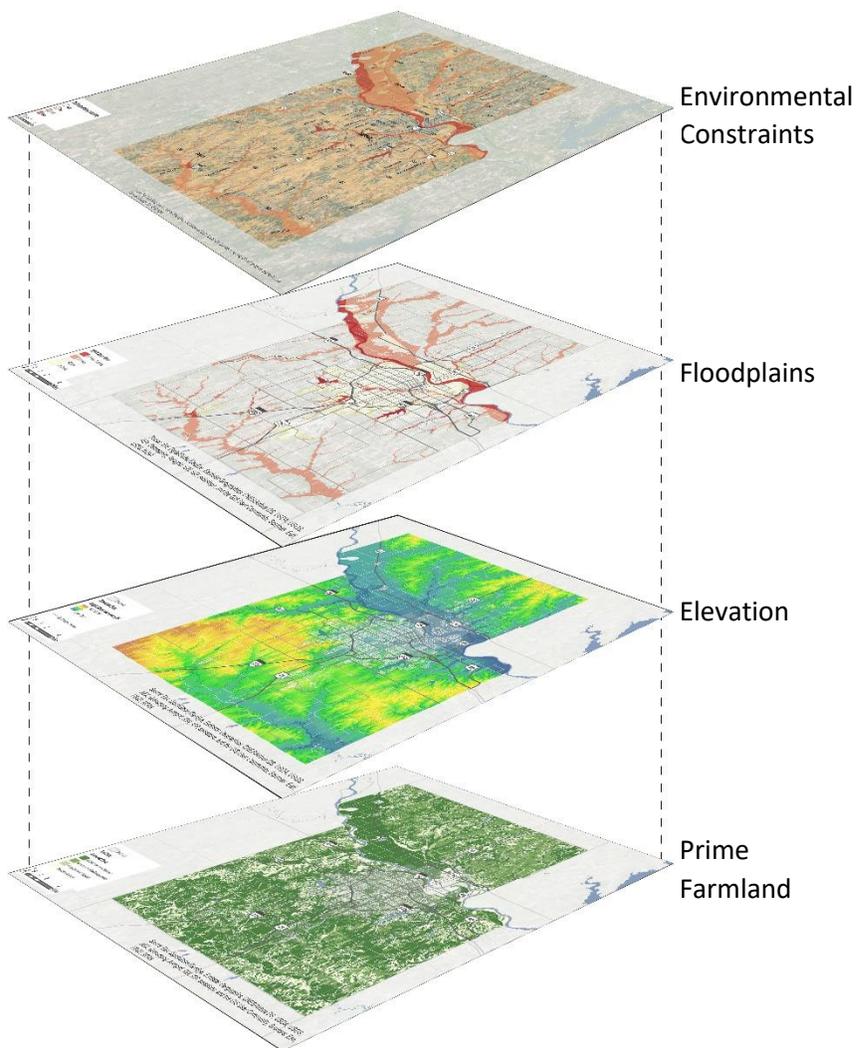


Natural and cultural resources form the base of everything in Shawnee County. Agriculture plays a significant role in the area’s economy, and the landscape provides opportunities and constraints to development. The comprehensive planning process provides an opportunity to bring together land use planning, water management, conservation, and industries like agriculture and mining to identify the best ways to improve quality of life. The process also shows that people rely on the health and productivity of the landscape and that stewardship of the land is critical in maintaining its health and productivity. By wisely managing these resources, the County can improve quality of life for present and future generations and can mitigate natural hazards which can save lives, property, and money.

How do environmental features affect development?

Environmental features affect where development should occur. Fragile lands and natural hazards like floodplains constrain development. Environmental features also provide positive opportunities, including mineral resources, parks, or areas of historical significance. Preserving these can improve quality of life.

Steep slopes, floodplains, and wetlands cross the county, along with other features that make development more difficult. Topography can create water retention and drainage issues. While subdivisions require drainage plans, often land is exempt from platting and therefore does not formally consider retention and drainage, or even fragile areas. This can lead to problems where abutting properties have not considered these issues or other environmental constraints. Taking these into account is integral to guiding the development process.



Natural, scenic, and historical features often provide benefits that are not always considered in the development process. These features throughout the county can be used for parks and recreation, especially those near natural areas like native prairie, wildlife areas, or undevelopable watersheds. The Shawnee County Parks Master Plan recommends a goal of 150 miles of trails to connect parks and form recreational loops. Cultural and historic sites also provide opportunities in the region. Maintaining these connects Shawnee County to both nature and its past, showcasing the area's unique history and providing opportunities for fishing, hunting, agritourism, and historical tourism. Other natural resources such as limestone provide opportunities for economic development.



Picture: Lake Shawnee

Findings & Conclusions:

1. Fragile land and hazardous areas provide constraints to development, all of which are not necessarily addressed during review processes.
2. Environmental features provide opportunities for tourism and recreation. Natural resources also include those that have the potential for economic development. Sometimes, these values are overlooked during the development process.
3. Environmental side effects, specifically water retention and drainage, are not coordinated with certain development patterns. These issues should be considered for all kinds of development.

Will new growth affect the County's character?

The County, with more than 200,000 acres of prime farmland, is partially defined by its rural character. The County may have an interest preserving these from encroaching development in rural areas. Preserving rural landscapes can be done by encouraging development near existing development clusters. This may include growth around rural unincorporated towns consistent with its surroundings and discouraging growth in predominantly agricultural areas. Protecting these resources provides economic benefits, especially in areas not already protected by the floodplain and helps maintain the rural appeal of the county.



Findings & Conclusions:

1. The agricultural economy is important in Shawnee County. Steps should be taken to protect prime farmland.



Goals and Policy Recommendations

Goals:

- Discourage development on fragile lands (steep slopes, wetlands, and floodplains)
- Encourage the protection of lands with positive environmental features to preserve opportunities to utilize it.
- Preserve areas for mineral extraction
- Focus growth away from predominantly agricultural areas

Policy Recommendations:

- Ensure a level of review either by developers or staff to prevent development from encroaching on steep slopes, wetlands, or floodplains. This could also potentially apply to native prairie. Review could be a strict prohibition, a discouraged activity, or a points-based system which evaluates overall impact.
- Identify prime farmland and discourage non-agricultural uses in these areas.
- Identify types of lands suitable for park development, in accordance with the Shawnee County Park Master Plan. This includes balancing parks across county, utilizing watersheds, expanding existing parks, or adding parks in natural/wildlife hotspots such as native prairies.
- Utilize scenic linear areas such as rivers and floodplains for trail development. The Parks Master Plan sets a goal of 150 miles of trails, including a north/south trail across I-70 and the Kansas River.
- Look to history, regional trails, and agritourism to find areas which need to be protected for future opportunities
- Work with mineral extraction companies to protect suitable areas from development.
- Require coordination of water retention and drainage where multiple dwelling units are within a certain distance of each other
- Preserve the rural landscapes by focusing development near existing development clusters. This should include clustering the development of rural unincorporated villages in a consistent manner