



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

### Introduction and Purpose

In May 2019, the Douglas County Commission adopted the Douglas County Open Space Plan Project Charter as a guiding framework for the development of a countywide Open Space Plan and Program. The charter adoption represents commitment to this multi-year community planning effort. Douglas County staff are now moving forward with active phases of the project, which include community outreach and engagement efforts and the development of the Draft Open Space Plan. This draft Community Engagement Plan (CEP) has been developed to outline and guide efforts to initiate effective discussions across the diverse Douglas County community and integrate key understandings into the draft Open Space Plan.

The Douglas County Open Space Plan is intended to serve both as a broad policy guide and as a roadmap for implementing specific open space enhancements by current and future generations in Douglas County. Through a community-driven process that aligns with the goals set forth in the Douglas County Comprehensive Plan 2040, the Open Space Program will enable Douglas County leaders to understand how Douglas County residents envision open spaces being used in ways that benefit the entire community. Existing and potential open spaces for consideration include:

- **Agricultural lands**
- **Natural resource areas**
- **Historical and cultural sites**
- **Active and passive recreational spaces**

As a result of the plan, the Open Space Program will work to protect Douglas County's most valuable natural resources while identifying best practices for public land development in harmony with landowners and the natural environment. Most importantly, the Open Space Program will facilitate dialogue between Douglas County rural residents, cities, towns, communities, and special interest groups that will result in a collaboratively designed plan for open space use, across the community—including those with potentially differing priorities but shared interests in a healthy and sustainable Douglas County.

### Open Space Plan Study Area

Planning efforts will focus on the open, or undeveloped, public, and private land in unincorporated Douglas County.

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## Program and Plan Values

The draft Open Space Plan will incorporate the following values as general guidance for all planning efforts:

- **Responsive and Inclusive:** The Open Space Plan will respond to and include values and recommendations of recently adopted plans and policies, including those created by Douglas County and unincorporated Townships, Lawrence, Baldwin City, Eudora, and Lecompton.
- **Recommendation-Based not Implementation-Based:** The Open Space Plan will create recommendations for new policy and programs, regulatory tools, funding sources, legislative initiatives, partnerships, and more. It will not result in immediate implementation of recommendations. Any new policy or code changes would be adopted through separate County processes. Implementation, including establishing a permanent Open Space Program, will be the work of county staff along with many agencies, non-profit, and private entities.
- **Data-Driven not Data-Collecting:** The Open Space Plan will rely on the best available authoritative data on current Douglas County land use, policy, and procedures. It will not engage in significant original data collection other than collection of community feedback and dialogue.
- **Advisory Committee:** The Open Space Plan will be guided by the Open Space Team and an Advisory Committee of community members with diverse interests. The Open Space Team will then consider and make recommendations to the Douglas County Commissioners for adoption. Other jurisdictions may accept, adopt, or approve all or portions of the Open Space Plan as desired.

## Community Engagement and Input

Community input will shape the vision and goals of the Open Space Program. A successful Open Space Plan requires project leaders to make a deliberate and sustained effort to fully understand the Douglas County community's interests. Substantial effort will be made to encourage meaningful community involvement by hosting multiple modes of sharing input, listening, and learning. The Open Space Team will gather insight from groups and individuals across the county on the value, opportunities, and context of interconnected issues impacting open spaces.

## Community Engagement Goals

The CEP includes the following goals related to community engagement:

- **Invite** input from diverse community perspectives including geographical, demographic, and across a range of interests and perspectives
- **Create** inclusive community conversations and input opportunities to the greatest extent possible
- **Raise** awareness in Douglas County communities about the possibilities for open space use, conservation, and management
- **Cultivate** critical connections between community groups around shared appreciation of open land
- **Enable** the Advisory Committee to identify priority conservation areas including natural areas, agricultural and cultural heritage landscapes, and a recreation vision for future uses and opportunities

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## Community Engagement Roles

### Internal Team and Contacts

The project is managed by a dedicated Project Management Core Team that includes Douglas County staff from the Sustainability Office, Zoning and Codes Department, and Heritage Conservation Office. Additional staff members will be engaged as needed throughout the project. The County Commissioners will adopt the Plan with recommendation from the Open Space Team.

- County Commission (adopts the Plan)
- Sustainability Office (Project Management Core Team)
- Zoning and Codes Department (Project Management Core Team)
- Heritage Conservation Coordinator (Project Management Core Team)
- County Communications Officer (Project Management Core Team)
- Geographic Information System (GIS) (Project Management Core Team)
- Open Space Plan Consultant Team – Logan Simpson and Coneflower Consulting (Program Management Core Team)

### Advisory Committee

The role of the Advisory Committee will be to provide recommendations and support throughout the development of the Open Space Plan before it is presented to the County Commission for review and adoption. The Advisory Committee offers technical expertise, embodies diverse interests and perspectives, and thinks big. The Project Management Core Team will facilitate regular meetings with the Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee has been selected to include, though is not limited to, the following perspectives:

- Historical and cultural heritage
- Land conservation
- Biodiversity
- Watershed restoration
- Agriculture
- Landowners
- Recreationists
- Housing

The Community Engagement Consultant Team will provide the Advisory Committee with public meeting notification materials for the Committee to distribute to their contacts during key milestone events.



## Engagement Timeline



Figure 1: Engagement Timeline

- **Phase 1: Completed prior to this project, per RFP and Douglas County**
- **Phase 2: Project Initiation – December 2022 - February 2023**  
**Actions:**
  - Review existing plans
  - Develop Community Engagement Plan
    - Develop survey in print and online formats
    - Develop list of focus groups for key stakeholder groups
    - Develop list of interviewees
    - Develop list of Open Space public meetings
    - Discuss opportunity for informational Open Space hotline
      - Hotline includes rudimentary survey capabilities
      - Hotline includes opportunity for pick-your-own-adventure information sharing to non-digital households
      - Hotline includes voicemail feedback option
  - Establish community Advisory Committee and schedule of Advisory Committee meetings
  - Develop fact sheet, project branding
  - Transfer and review County GIS Data for use in analysis, mapping, and communication materials
  - Develop and publish project website
- **Phase 3: Community Visioning and Plan Development – February - July 2023**  
**Actions:**
  - Coneflower records Hotline stories and takes Hotline live no later than March 1
  - Circulate surveys online and with mailer (unincorporated residents)
  - Conduct focus groups and interviews with key organizations/individuals
  - Logan Simpson conducts site visits/listening tour (captures video for social media)

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- Work session with Advisory Committee
- Logan Simpson analyzes existing conditions and trends
- Logan Simpson analyzes survey, focus group, interview, and public meeting results
- Preliminary goals and recommendations
- **Phase 4: Draft Phase – August 2023 - January 2024**  
**Actions:**
  - Develop preliminary recommendations
  - Identify key indicators
  - Develop draft Plan
  - Public Meeting to share draft Plan and receive feedback
  - Comment analysis
- **Phase 5: Plan Approval and Implementation Launch – January 2024 - May 2024**  
**Actions:**
  - Final public Plan unveiling and celebration
  - Funding analysis
  - Implement action plan and identify potential pilot projects

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## Level of Community Engagement

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 				
	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed and listen to and acknowledge concerns & aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns & aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice & innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

## EXAMPLE TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

SELECT BASED ON LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> <li>• Public comment</li> <li>• Open houses (where there is an opportunity for the public to give input)</li> <li>• Public engagement platforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charrettes</li> <li>• Focused conversations</li> <li>• Community liaisons</li> <li>• World cafes/table talks</li> <li>• Open space meetings (self-directed meetings)</li> <li>• Card storming (using sticky notes to generate ideas, identify priorities)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciative inquiry processes</li> <li>• Deliberative forums</li> <li>• Advisory groups</li> <li>• Study circles</li> <li>• Workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Deliberative polling process</li> </ul>
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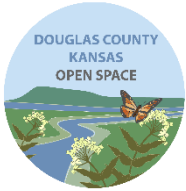
**INFORM/COMMUNICATE**  
 To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.

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## Logos and Branding

The project logo was developed to include commonly recognized natural elements found throughout Douglas County including a confluence of two rivers (representing the Kansas and Wakarusa rivers), hillside topography representing local land formations within the county, and a monarch butterfly and milkweed host plant.



## Objectives/Tools

Tool	Level of Engagement	Description	Audience
<b>ArcGIS Online</b>	Consult and Involve	Use online platform to inform the community about the project, gather input, and share data internally.	All
<b>Advisory Committee</b>	Collaborate	Hold eight meetings to establish project goals, review maps, methods, results, and recommendations.	Advisory Committee
<b>Douglas County Meetings</b>	Collaborate	Host up to three meetings to provide information and updates to the Board of County Commissioners.	Douglas County
<b>One-on-One Interviews</b>	Involve	Conduct discussions with small groups or one-on-one to understand what success looks like, gather sources to review, and understand challenges.	Key Constituents
<b>Online Community Survey</b>	Involve	Provide a link via the project webpage and through social and other media to an online survey focused on understanding community priorities around open space within the county.	All
<b>Community Forums</b>	Involve	Use engagement techniques to gather input on values and open lands priorities from data partners and the public.	All
<b>Other Notifications</b>	Inform	Use newsletters, social media, mailer, and press releases during key community involvement stages and major project milestone updates.	All