has been identified by the JCCVC and its constituent groups as the most important issue for the county's future. Over the next 20 years, high priority must be given to maintaining and enhancing educational quality in the county's public and private schools, colleges and universities.

#### Current Situation

The public school systems in Johnson County are rated in the top 10 percent in the nation. Almost half the survey respondents cited "the quality of public schools" as one of the three primary reasons they chose to live in Johnson County, affirming the #1 priority placed on education in the constituent survey.

The six districts graduate between 4500 and 5000 students per year. Five of the districts participate in JC-TEC, which offers technical education and preparation. The districts also cooperate with Johnson County Community College to offer TechPrep, as well as other college-level courses within the high school curriculum. Further, the districts work together to present common issues to the state legislature. Currently, the average cost per student in Johnson County public schools is less than \$5000, lower than the state average of \$5500 to \$6000. Budgets have grown proportionately to enrollment over the past five years.

The Regents Center provides 25 percent of the graduate hours offered by the University of Kansas, at lower tuition per credit hour than UMKC. The Regents Center is planning to expand to meet the growing demand for graduate education. Johnson County Community College is one of the largest and finest two-year schools in the country, providing over 40 career training and retraining programs. There is close cooperation between JCCC and KU, and interest in connecting with other state universities to offer courses in Johnson County.

The County has many private schools, offering preschool, kindergarten through twelfth grade and post-secondary opportunities. Additionally, lifelong learning is available through the County's Parks and Recreation Department, Libraries, JCCC and other colleges and universities.

### Opportunities/Threats

Adequate funding to maintain this high quality will be a major challenge, both at the K-12 and post-secondary levels. Cooperation among the public school districts to influence state legislation will continue to be critical. Schools also face challenges in the areas of safety, keeping up with technology, responding to the rapid growth of knowledge and meeting the increasingly diverse needs of our population. There are exciting opportunities to share facilities among schools, government and business; to expand lifelong learning as the population ages; and to utilize technology to expand the scope and reach of education.

A major threat could be the impact of our aging population on public support for education. If citizens become disenfranchised from the schools, they will be less likely to invest their dollars and their time. Another threat is the rapid growth of knowledge and technology and its impact on our ability to prepare all our children for a high-skill, high-tech world in an equitable way.

### Desired Future

By 2020, our public school system has maintained its excellence and responded innovatively to changing times. Education remains a major factor in the decisions of individuals, families and employers to locate in Johnson County. Private schools remain an important part of the educational system. The University of Kansas Regents Center has expanded through private funding, offering continuing education to the county's growing retiree population. Johnson County Community College has kept its tax rate level, with student fees and other financing supporting expansion on the main and satellite campuses.

### Future County Role

The County should continue to support and endorse the outstanding work of our schools, colleges and universities, but should play no direct role in the educational system. The County can encourage the shared use of facilities among schools, governments and businesses through its planning, zoning and code enforcement policies.

## **B. PUBLIC SAFETY**

### Issue Analysis Summary

In addition to education, public safety has been a major contributor to the growth of Johnson County. The "zero tolerance" attitude of our citizens and law enforcement agencies has minimized the influx of criminal activity and kept our crime rate lower than in comparable counties nationwide. Changing demographics and the potential for decline in older parts of the county demand a proactive approach to maintaining a safe community.

In the citizen survey, 90 percent of respondents view state-of-the-art emergency services as one of the most important new projects for the County by the year 2020.

### Current Situation

Although crimes tend to be less serious in Johnson County than in many other parts of the country, local police departments, courts and corrections facilities are experiencing increased demands, particularly in the areas of youth crime and domestic violence. Police reports on youth rose from 4500 in 1995 to 6000 in 1996--an increase of 33 percent. Child abuse and neglect, a major cause of later violence, are also increasing. Changes in the state juvenile justice code have shifted more focus to safety and less to children's issues.

In response to these changes, the Community Corrections Center, originally intended to serve only non-violent offenders, now works with all types of misdemeanants and felons. Its costs are about \$18,000 per person annually, compared with \$21-22,000 in state prisons. The Center also plays a significant role in supervision programs which offer cost-saving alternatives to incarceration. The juvenile justice system is focusing on earlier intervention in family support, case management, and abuse prevention.

Laws are more strictly enforced than in surrounding urban areas, and the County's conviction rate is 20 to 30 percent higher than the national average. However, increased demands on the courts limit the time spent on civil grievances. The jail population has increased 25 percent over the past four years, and juvenile intake rose 25 percent in one year alone, from 1995 to 1996. The new jail being constructed at New Century Airport is not expected to meet these growing demands, suggesting continuing needs for expansion unless something is done to stem the rise in crime.

The county's six city fire departments and four consolidated and rural fire districts operate as "emergency service departments," responding to far more medical emergencies than fires. In Consolidated Fire District #2, for example, medical calls have increased 160 percent over the past six years, with almost no increase in fire calls. Police and fire/EMS departments and districts are locally oriented, responding to the unique needs of their areas--an argument against moving

toward a countywide fire/EMS department. However, cooperation is growing in training, purchasing and sharing of specialized resources.

### Opportunities/Threats

Demands on law enforcement, courts and corrections will increase as the size of the juvenile and young population increases around the year 2000. The rising incidence of child abuse and neglect--a major predictor of violent behavior--will also increase demand. The growth of rental and unoccupied housing, as well as deterioration of some older areas, also predict rises in crime rates. If nothing is done, the County will face repeated expansions of the jail to house offenders. Opportunities exist to break the cycle of violent behavior through more focus on prevention and expansion of social services to support children and families. Additionally, the aging of the population will strain the capacity of emergency medical services as they are now configured.

### Desired Future

By 2020, the county has maintained its zero tolerance attitude toward criminal behavior, but it has also experienced lower crime rates through greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention. A highly coordinated community-based network provides education and support services to children and their families. Community policing is the norm in the county. Law enforcement and public safety agencies work in close cooperation both within the county and the entire metropolitan area. Emergency medical services have been expanded to meet the growing needs of the population, particularly its older citizens.

### Future County Role

The County provides leadership and incentives for cooperation among law enforcement/public safety agencies. A central staff person coordinates joint purchasing, training, and other activities which benefit the agencies and the county as a whole. Communication among police departments has been enhanced through support of better technology. Consolidation and resource sharing among fire/EMS departments and districts have increased their ability to respond to rapidly increasing medical emergency calls. Also, the County works more proactively within the metropolitan area to coordinate public safety and emergency services. Public and private resources have been increased to support prevention and early intervention efforts for children and families. Public understanding of crime and safety issues has helped build support for major initiatives to restore and maintain older areas of the county.

## C. LAND USE

### Issue Analysis Summary

Land use planning and decision making have been an important strength and will continue to be extremely important to the county's successful development. Effective planning and zoning are the primary tools to achieve orderly, well-managed growth--a critical issue for citizens. "Rapid growth" is one of the three things citizens like least about living in the county, while "open space and parks" is one of the three things they like best. Citizens also rate land use planning as the second most critical role for County government in the future.

### Current Situation

With some exceptions, zoning decisions have been thoughtful and well conceived, taking into consideration the public's health, safety and welfare as well as the individual needs of residents and developers. Land use decision-making is occurring in a multitude of jurisdictions, and yet these various zoning and subdivision regulations have successfully produced developments that provide a variety of choice and type while not compromising density, location or physical design. However, adherence to the County's comprehensive land use plan has not always been consistent, with exceptions allowing "leapfrog development."

Additionally, current zoning regulations discourage innovative developments, such as "clustered communities" with higher densities and mixed residential/commercial uses which are more self-contained. These are becoming more popular in other parts of the country, and a model is under development in Johnson County.

The County is an ongoing partner with cities to provide the appropriate infrastructure necessary to serve the needs of particular neighborhoods or developments (CARS, stormwater, wastewater, etc.). The citizen survey showed that "neighborhood rehabilitation" is the #1 new service which should be offered by 2020. Strong, well-maintained neighborhoods create a feeling of community and accountability that increases the likelihood that property will be maintained and decreases the intrusion of social problems.

According to the County Economic Research Institute (CERI), about 170,000 acres--more than half the county's land area--is currently in active agricultural use. The County's Rural Comprehensive Plan suggests that rural, agricultural lands should not be developed until infrastructure is in place to support the development that is proposed. In 1994, the County down-zoned land in rural areas, which in part has held in check premature development. Also, the County Extension Office helps farmers apply the benefits of university research to their farming practices, which encourages better environmental stewardship.

## Opportunities/Threats

With a projected population of 525,000 to 600,000 by 2020, the county could face a decline in its quality of life if growth is not well-planned. Traffic congestion and rapid growth are already viewed as negative aspects of living in the county. Involving citizens and constituent groups in comprehensive planning, which includes but is not limited to land use, can ensure that future development is consistent with community needs, marketplace trends and good planning practice.

A national trend toward "clustered communities"--sometimes described within a concept called "New Urbanism"--has been gaining attention in recent years. These communities combine higher density with a mixture of residential/commercial uses and common spaces to create more opportunities for residents to interact with one another and to access services within their own neighborhoods. These characteristics often conflict with current zoning practices, making it difficult for developers to get approval. This is the type of innovative development idea, which if supported by market demand, needs to be accommodated by planning and zoning regulations.

Although Johnson County's housing is more affordable than many parts of the country, it is already exceeding the reach of many low to moderate-income families. Many employees cannot afford to live in the county, contributing to the current labor shortage. As the population ages, affordable housing will become an even greater issue.

## Desired Future

The County is the steward of future growth. While the County has not imposed a "growth boundary", it practices innovative land use planning which involves citizens, neighborhoods and special interest groups and consistently enforces strict development standards. Planned development, fully supported by infrastructure, has occurred in the west and south. "Leapfrog" or "piecemeal" development has been prohibited. The county has maintained a healthy balance of development and the creation and preservation of open spaces, parks and recreation areas, and agriculture. Although the percentage of farmland has decreased over the past 20 years, it is still viewed as a valuable natural resource and a vital part of the community's heritage.

Affordable housing for low to moderate-income households, coupled with a public transit system, has created a more socioeconomically diverse population and a more balanced workforce for county employers. Neighborhood associations are well-supported with particular emphasis in the older neighborhoods. A council of neighborhoods and neighborhood resource centers will further encourage residential revitalization and community involvement.

## Future County Role

The County should move immediately to consolidate zoning boards to ensure consistent land use decisions across the unincorporated area. The County's comprehensive land-use plan should be updated regularly to reflect evolving national trends and the desires of the citizenry. The plan must consistently guide decision making on land use proposals, and exceptions should not be made without compelling reasons. Policies related to agricultural land should be strengthened, as should County support for the Extension Office. The County should continue and expand its cooperation with cities in land use planning, and its leadership role in capital improvements planning and budgeting to provide for proper infrastructure. The development process should continue to be user-friendly.

## **D. TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

### Issue Analysis Summary

The transportation system of Johnson County has provided a strong base for much of the economic development experienced to date. Planning at the state, county and city levels of government has enabled needed road upgrades and expansions to have been made on a timely basis, allowing for the orderly movement of people and commodities into and out of the county. Businesses have chosen to locate their operations in the county, in part because of the transportation system. Likewise, much of the county's population growth can be tied to its transportation system and the ease of access provided to all areas of the Kansas City metro region.

Public support for maintaining and improving streets and roads is strong: 94 percent of citizens surveyed said that increasing the level of improvements is an important future project, while 95 percent believe well-maintained roads will be important to the quality of life in 2020. Three-fourths of survey respondents think it will be important to develop major road systems in southern and western Johnson County to link with Missouri and other areas in the region, and 80 percent are supportive of an expanded public transit system by the year 2020.

### Current Situation

As already mentioned, the county's network of roads and highways provides a high level of access to the entire metropolitan region. Recent modernizations to those portions of the interstate highway system located in Johnson County will provide the county with a highly efficient road network that delivers a safe and efficient means of travel well into the future. The County's efforts to upgrade its existing network of roads through its CARS (County Assisted Road System) program has enabled the county road system to be responsive to the increased traffic being produced by the rapid pace of both residential and commercial

development. CARS has enabled the County to bring needed improvements to the main trunk lines of county roads. County planning efforts have complemented individual city planning efforts, resulting in cooperative planning among the various jurisdictions and producing a seamless transition from city to city. A good case in point is the cooperation involved in the planning of the K-150/135th Street Corridor among public officials of the state, County, and cities of Olathe, Overland Park and Leawood.

Providing an adequate level of transportation funding will be critical if the county is to continue capitalizing on its strengths. Challenges with the road and bridge system will be: maintaining and upgrading existing facilities, addressing future/growth perimeter needs, and continuing to address economic development needs. Non-highway transportation challenges will be to develop an adequate public transit system and strategies that will relieve traffic and complement the existing road system by operating as a multi-modal system. One strategy that may hold promise for the future is the development of a commuter rail service to relieve future congestion. A public transit system could provide residents with transportation within the county, as well as the entire metro area through cooperation with the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA), provide access to the county's job market, and address the needs of low income individuals and the elderly and handicapped.

#### Opportunities/Threats

Johnson County will be able to continue planning much of its future transportation around its existing grid of county roads, which provides a good transportation network for further development. The County Commission has taken steps to allow for future modernization of the county road network by establishing an official street line of 60 feet along all section line roads in the unincorporated areas, allowing no new structures closer than 50 feet from the official street line. This action will provide future County Commissions with the opportunity to provide for future expansions as will be needed. In this vein, the County will also need to ensure that a minimum of access cuts are permitted onto County roads to ensure future traffic flow. The county will have opportunities to capitalize on Kansas City's status as the number two rail center in the U.S. Continuing the recent trend of economic growth in the county will be a challenge. More stringent air quality requirements and an aging population will impact future transportation planning.

#### Desired Future

By 2020, the county's excellent transportation network stands out as one of the cornerstones of its continued economic growth and high quality of life. The K-7 Highway Corridor has provided a relief valve for Interstate Highway 35. The County has identified and developed a corridor to provide for east-to-west traffic movement in the county on one of the following roads: 135th, 151st and 175th Streets. Through careful planning and innovative use of technology, the County has maintained its efficient transportation system, continuing to provide quick and

easy access to all points of the metro area. The County's transit system has been developed in partnership with local businesses to provide a vital connection between workers and jobs; continuing to fuel the economic engine of the county. A component of the transit system is in place to respond to the needs of the disabled and seniors. The County has entered into a partnership with its cities to address upgrading aging infrastructure in the older parts of the county using a portion of CARS program funding, thereby ensuring that: 1) older areas of the county are upgraded and not allowed to deteriorate to a blighted condition, and 2) CARS funding remains dedicated to transportation infrastructure improvements. Upgrading the transportation system in the older areas has improved access into these areas and provided economic development benefits, rejuvenating these older sections of the county.

### Future County Role

The County needs to continue to exercise strong leadership in the development of transportation plans to provide strategies that can respond to the county's development trends, existing business needs and ensure a continued high quality of life for its residents. Transportation planning will need to examine and integrate other desired means of transportation, where appropriate, in order to develop a complete system for the county's residents and businesses. The County should address its capacity needs by focusing on expanding/modernizing its existing system. An adequate level of funding will need to be provided to maintain the system in an "as built" condition. This will require effective leadership by the county's elected officials to educate the public on the need for these expenditures. The need for construction of perimeter roads should be based on the inability of the existing County system of roads or other transportation mode to provide for the efficient, cost-effective movement of people or goods in the county. CARS funding should be reserved only for improvement of the county's roads and bridges, as well as sidewalks and bike paths associated with those road and bridge projects. The success of the CARS program should be used as a model for other projects within the county such as public transit/rail, sidewalks, etc.

## **E. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### Issue Analysis Summary

Johnson County has experienced great economic growth due primarily to a combination of outstanding education, low crime, thoughtful planning and zoning, solid infrastructure including transportation, open spaces and environmental quality plus aggressive economic development activity.

## Current Situation

Strong expansion overall is taking place, with the greatest growth in the south and west parts of the county. Much of the county's economic growth is occurring from within, through the retention and expansion of existing businesses. Since residences utilize two to three times the amount of resources they pay in taxes, it is critical to attract commercial and industrial development to keep residential taxes low, as well as to support social, cultural and other public services. Economic development groups are working well together, through an informal Johnson County partnership and the Kansas City Area Development Council on a metro wide basis. Both work to market "seamlessly" to prospective businesses, with appropriate competition on individual situations.

The greatest current challenge to economic growth is the shortage of labor in certain sectors of the work force. Although there appear to be enough workers in the metropolitan area, they are difficult to attract to Johnson County because of the lack of public transit and affordable housing. A "reverse commute" initiative with Wyandotte County and an agency program to help clients get auto financing are innovative ideas to address this issue.

Both New Century and Executive Airports represent valuable assets to the County. The feasibility of having commercial airlines at New Century is under consideration. Fifty-one (51) percent of citizens surveyed think the addition of a commercial airline is an important project for the future.

## Opportunities/Threats

Economic opportunities abound, yet public monitoring helps ensure continuation of our very favorable economic momentum. Special efforts must be made to attract potential employees. A labor shortage in service and clerical skills is our greatest threat to continued growth. There is a shortage of affordable housing and public transportation. A second threat is the potential decline of the older areas of the county, which would adversely affect economic development, as well as many other aspects of our community.

## Desired Future

Substantial growth has not compromised our high quality of living. All areas have shared in the county's prosperity. The developments to the south and west have been paced so infrastructure and government services have been maintained at a desirable level.

## Future County Role

Economic development efforts are being handled well by city and regional entities, so the County can spend minimum time/money and take a secondary, yet

supportive role. Strong economic growth will continue over market/business-driven cycles if the County plans well and leads on responsive infrastructure. The County should consider the feasibility of disproportionate tax incentives or infrastructure spending to foster new development of older areas. The County should also support economic forecast and other programs that foster development of industry and technology.

## **F. NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT**

### *Issue Analysis Summary*

#### Current Situation

Johnson County and its cities are cooperating well in the development and maintenance of parks and the provision of recreational programs. Demand continues to increase with the growing population. Rapid population growth and development have contributed to a decline in the metropolitan area's air quality, largely through auto emissions. Environmental groups have played an important educational role, although public understanding of these issues remains limited. Approximately 20 percent of our solid waste is being recycled, with significant amounts of lawn waste still going into landfill. Current urban development has an adverse impact on water quality, which is compromised by runoff from parking areas/roads and agricultural/lawn chemicals going into storm sewers, lakes and streams.

"Open space and parks" are one of the three things Johnson Countians like best about living here. Ninety-three percent of survey respondents believe these will be important to the quality of life in 2020.

#### Opportunities/Threats

A well-educated public makes wise choices, offering the opportunity to maintain a quality environment through strong educational initiatives. Environmental issues are regional in nature, requiring more partnerships with neighboring counties. Additional opportunities include: planning for greenspace and parkland in advance of development and/or annexation; ensuring clean air by enforcing auto and industrial standards which meet or exceed EPA requirements; implementing a county/metro alternate transportation system; and exploring alternatives to additional landfill. Decreasing federal/state funding in the environmental area is also a threat.

#### Desired Future

Public transportation options connect Johnson County with the metropolitan area. Several large county parks and expanded greenspace/walkways within city

boundaries have significantly increased parklands. Natural greenspace is valued and protected. The Johnson County Conservation District, together with Planning, Public Works and the Environment Department, are assisting the County and cities in making the development community and citizens aware of the need to protect and enhance natural resources for future generations.

### Future County Role

Johnson County should model environmental education and air quality standards enforcement for the metropolitan area. The County should also take the lead in design and implementation of a county/metro public transportation system. The County can support research and public education efforts of the Johnson County Conservation District and encourage cooperation among the District, the County Environmental Department, the Cooperative Extension Service and all county departments working in areas that impact the environment. The Cooperative Extension Service can also provide public education about natural farming, gardening and lawn care methods. An Environmental Advisory Council could be created to bring citizens and staff together to work in partnership toward common goals. The County can also be a positive role model by increasing efforts to recycle, use recycled materials, increase energy efficiency and limit chemical use.

## **G. HUMAN SERVICES**

### Issue Analysis Summary

#### Current Situation

The delivery and financing of human services spans all levels of government, as well as both the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors. Fourteen percent of the County's budget supports services in mental health, developmental supports, aging and public health. Johnson County enjoys high-quality services with minimal duplication or competition; however, there is a need for greater coordination and continuity. Human service needs are experienced by families of all income levels; however, needs are often invisible, resulting in low awareness of both needs and services, and limited private funding from outside the county.

Funding and delivery of human services among federal, state and local government, as well as not-for-profits, for-profits and the voluntary sector is highly fluid. Kansas is moving toward more privatization of services, while at the local level, cities are generally deferring services to the County. In 1988, Johnson County adopted a policy stating that first priority would be given to those who cannot afford or access services elsewhere. Human services currently represent 14 percent of the County's budget of which 40 percent comes from federal and state government, 30 percent from fees, 21 percent from taxes and 9 percent from other sources.

In the citizen survey, 92 percent of respondents report that health care access is an important factor to the future quality of life in the county, while 80 percent report that support systems for those in need are important. In terms of human interaction, only 19 percent report "friendly people" as one of the three things they like most about living here.

### Opportunities and Threats

Human service needs will escalate with the projected increase in lower-income households and the aging of the population. With a larger population, the incidence of substance abuse, child abuse, family violence and other individual and family problems will also increase. Without effective prevention and early intervention, these problems can pose a threat to public safety, further straining the justice system. Human services must be viewed interdependently with other issues impacting the quality of life in the county. The County must focus on public safety in order to unify all sectors of the population behind an effective human services effort. Devolution will push more services to the local level at a time when public dollars are limited, requiring the County to prioritize needs and to partner with the private and not-for-profit sectors.

### Desired Future

Johnson County models an integrated delivery system designed through proactive, collaborative planning among all sectors. Prevention and early intervention are emphasized, resulting in a measurable decline in crime, including juvenile offenses and family violence. The business community recognizes the impact of human service issues on productivity and invests in workplace benefits such as health insurance, child and elder care. The majority of individuals and families are involved in volunteerism, raising their awareness and understanding of human service needs. County facilities comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations, and persons with disabilities participate in facility planning. The growing diversity of the county is valued and celebrated as part of a community that cares about one another.

### Future County Role

The County's role in ensuring quality human services is fundamentally linked to its responsibility to protect public health and welfare and to create a safe community. The specifics of this role (e.g., level of involvement in funding and delivery) will vary over time depending on decisions made at other governmental levels. The County must assume a strong leadership role as dollars tighten--to plan, educate and establish community priorities. The County, not the cities, should be the conduit for state and federal human service dollars and be accountable for how those dollars are spent. Finally, the County must provide leadership in connecting

human services into an integrated system and giving "voices to the voiceless" to ensure that all citizens have access to basic services.

## **H. CULTURE, ARTS AND HUMANITIES**

### Issue Analysis Summary

#### Current Situation

Culture, arts and humanities are important to quality of life in that they provide a community identity and an opportunity to define and celebrate shared values. Johnson County has over 70 arts and humanities groups which complement larger, facility-based organizations--most notably the Cultural Education Center at Johnson County Community College. But, as a maturing community, Johnson County citizens are underserved in their access to cultural opportunities. A major challenge is the need for more space at a readily accessible location within the county, both to support local cultural activities and to attract larger productions.

In the citizen survey, "convenience to cultural activities" is the least positively rated feature of the county's quality of life, although 60 percent rated it "good" to "very good." Sixty-seven percent of respondents are supportive of a cultural arts/recreation center located on Johnson County park land.

#### Opportunities/Threats

A significant opportunity exists for collaborative planning with the "Big Five" cultural institutions (i.e., the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City Symphony, Missouri Repertory Theater, Kansas City Ballet and Lyric Opera). With expanded space, Johnson County could offer more cultural opportunities to its citizens by providing a world-class performing arts facility to complement--not compete--with their programs. These and other cultural opportunities produce a significant economic impact to the county, particularly when they attract more regional audiences. Funding for culture and the arts is highly competitive, with few philanthropic dollars remaining in Johnson County.

#### Desired Future

Johnson County is the site of a premier community arts center, which hosts local, regional and national arts performances, as well as community forums, festivals and other cultural events. The facility will be the central focus of a restaurant and retail area complementing the arts. The Kansas City Symphony, Missouri Repertory Theater, Kansas City Ballet and Lyric Opera perform at the center on a regular basis. The center was funded by a foundation established through a public-private partnership, with strong support from the private sector and business community. The foundation also underwrites local arts and humanities

groups. The center is a defining symbol of the Johnson County community and a gathering place to discuss ideas and celebrate our heritage.

### Future County Role

The County Commissioners provided the leadership to establish the foundation, citing the importance of culture to the quality of life in the county. Through the work of the foundation, Johnson Countians have increased both their financial support and participation in culture and the arts. The County has worked collaboratively with metropolitan institutions to ensure that county residents have access to cultural opportunities without inappropriate duplication of services. Through its efforts, Johnson County has become a respected voice in the cultural life of the metropolitan area.

## **I. COUNTY RELATIONSHIPS**

### Issue Analysis Summary

#### Current Situation

Relationships within the county are increasingly cooperative. The CARS program, stormwater initiative and current merger explorations between Countryside and Mission are examples of cooperation between the County and cities and among the cities themselves. MARC provides a mechanism for metropolitan cooperation, although Johnson County governments have not participated to the fullest extent possible. The county is perceived by some in the metro area as isolationist, but the recent bistate initiative and increased cooperation between the northeast cities and Kansas City, Missouri are softening that perception.

Over two-thirds (71 percent) of survey respondents think it is important to develop ways to work with Kansas City, Missouri; 62 percent have the same perception about Kansas City, Kansas. Almost half (49 percent) of citizens would be supportive of using bistate taxes to fund other initiatives for the metro area.

#### Opportunities/Threats

Economic forces will continue to drive cooperation, as local governments must maximize shared resources and minimize service duplication. The multiplicity of taxing districts, including the county, cities, schools and special districts, presents a challenge in efforts to increase efficiencies. There are opportunities to expand metropolitan cooperation by building on the success of the bistate initiative and on such leadership groups as the Council of Councils. Threats to metropolitan cooperation are fear and a lack of understanding of other areas within the broader community.

## Desired Future

Johnson County has recognized the critical importance of metropolitan cooperation in addressing major issues such as air quality and transportation and making the most efficient use of limited resources. Through increased cooperation, Johnson Countians have a better appreciation of metropolitan diversity and are proactive participants in solving common problems. Johnson County is also working more cooperatively with Wyandotte County, expanding on the success of the worker transit program in the late 1990's.

## Future County Role

The County plays a significant role in convening cities, as well as private and not-for-profit organizations to solve problems. Johnson County government has helped coordinate metropolitan leadership to address issues of mutual concern and benefit. The County has also encouraged governing bodies and staff to look for opportunities to cooperate. Johnson County cities are more involved in MARC and, with representatives of both Johnson and Wyandotte Counties, have established a stronger Kansas presence in that organization. Johnson County needs to be perceived as a proactive partner in the metropolitan area and a positive force in making the Kansas City area one of the most livable communities in the U.S.

## **J. FINANCING AND TAXATION**

### Issue Analysis Summary

#### Current Situation

Johnson County has a diverse revenue base, with a decreasing percentage of revenues from ad valorem taxes in recent years and a corresponding increase from sales and other taxes. While residential property tax burdens are average for the nation, Kansas businesses pay one of the highest property tax rates in the nation. Only 12.5 percent of the County's Capital Improvement Plan is financed through debt. A critical future challenge is the need to finance repair and improvements to aging infrastructure. Without these improvements, the county is at high risk for neighborhood deterioration, property devaluation and associated increases in crime and other social problems. Once deterioration begins, residents lose the psychological momentum to invest in their neighborhoods. However, improvements to aging infrastructure must be financed in a way that does not overburden taxpayers and detract from the affordable and high quality of life present in the county. This is particularly important in that 60 percent of survey respondents report "taxes" as one of the three things they like least about living here--a more negative factor than "growing too fast" at 44 percent and "traffic congestion" at 38 percent.

## Opportunities/Threats

Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Neighborhood Improvement Districts (NID) and other economic redevelopment tools can be used to encourage investment in the older areas of the county. Increasing cooperation among cities to attract investment can benefit the county as a whole. As wealth continues to shift from property to more intangible assets (e.g., stocks, bonds and information), there is a critical opportunity to rethink the taxation system. User fees will continue to expand as they are better understood as a key revenue source. The County could charge value-based fees on the information it provides. Another threat is the loss of federal funds through devolution, although this can present an opportunity to build more community-based solutions.

## Desired Future

As the result of a bold initiative started in the late 1990's, Johnson County has maintained and improved its older infrastructure while continuing to support new development. Through a proactive financing plan, the County has remained ahead of maintenance needs, resulting in increased property values and fewer rental homes in older neighborhoods. The ad valorem tax is now a less important revenue source for the County, with economic use taxes and user fees representing the highest percentage of revenue. Through its long-range financial planning, the County regularly assesses the optimum mix of revenue sources to support its goals.

## Future County Role

The County should design a bold initiative to address infrastructure needs, with increasing emphasis on maintaining older infrastructure until needed improvements are made. A blue-ribbon panel should set priorities and develop a proactive approach to financing infrastructure improvements, including a sophisticated review of tax sources. The County has established an electronic courthouse, reducing administrative costs and increasing service and access. The County also needs to educate the populace about taxation and debt, to build understanding of the hidden costs of not investing adequately in our future. Finally, the County needs to be a leader in working with our legislative delegation to ensure that we contribute a fair but not excessive share to state revenues, and to participate in designing a more contemporary taxation system.