

SECTION 1:
THE THOMAS COUNTY
PLANNING PROCESS.



THE THOMAS COUNTY PLANNING PROCESS.

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

This **Comprehensive Plan** was prepared as an update to the existing **Thomas County Plan**, completed in 2002. This updated **Plan** will serve as a guide to direct future growth and development opportunities in **Thomas County, Nebraska** during the 10-year planning period, 2019 to 2029.

The focus of this **Comprehensive Plan** is to assess the effectiveness of balancing the preservation and protection of agricultural production lands for agricultural uses, with the appropriate locating of development for non-farm dwellings and rural subdivisions.

The implementation of this **Comprehensive Plan** should be guided by “*Goals & Policies,*” as determined by the evaluation and analysis of “*Population, Income, & Economic Profile,*” “*Land Use Profile & Plan,*” “*Public Facilities & Transportation*” and an “*Energy Element.*” The intent of this **Comprehensive Plan** is also to serve as a foundation and guide for the implementation of **Zoning and Subdivision Regulations**, as needed, to achieve the specific **Goals and Policies** identified in the **Plan**.

This **Comprehensive Plan** is intended to provide policy guidance to enable the residents and elected officials of the County to make decisions based upon the consensus of opinion by the **Thomas County Planning Commission**. Plan implementation methods should include incentives to stimulate private action consistent with the **Plan** and the use of Local, State and Federal programs for County-wide economic development activities.

The **Comprehensive Plan** was prepared under the direction of the **Thomas County Planning Commission** and Planning Consultants, **Hanna:Keelan Associates, P.C.**, of Lincoln, Nebraska.

PLANNING PERIOD

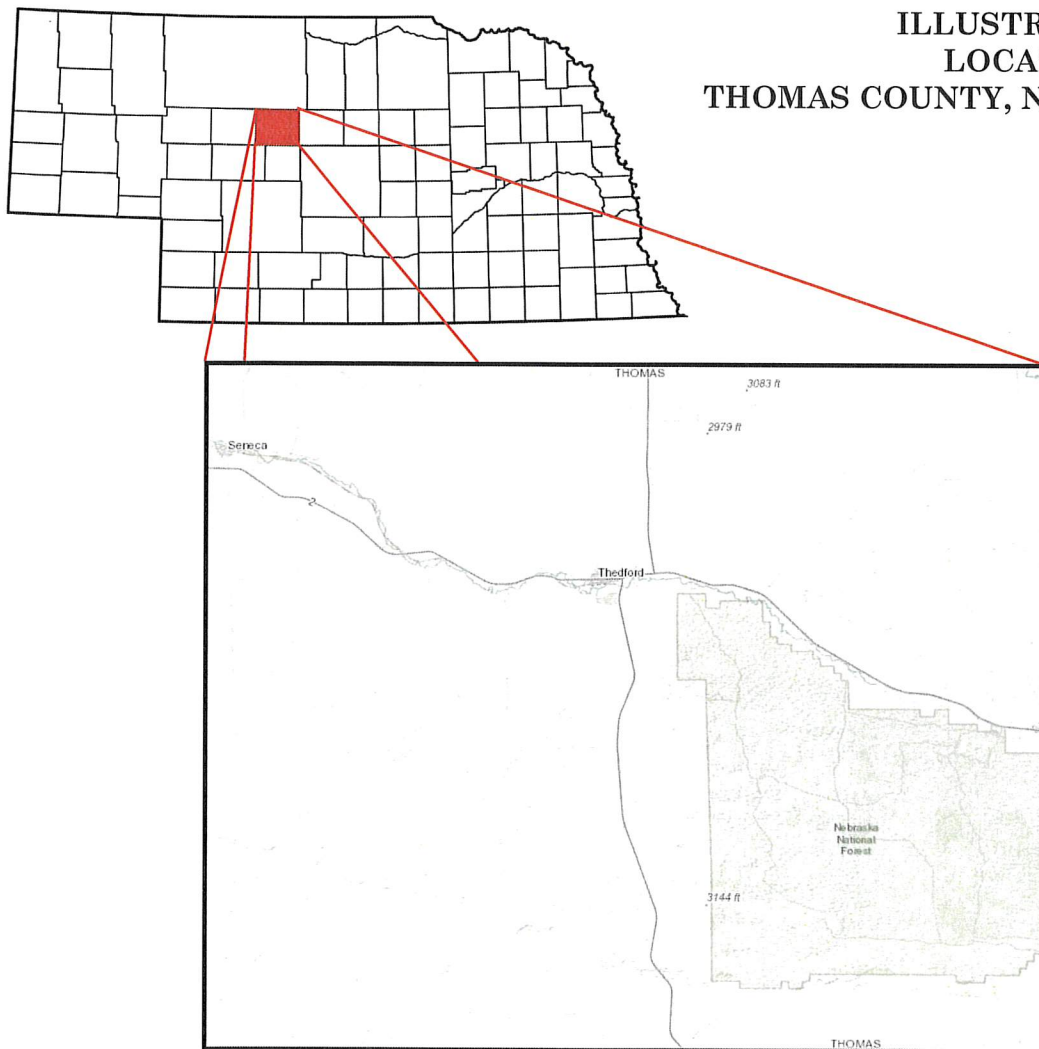
The planning time period for achieving the goals, programs and economic development activities identified in this **Comprehensive Plan** for Thomas County, Nebraska, is 10 years (2019-2029).

AUTHORITY TO PLAN

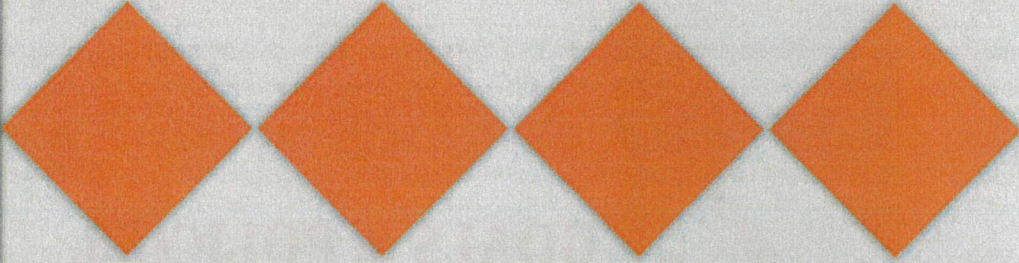
This **Comprehensive Plan** for Thomas County is prepared under the Authority of Sections 23-114 to 23-174.10, Nebraska State Statutes 1943, as Amended.

AMENDMENT

The **Comprehensive Plan** may be amended or updated as the need arises as provided in the Nebraska State Statutes.



**ILLUSTRATION 1.1
LOCATION MAP
THOMAS COUNTY, NEBRASKA**



SECTION 2:
GOALS & POLICIES.



INTRODUCTION

The **Comprehensive Plan** plays a major role in the future growth and sustainability of Thomas County. Important components of this **Plan** are specific planning **Goals** and **Policies** that provide local leadership with the direction for the administration and overall implementation of the **Plan**. In essence, **Goals** and **Policies** are the most fundamental elements of the **Plan**; the premises upon which all other elements of the **Plan** must relate. The following **Goals** and **Policies** will be in effect for the period of the **Thomas County Comprehensive Plan, 2019 to 2029**, pending annual review.

Goals are broad statements, identifying the present state or condition of the planning area and what the area could or should evolve into during the planning period. Goals are established for the primary components of the **Comprehensive Plan**, including **land use, housing, economic development, public facilities and transportation and plan maintenance and implementation**. Goals are long term in nature and, in the case of those identified for this **Comprehensive Plan**, will be active throughout the **10-year planning period**.

Policies help to further define the specific actions to accomplish specific goals. Policies, or often referred to as objectives, are sub-parts of a Goal and are accomplished in a much shorter time space.

The following **Goals** and **Policies** are the result of both qualitative and quantitative research conducted in association with the **Comprehensive Plan**. The **qualitative research** has included input received from the **Thomas County Planning Commission** and **general public**.

GENERAL GOALS

The first step in developing **Goals and Policies** for this **Plan** is the creation of **general goals**. These “**General Goals**” were developed to "highlight" **important** elements of this comprehensive planning process, as determined via field analysis and the formation of "key" issues with the public.

The following represents the General Goals associated with the rural, unincorporated areas of Thomas County.

1. Protect and preserve the agricultural industry, including the diversity of crops and cattle/calf production. Historically, agriculture has been the primary income producing activity for Thomas County, and is anticipated to remain as such through the 10-year planning period.
2. Encourage proper rural housing development activities and job creation opportunities to stabilize the Thomas County population.
3. Promote the lifestyle and amenities of Thomas County to broaden the economic base and expand economic development and employment opportunities.
4. Promote citizen participation by persons of all ages and incomes to ensure the preservation improvement of the economic and social quality of life in Thomas County.
5. Collaborate and promote programs in conjunction with Nebraska Games and Parks and the Upper Loup NRD to promote the use of the Dismal River, Middle Loup River and the Nebraska National Forest at Halsey.
6. Enforce the **Comprehensive Plan** and appropriate planning and zoning administration procedures to ensure the proper implementation of the Thomas County Future Land Use Map and Zoning Regulations.
7. Maintain and strengthen relationships between the County and the Villages of Thedford and Halsey to produce planning and development practices supportive of proper land usage, economic growth, housing, public facilities and services, transportation and recreation.
8. Maintain a flood plain evaluation and administration process in Thomas County that fits with both proper development activities and flood mitigation efforts. This includes finalizing and implementing **minimum requirements of Nebraska Standards for floodplain management programs** in Thomas County.

LAND USE

Goal 1 – Provide opportunities for land development in an orderly, efficient and environmentally sound manner.

Policies:

- 1.1 Ensure that future non-agricultural development in rural Thomas County is equipped with modern public utility services. These facilities are recommended to be located in close proximity to the Villages of Thedford and Halsey and the unincorporated Community of Seneca.
- 1.2 Direct future developments to locations which are relatively free of environmental constraints relating to: sensitive soils, slope, floodplains, drainage, ground water, endangered species or other natural resources.
- 1.3 Avoid development in regions (specific Soils Associations) in Thomas County that could result in the contamination of soils and ground water resources.
- 1.4 Implement Zoning Regulations that allow for livestock/confinement facilities in appropriate areas of rural Thomas County, when in conformance with the Thomas County Zoning Regulations.
- 1.5 Utilize alternative energy systems to supplement individual residential and business electric consumption in accordance with Nebraska State Statute 70-12, as amended August, 2009.

Goal 2 - Maintain land use development patterns and densities in Thomas County that conform to uniform planning standards.

Policies:

- 2.1 Utilize the Future Land Use Map to make appropriate land use decisions in the County, which is based upon present needs and sound forecasts of future growth and development of the agricultural industry.
- 2.2 Preserve and protect existing and future State Special Use Areas, program hunting and trapping lands and, potentially, the Dismal and Middle Loup Rivers and the Nebraska National Forest environs for the use of residents and visitors to the County.
- 2.3 Direct both irrigated and dryland crop production to areas that minimize the effect on the local groundwater system.

GOALS & POLICIES.

- 2.4 Enforce Zoning Regulations to provide incentives for maintenance and preservation of agricultural lands for agricultural uses throughout the rural County jurisdiction, while encouraging appropriate non-agricultural development activities, non-detrimental to the natural environment.
- 2.5 Limit the development of new livestock confinement facilities and operations from areas with sensitive soils and other natural environmental conditions. Land along the Dismal and Middle Loup Rivers contain the highest concentration of sensitive soils conditions and designated flood plains, in addition to unique environmental settings.

Goal 3 - Encourage compatible adjacent land uses through regulations suited to the unique characteristics and location of each use.

Policies:

- 3.1 Establish an annual review and modification process of established Zoning Districts and regulations to encourage both development and redevelopment activities.
- 3.2 Ensure the orderly development of residential uses that are environmentally sound, regarding topography and soils capacity
- 3.3 Encourage planned development of residential dwellings within and adjacent the two incorporated Thomas County Communities and in areas not suitable for agricultural production. Encourage planned rural subdivisions with modern infrastructure, within appropriately Zoned districts.
- 3.4 Ensure the appropriate location of industrial and commercial developments within and/or adjacent Thomas County Communities, or in areas allowing for compatible land uses and adequate access to transportation systems and utilities.

Goal 4 - Work cooperatively with Federal, State and County Governments to develop compatible flood control measures.

Policies:

- 4.1 Continue to work cooperatively with State and Federal Agencies to protect the natural environment in Thomas County from developments that result in contaminants or pollutants.
- 4.2 Require all developments in the County to be consistent with flood plain requirements.

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- 4.3 Review and identify measures which limit or reduce flood hazards, control water runoff and enhance the quality of surface and ground water.

Goal 5 - Achieve residential, commercial, and industrial land use developments that are suitable for existing soils capacity and topography.

Policies:

- 5.1 Support sound, planned rural subdivision development in Thomas County, through appropriate, but cost efficient standards for subdivision design and construction.
- 5.2 Identify land uses to promote and complement the existing State Recreation and Wildlife Management Areas.

HOUSING

Goal 1 - Provide access to a variety of safe, decent and affordable housing types in Thomas County.

Policies:

- 1.1 Improve on existing and develop new organizational relationships to create affordable housing in Thomas County, including County government partnering with West Central Nebraska Development District and the Community Action Partnership of Mid-Nebraska.
- 1.2 Promote affordable housing programs in rural Thomas County, both for the rehabilitation and/or removal of unsafe housing, as well as new housing construction.
- 1.3 Promote and encourage the development of varied housing styles, prices, densities, quantities and locations, as to attract individuals and families to Thomas County.

Goal 2 - Protect and preserve existing rental and owner occupied residential housing units in Thomas County.

Policies:

- 2.1 Promote housing rehabilitation programs in rural Thomas County to preserve and ensure that the existing housing stock meets current health and safety codes.
- 2.2 Identify and encourage the rehabilitation/preservation of the historically significant residences and structures in Thomas County.

Goal 3 - Encourage future residential developments in Thomas County that are compatible and complements existing environmental features. Non-farm/ranch dwellings should be located adjacent or near hard surfaced highways.

Policies:

- 3.1 Identify and promote additional areas for residential units in appropriate areas of Thomas County. Areas adjacent or near Thomas County Communities, where municipal services are available, would be best, preventing conflicts with agricultural production areas of the County.
- 3.2 Discourage development of residential units in environmentally sensitive areas, including, but not limited to, the Dismal River and Middle Loup River areas and the Nebraska National Forest at Halsey.

Goal 4 - Encourage rehabilitation and new construction of housing for the elderly and persons with special needs in the communities of Thomas County.

Policies:

- 4.1 Promote an adequate supply of affordable housing in Thomas County for persons with disability types.
- 4.2 Encourage the development of transitional housing, with supportive services, for persons/families in need of safe shelter.
- 4.3 Advocate the development of residential retirement housing, as needed, within or adjacent the Villages of Thedford and Halsey. This housing should be designed and built for elderly of all income levels as independent, congregate and residential care living units.
- 4.4 Promote additional housing to retain young families, especially the local workforce.

PUBLIC FACILITIES & TRANSPORTATION

Goal 1 - Plan, program and implement the most effective, safe and cost efficient public facilities and transportation systems throughout Thomas County.

Policies:

- 1.1 Support local, public organizations in preparation of **Capital Improvement Programs or Plans**, consistent with the Goals and Policies of this **Comprehensive Plan**.
- 1.2 Recognize the need for and improve on intergovernmental and regional cooperation to reduce duplication of public health and safety efforts.
- 1.3 Maintain modern design standards and policies for public infrastructure improvements within the unincorporated Community of Seneca, in Thomas County.
- 1.4 Maintain a **One- and Six-Year Road Plan** to assure a safe and efficient road system in Thomas County.

Goal 2 - Provide a transportation system throughout Thomas County for the safe and efficient movement of people, goods and services.

Policies:

- 2.1 Coordinate transportation planning and improvements with the planning and development of other elements of the County, including public utilities and facilities supportive of commercial and industrial development.
- 2.2 Maintain a road and associated bridge system in Thomas County that is in accordance with the standard functional street classification system of the State of Nebraska.

Goal 3 - Provide adequate, efficient and appropriate public utilities and services to both existing and future residential, commercial and industrial areas in Thomas County.

Policies:

- 3.1 Provide facilities and services in Thomas County necessary to prevent degradation of the environment, including sewage treatment, refuse collection and disposal, road maintenance and similar environmental control processes as necessary.
- 3.2 Support efforts of each Community in Thomas County to supply appropriate drinking water and sewage treatment systems to all residents. Ensure the rules and regulations governing safe drinking water and sewage treatment are met in Thomas County. The Nebraska Departments of Environmental Quality and Health and Human Services assist in the regulation of these systems.
- 3.3 Maintain and improve existing public utilities and health & safety services in Thomas County, based upon future needs.

Goal 4 - Provide for the equitable distribution of public facilities to meet the cultural, educational, social, recreational and safety and health needs of Thomas County.

Policies:

- 4.1 Provide sufficient resources to examine, maintain and develop appropriate recreational, cultural and leisure activities in Thomas County.
- 4.2 Provide adequate public health, safety and crime prevention systems throughout Thomas County.
- 4.3 Promote a social and cultural environment in the County that provides an opportunity for all residents to experience, develop and share their values, abilities, ambitions and heritage.
- 4.4 Foster a local educational delivery system capable of maintaining the overall educational level in Thomas County.

- 4.5 Develop and promote programs to educate the residents of Thomas County and visitors regarding the rich heritage and history of the region. Utilize current and future public and cultural facilities such as community libraries, museums and natural wildlife areas associated with the Dismal and Middle Loup Rivers, as well as the Nebraska National Forest at Halsey.
- 4.6 Ensure the rules and regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act are met in all public facilities.
- 4.7 Encourage the availability of all necessary services to youth and older adults in Thomas County.

PLAN MAINTENANCE & IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 1 - Maintain and utilize the Comprehensive Plan as the primary tool for Thomas County decisions regarding the physical development of the Region.

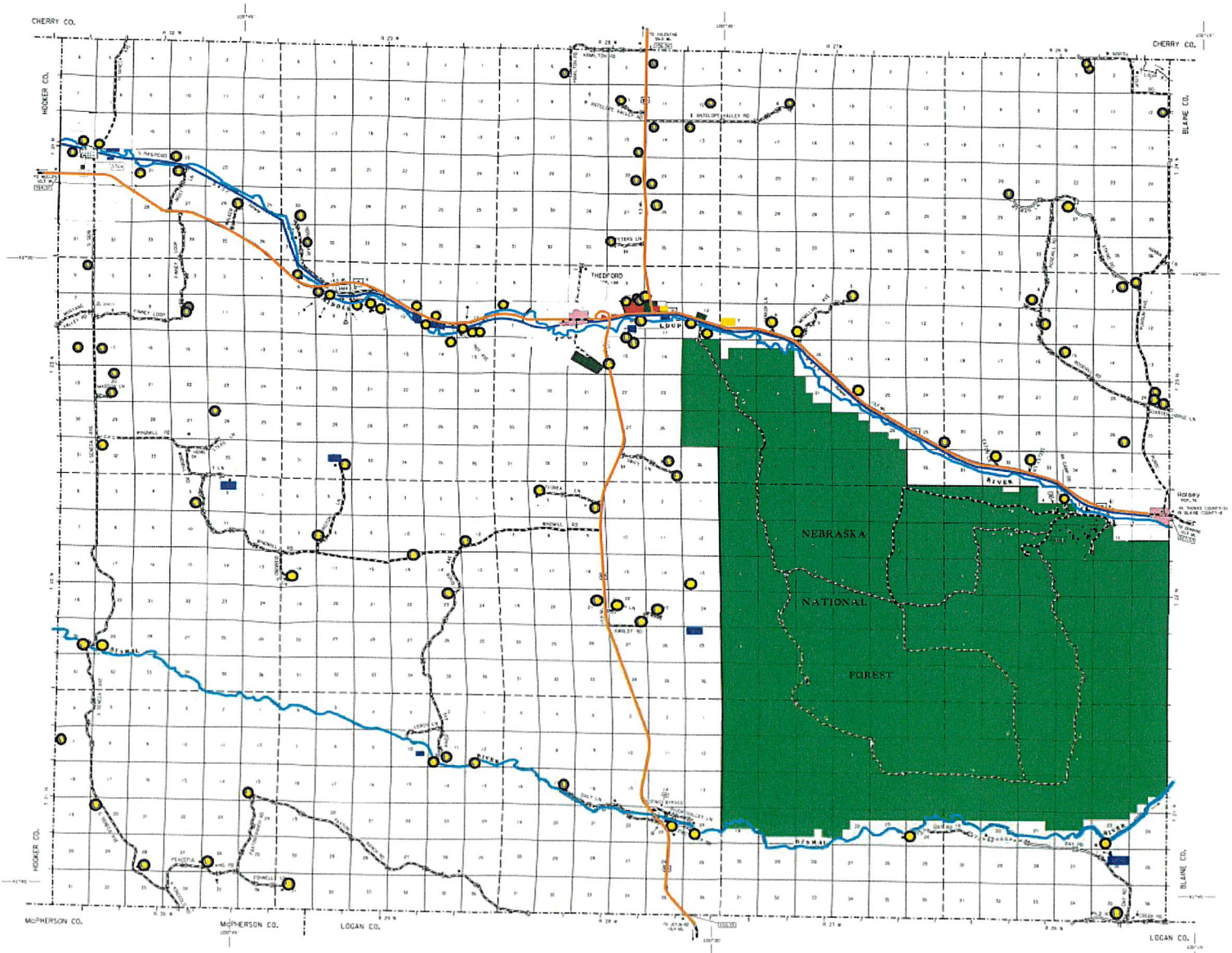
Policies:

- 1.1 Establish an annual review process for the **Comprehensive Plan** and **Zoning Regulations**.
- 1.2 Coordinate development and land use changes with local, County and State officials.
- 1.3 Coordinate local groups and organizations to carry-out the Goals and Policies of this **Comprehensive Plan**.



EXISTING LAND USE MAP

THOMAS COUNTY, NEBRASKA



LEGEND

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| VACANT/AGRICULTURE | MUNICIPAL JURISDICTION |
| PARKS/RECREATION | RURAL SINGLE FAMILY DWELLING |
| PUBLIC/QUASI-PUBLIC | HIGHWAY CORRIDOR |
| RESIDENTIAL SUBDIVISION | RAILROAD CORRIDOR |
| COMMERCIAL | RIVER CORRIDOR |
| INTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL/INDUSTRIAL | |

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ILLUSTRATION 4.2

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