

Visual Analysis

The visual appeal of a place is a crucial quality that defines the look and feel of a community. The look of an area will attract or deter possible new residents and visitors. The current residents are able to create an aesthetically pleasing community, which helps to appeal to new residents and guests.

Visual assessment is a means to gain insight for needed or potential enhancements in Dickinson County. Harmony between visual elements is important. This harmony is found by providing appropriate landscaping and signage. In order to improve the visual character, it is also important to enhance the existing visual elements of the county.

This chapter focuses on ways to retain and enhance the appeal of Dickinson County. It identifies visual assets and addresses measures to enhance those assets.

Focus Groups and Other Meetings

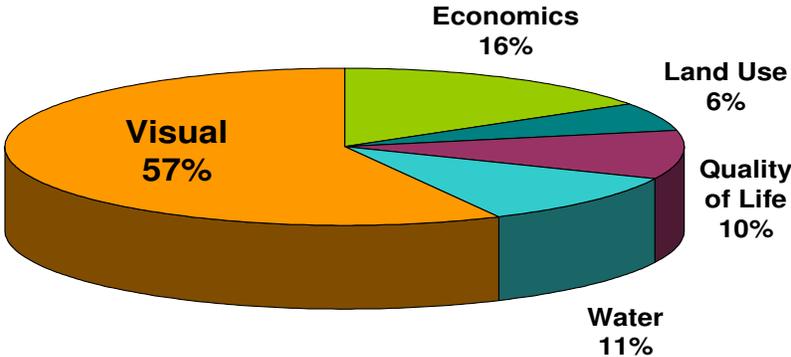
To assist in the assessment of the visual aspects of Dickinson County, the Plan Preparation Team hosts two separate public focus group meetings. The first takes place in Herington where 34 residents attended, and the second in Chapman, where 24 residents were in attendance. The meetings last around two hours; the residents are seated at tables to participate in a discussion focused on these five key issues:

- o economic development
- o land use
- o quality of life
- o water and facilities
- o visual assessment

These meetings help to focus the comprehensive plan on issues imperative to the community. Each person is allowed to voice their opinions on all the issues while at that tables. A recorder writes lists on posters that are then adhered to the walls around the meeting room. Following the table discussions, all participants are asked to place sticker dots next to the issues that they felt were key to the county’s development.

Of the 362 total “dot” votes, 57 percent deal with visual aspects.

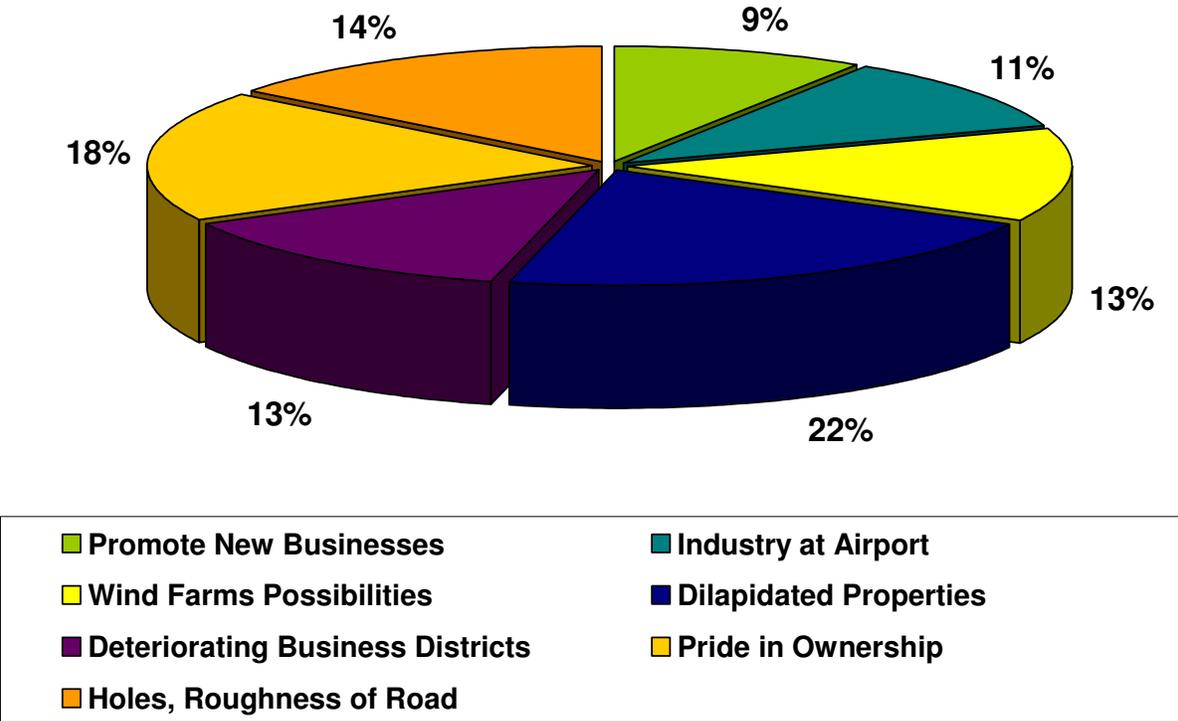
Graph 7.1 Focus Group Voting Responses By Category



From analysis of the results, improvement is needed in the visual aspect of many of the communities, ranging from deteriorating business districts to dilapidated housing. Economic growth is also a main concern; growth near the airport is one possibility discussed, along with the prospect of wind farms (**Graph 7.2**). Overall, citizens are pleased with the quality of life in Dickinson County for many reasons including the small town atmosphere, community safety, and good quality education. See **Appendix G** for all focus group results.

Graph 7.2

Citizen Concerns Indicated During Focus Groups



Prior to the focus group meetings, the Planning Team conducts an introductory presentation before the comprehensive plan project’s Citizen Steering Committee, assembled by the County. Following the presentation, a question-and-answer session led to a summary of community issues (See **Appendix H**). Most of these issues were in sync with those later brought up at focus group meetings.

Between focus group meetings, a Planning Team representative attended a work session of the County Commission. This four-hour session in Abilene involved commissioners as well as members of the Board of Zoning Appeals. Issues raised by these participants were along the same lines of those raised by county citizens in focus groups. This shows that the County Commission is listening and staying aware of county sentiments.

Dickinson County Citizen Opinion Survey

The Dickinson County Citizen Opinion Survey asks a variety of questions related to the look and feel of Dickinson County. Some of these results are below. For more survey results, please see **Chapter 10** and **Appendix J**.

- Many residents agree that Dickinson County's history and architecture should be preserved.
- The majority of residents disagree that old buildings and houses should be torn down for newer construction.
- County residents have no opinion or are not sure if the entrances to towns in Dickinson County are unattractive.
- Residents agree that there should be more places for kids to hang out with their friends.
- Most residents agree that homes in Dickinson County have an above average appearance.
- Many citizens would support a program to strengthen community pride and appearance.
- Residents are neutral when it comes to using community centers and/or walk-n-bike paths.
- There is a neutral response to whether there are enough places to exercise.
- When asked if outdoor recreation is limited or non-existent, citizens again respond neutrally.
- A major portion of residents agree that lakes, reservoirs and streambeds are Dickinson County's most important assets.
- When asked if there are enough cultural opportunities, events and activities, the response is neutral.
- Finally, residents also have neutral feelings about needed improvement of the overall appearance of Dickinson County.

Visual Elements

The Planning Team analyzes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Dickinson County. The goals are to enhance strengths, improve weaknesses, and take advantage of opportunities. This kind of focus should enhance Dickinson County's visual opportunities, expand community pride, and attract potential investors and residents. The following design features are discussed:

- Community Entrances
- Downtown Business Districts
- Open Spaces and Parks
- Landmarks

Community Entrances

A community entrance serves as the first impression of a community and can have either a positive or a negative effect on visitors. An ideal community entrance consists of a gateway, signage and landscaping. The gateway invites the visitor into the community; the signage identifies the community and welcomes the visitor; and the landscaping enhances the view.

Abilene

The predominant entrances to Abilene are located at the northern and southern edges of town along K-15 and at the eastern and western edges along I-70. The northern and southern signs are positioned on the right side of the highway just before entering town. A small wooden adornment states "Youth + Community = Abilene", and a larger graphic welcomes the visitor.



Water tower at western entrance along I-70

The western entrance from I-70, denoted by the large water tower, is actually very successful. Its placement, subtlety and scale create a nice welcome to the city. Unfortunately, the city of Abilene has neglected the need for a welcome sign on the eastern edge of the city at I-70. A subtle, well-placed sign would be a nice addition. There is another entrance to the city from the



Abilene welcome sign at northern and southern entrances on K-15

west along Old Highway 40, although it is not nearly as well traveled. It would be nice if there was a smaller sign similar to the others welcoming visitors to Abilene.

Although the existing entrances are sufficient, improvements could be made to enhance their visual quality. For example, the graphics could be updated and the landscaping should be better maintained. Lighting should be added to improve nighttime visibility. It would also be better if signs are established to thank the visitors for coming.



Southern entrance to Herington

Herington

Entrances to Herington are located along the main arterial highways. The entrances are denoted with signage at each of these entrances. There is a nice brick construction with a welcoming message located at the southern edge of Herington, but the sign is awkwardly placed and difficult to see or read. Beside realignment, this entrance should also

be improved by adding lighting for night and a landscaped base for visual appeal.

The other gateways consist of nothing more than clumsily-placed, painted plywood signs. These entrances could be vastly improved with appropriate lighting, landscaping and more appealing signage. There is also an opportunity to utilize the existing oil tanks located on the northeast side of the intersection of Highways 77 and 56. With some paint and creativity, the oil tanks could become nice welcoming elements. Finally, an aesthetically pleasing way to thank guests for visiting should be incorporated into the signage at the exits.

Chapman

Chapman's entrances are located to the north, south, east and west of town. The most prominent of these is the northern entrance, about a mile south of I-70. The entrance signage is great, but it lacks both lighting and landscaping. The entrance would be improved with the addition of lighting for ease of seeing it at night, along with more prominent landscaping. The existing small bushes are not enough visual appeal to attract visitors.



Northern entrance to Chapman

Again, smaller, less dominant signs with some landscaping at the other entrances are ideal. "Thank you for visiting" signs would be nice additions as well.

Solomon

Solomon's entrance from I-70 could be improved and made more welcoming. However, Solomon does have signage on Old Highway 40 on the east and west entrances to the city.



Solomon's existing I-70 entrance

Enterprise, Hope, Woodbine, Manchester, Carlton

These communities have little to no signage welcoming residents and visitors. It would be nice to have a simple entry to each town, welcoming residents home. Exit signs should also be used to thank visitors for coming and to invite them to return in the future. This could consist of something as simple as a small flowerbed and short sign.

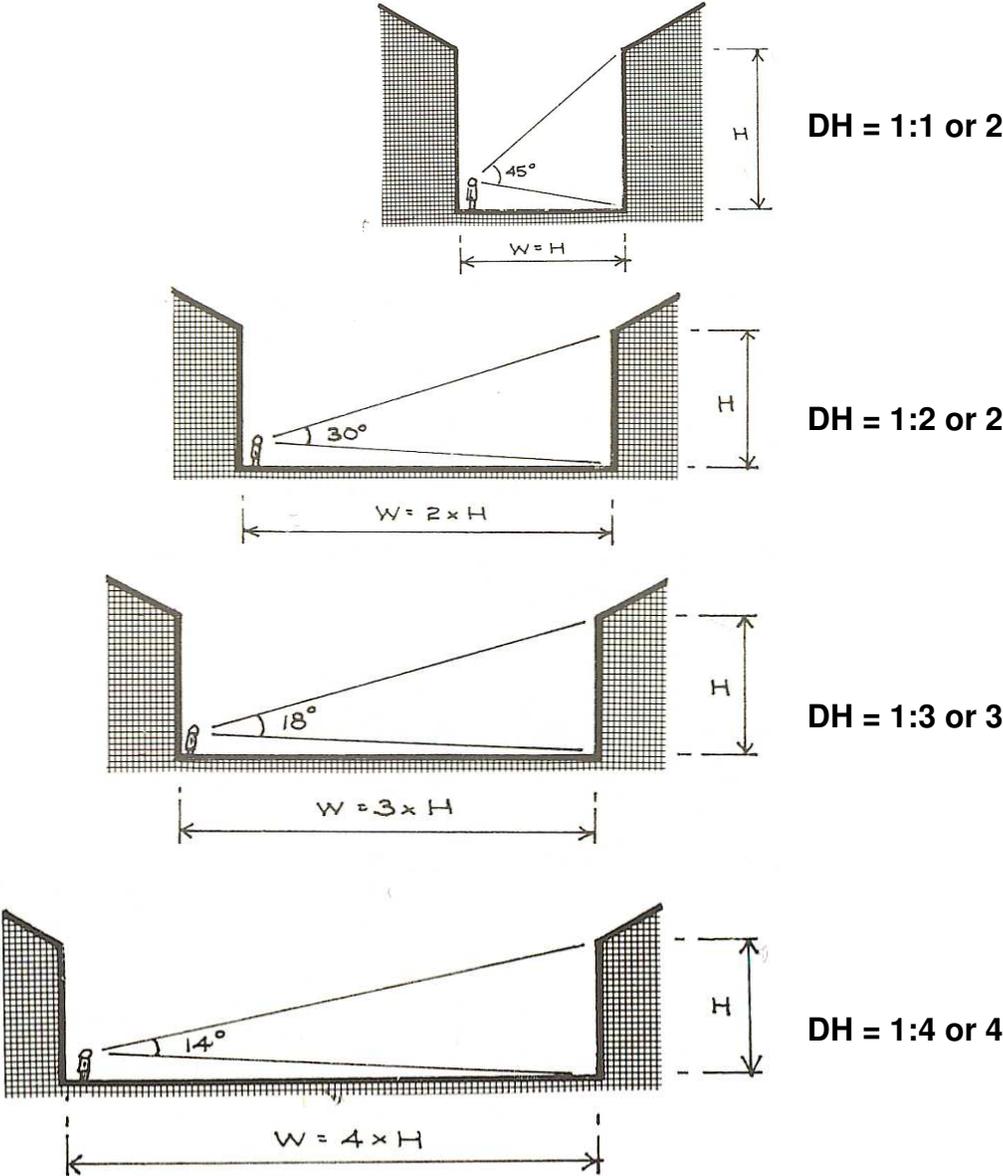
Downtown Business Districts

The downtown business district of a community not only provides goods and services to its residents and visitors, but also establishes an image of the community. In Dickinson County, downtown business districts are located on the communities' primary streets. The image of downtown gives a sense of enclosure from the architectural

characteristics of buildings, the landscaping, and the street furniture such as signage, lighting, and trash receptacles.

The feeling of enclosure is the relationship between humans and the size of the street space. The distance between buildings on both sides of the street (D) and the height of the adjacent building (H) are two elements used in this analysis. A D/H ratio of one to two is well balanced because the opposite elevation and façade details can be comfortably perceived within a 30° to 45° cone of vision. When the D/H ratio is greater than one to three, the angle of vision with the opposite elevation reduces to less than 18° . In this case, the sense of spatial enclosure is low and the elevation loses detail.

Diagrams 7.1 – 7.4 Degrees of Street Enclosure



Source: McCluskey, J. (1992). *Road form & townscapes*. London: Butterworth Architecture. Pgs. 108-110.

The architectural characteristics of the downtown supplement its street image. These also show the economic condition of the district. The decline of downtown businesses is indicated by the condition of the buildings along main streets. Poor maintenance and unattractive elements due to non-renovation add to this decline. It is important to preserve and restore downtown buildings because they influence economical opinion.

Landscaping enhances the visual quality and softens the street image. It can be integrated with street furniture, providing convenience, increasing attractiveness of the streetscape, and improving human scale.

Enhancing the image of the downtown districts attracts new businesses, improves the possibility for growth, and helps to create vibrant and healthy surroundings. It should be a goal for every community to maintain an attractive downtown. This can be accomplished by providing small tax incentives for improving downtown structures.

Abilene

The main drag of the downtown business district of Abilene is located on north Third Street. With a D/H ratio at about two, the downtown has a comfortable sense of enclosure. On-street parking buffers sidewalks from vehicle traffic flow. Buildings line up along the street nicely and are in good condition, indicating economic strength. Most of the buildings are two-story structures built of brick, maintaining a uniform streetscape and human scale. In addition, wider sidewalks and decorative street lamps, as well as a nice open space, provide seating and green space. This enhances the attractiveness of the streetscape.



Downtown Abilene

It is recommended that the decorative street lamps and signage continue throughout the entire business district rather than just for a few blocks. The original architectural features of the buildings and the street furniture should be preserved and maintained. It is necessary to enforce specific architectural design regulations in order to preserve the historical character of the downtown. New architecture should complement the style of the existing context of buildings.

Herington

The downtown district of Herington is primarily located on North Broadway. The businesses are primarily small-scale and service-oriented. These include a pharmacy, chiropractor and insurance company. In addition to these, there is a larger retail store located on the southern edge of the district.



Current downtown Herington

Largely, the buildings in the downtown district are two stories tall with lower overhangs above store entrances, providing a better sense of human scale. North Broadway has an H/D ratio of about three which creates a less than ideal, but acceptable, sense of enclosure. The continuation of the landscaped median located in the residential portions of Broadway could easily be continued in order to improve the H/D ratio, and wider sidewalks could make downtown Herington more pedestrian friendly place as seen in the picture below. The majority of buildings are all in relatively good condition, although some could benefit from simple maintenance improvements.

It is recommended that the original architectural features of the downtown buildings be maintained and the deteriorating buildings be restored to attract new businesses to the area. It is necessary to enforce architectural design regulations in order to preserve the historical character of the downtown. Renovations should compliment the style of the existing buildings.

Chapman

Chapman's downtown business district is located on Marshall Avenue. It has an H/D ratio of about two, an ideal degree of enclosure. The buildings are primarily built of stone and brick and contain small-scale, service-oriented businesses. A few of the buildings need minor repair, but for the most part, the buildings are in good condition. The brick street adds to the appeal of the small community's downtown. The curbs and sidewalks should be repaired in order to be more visually attractive.



Downtown Chapman

Chapman has a great sense of pride. This is seen not only throughout the downtown signage, but also throughout the entire community. The shamrocks hung on the light poles in the downtown district and various signs hung around the town are examples.



Downtown Solomon improvements

Solomon, Enterprise, Hope, Woodbine, Manchester, Carlton

The smaller communities of the county should look into renovating their downtown districts. Currently, Solomon is undergoing a revitalization to improve its downtown. This project could be an example for other communities. The sidewalks have been widened to create a safe area for pedestrians. The on-street parking and designated brick crosswalks add to this pedestrian safety while broadening visual appeal. An open space for community interaction has been developed and storefronts are being updated.

The communities of Enterprise, Hope, Woodbine, Manchester, and Carlton should use this example to revitalize and update their downtown business districts.

Landmarks^[blc1]

Landmarks are distinguishable elements located throughout communities. Both citizens and visitors use these places to orient and direct themselves. Landmarks are generally identifiable, significant and memorable. Since Dickinson County has a very historical past, many significant places are located throughout the area. Below is a list of places listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

Abilene

- Coulson, Emerson House
- Eisenhower Home
- First Presbyterian Church of Abilene
- Hotel Sunflower
- John Johntz House
- Lebold Mansion
- Litts-Dieter House

- Meade-Rogers House
- Parker Carousel
- Perring Building
- St. John’s Episcopal Church
- Seelye Mansion
- D.G. Smith Building
- United Building

Chapman

Prospect Park Farm

Herington

Carnegie Public Library

Artwork at Post Office

Because of the rich heritage and cultural significance of these landmarks, it is recommended that the county focus on preservation [blc2]of these existing structures as well as their environmental conditions.

Other important landmarks located throughout the county are the one room schoolhouses. These structures date back to the late 1800s and early 1900s and are significant aspects of the history of education in Dickinson County. Many of these structures are well preserved and still used today. The utilization of this asset is commended and further restoration, renovation and preservation of the school houses as community centers or museums is encouraged. The County could also develop an organization in charge of preservation and publicity of the various schoolhouses located throughout Dickinson County.

One location which could be better utilized is southern Abilene from downtown to Old Abilene Town. This area includes downtown Abilene, the Eisenhower Presidential Center, the Greyhound Hall of Fame, the Hall of Generals, Old Abilene Town, the end of the Chisholm Trail and the Historical Museum of Dickinson County.

Since all of these places are located in a somewhat centralized location more effort should put forth to unify these attractions. As a result, visitors to a certain attraction should find themselves wanting to visit the others as well. Transformation into a day and night walkable tourist center should attract more visitors. Other considerations could be trolley or horse carriage rides, children's activities and city tours. The addition of restaurants and relaxing open spaces would add to the Abilene community as a whole.



Existing trail landmark

Other than the unification of these locales, the historical significance of the Chisholm Trail should be utilized more effectively than it is presently. Currently, a simple three-foot concrete pole marks the end of the trail as a historically significant site. A park and monument could easily be constructed in the parking lot where this pole is located. In addition, the trail could be creatively marked along K-15 which would increase the awareness and interest of people traveling south of Abilene. It could potentially be reopened as a living history or walk-and-bike trail.



Example of new Chisholm Trail landmark

Open Spaces

Open spaces in Dickinson County facilitate interaction between residents. These include parks, walk and bike paths, tracks, and trails. These informal gathering places provide space for community events and promote cultural celebrations and activities. These spaces, especially spaces with designed water features, public art, and pleasing innovative design features, enhance the visual appeal of the county as a whole.

This analysis shows that the communities of Dickinson County have sufficient open space and opportunities for recreation. The main concern for these spaces is adequate maintenance, updating and upkeep.

Housing

Dwelling units are important elements in the visual appeal of communities. As stated before in the Housing chapter of this plan, the housing stock of the county is in relatively good condition. The houses themselves have an above-average appearance, according to the citizen survey. This issue is also discussed in the focus group meetings. Some citizens are concerned that the appearance of lawns is less than attractive. It is suggested in the citizen survey that there be a program to repair/clean-up homes and lawns, but community response is neutral. The appearance of lawns could be improved by something as simple as enforcing county property ordinances and assessing fines for those failing to comply.

Conclusions and Recommendations^[b1c3]

According to the community survey, Dickinson County's history and architecture should be preserved. Preservation is important to a heritage county such as Dickinson County. It is important to prevent new developments from creating visual disharmony to the existing architecture. Environmental protection and the conservation of prime farmland need to be emphasized when developing new areas.

Dickinson County towns have workable downtowns for business opportunities, but these opportunities need to be investigated. Communities are encouraged to revitalize their downtown business districts since visual quality reflects the economic conditions of a community. New structures should be compatible with the existing business context of the downtown region.

Beautification movements, such as landscaping and street furniture, would aid in the visual quality of Dickinson County's communities^[b1c4]. The creation or enforcement of local ordinances pertaining to yard cleanliness ^[b1c5]will also increase visual appeal. Lastly, communities must build on their local resources, assets and strengths.