
INTRODUCTION

Cherry County, Nebraska is the 49th largest county by population of the 93 counties in the State of Nebraska and is the single largest County by area in the entire State of Nebraska. The County experienced declines in population since 1920, when it reached a maximum population of 11,753, to 2010 when the population had declined to 5,713 persons. However, since 2010 the County has experienced a slight growth in population and employment opportunities. This growth in population is a result of increases in employment and business opportunities which foretells a number of challenges that the residents in the County will face in the foreseeable future in order to continue economic growth.

This Comprehensive Plan has been formulated to identify the challenges that the residents of the County will face and identify goals, objectives and public policies that will allow the County to effectively address such challenges in a manner preferred by its citizens.

ROLE OF THIS PLAN

A Comprehensive Plan has two fundamental purposes. The first is to define a “vision” for the future county to give guidance to local public officials on how to achieve the goals and objectives established by the citizens of Cherry County. The second is to provide a sound legal basis for land use regulations, including zoning and subdivision control which are instrumental in achieving the physical vision of the future County.

Nebraska State Statutes enable counties to adopt zoning and subdivision regulations to promote “the health, safety, morals, convenience, order, prosperity and welfare of the present and future citizens of the County. However, these same Statutes indicate that a County may not adopt land use regulations without first formulating and adopting a Comprehensive Plan. This limitation is based upon the premise that decisions regarding future land uses should not be arbitrary, but instead should be based upon an overall plan for the future development of the County which has been formulated by local citizens and officially adopted by the County Board of Commissioners.

To ensure that such a Plan is reasonably comprehensive, these same Statutes also specify that, at a minimum, a Comprehensive Plan must include the following elements:

- A land use element which designates the proposed general distribution, general location and extent of the uses of land for agriculture, housing, commerce, industry, recreation, education, public buildings and lands and other categories of public and private use of land.

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- The general location, character and extent of existing and proposed major streets, roads and highways, and air and other transportation routes and facilities.
 - The general location, type, capacity and area served by present and projected or needed community facilities, including recreation facilities, schools, libraries, other public buildings and public utilities and services.
 - An energy element which evaluates energy use within the County and provides recommendations regarding methods and projects that can be implemented to reduce overall energy use.
 - The Comprehensive Plan shall be designed to accommodate anticipated long-range future growth which shall be based upon documented population and economic projections.

COUNTY VISION

A comprehensive plan is important, if not critical to the future development of the County because it is typically the only plan that addresses the future economic and physical development of the County.

The plan establishes a “picture” or “vision” of the County’s future, based on a consensus of the desires of residents of the County. This picture or vision will become crucial as the citizens of the County face the impacts associated with an aging population, changes in employment opportunities and limited growth of the tax base.

Beyond defining a vision, this Plan presents public policies and actions that will need to be taken to achieve the vision of the future.

THE PLANNING PERIOD

Due to the comprehensiveness of this Plan and the need to address a variety of issues, it is not possible to make reasonably accurate projections of future needs or results for an infinite period of time. This comprehensive plan limits the time period for defining the vision for the County to ten years. At that point the Plan should be reviewed to determine what has changed and what changes are needed to deal with any changes that are identified.

WHO DOES THE PLANNING?

Ideally, every citizen in the County would participate in the formulation of a Comprehensive Plan. Unfortunately, not all citizens will choose to participate for a variety of reasons regardless of the efforts and the associated monetary costs expended to seek participation at various meetings and public forums used to formulate the Plan.

Nebraska Statutes enabling county planning recognize this problem of citizen participation, but still require that the Comprehensive Plan be formulated by citizen volunteers. The law requires that a group of local citizens be appointed by the governing body to lead the formulation of such Plan. This group of citizens is known as the Cherry County Planning Commission.



The citizens who serve on the Planning Commission are people who serve as unpaid volunteers. This requirement that the Comprehensive Plan be formulated by such unpaid citizen volunteers is designed to assure that the Plan will reflect the views and desires of the people of the County and not solely those of local politicians or interest groups.

This requirement places a substantial burden on such citizen volunteers in that it takes considerable time and effort to understand the issues that the County will face during the Planning Period, to seek the opinions of other citizens in formulating the Plan and to identify goals, plans, public policies and actions which will be needed to achieve the vision of the future County that is desired by the majority of its citizens.

ECONOMIC, POPULATION & HOUSING ANALYSIS & PROJECTIONS

In order to formulate effective plans for the economic enhancement and the physical development of Cherry County, which are properly scaled to meet the needs of the present and future County, it is necessary to establish a forecast of the future population. Historic population data and trends assist in developing projections of population, which in turn assist in determining future housing, educational, public services demands and future public facility and land use needs within the County.

Population growth or decline in any geographic area is dependent on the levels of and trends in the regional and local economies. A strong, expanding economy generates employment opportunities within a given geographic area, which in turn attracts more people to the area to obtain employment. A declining economy, on the other hand, results in decreasing employment opportunities and the outflow of people from a given geographic area in search of employment opportunities elsewhere.

The following analysis relates the historic economic trends of Cherry County with past population changes in the urban communities in the County and the overall County. Future economic activity assumptions can be derived from past economic patterns and trends to provide supporting data for forecasting future population levels.

HISTORIC ECONOMIC TRENDS

One of the critical components in the analysis of economic trends in Cherry County is an analysis of employment levels, types of employment and changes in employment over time. As indicated in Table 1, the local County economy experienced several changes in employment characteristics from 2000 to 2010. Some data for later years is available, but such data are only estimates and have a relatively high error rate and have not been used in this analysis. From 2000 to 2010 the number of persons employed in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining, which in the case of Cherry County is primarily agricultural employment, has decreased by 136 persons or nearly 15%. This decrease is reflective of a statewide trend toward larger farms and ranches and fewer farmers and ranchers.

The County has also experienced notable decreases in employment in manufacturing, transportation, warehousing and utilities, entertainment and food services and public administration. Combined, employment declines in these categories totaled 122 jobs lost during the decade of 2000-2010.

TABLE 1 EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Industry Category	2000		2010		Employment Gain or Loss 2000 - 2010	% Change 2000 - 2010
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries & Mining	920	29.0%	784	24.7%	- 136	-14.8%
Construction	186	5.9%	202	6.4%	+ 16	+ 8.6%
Manufacturing	80	2.5%	60	1.9%	- 20	- 25.0%
Wholesale Trade	102	3.2%	97	3.1%	- 5	- 4.9%
Retail Trade	305	9.6%	360	11.3%	+ 55	+18.0%
Transportation, Warehouse & Utilities	168	5.3%	119	3.7%	- 49	- 29.2%
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	110	3.5%	125	3.9%	+ 15	+ 13.6%
Education and Health Services	629	19.8%	796	25.1%	+167	+26.6%
Professional, Scientific Management, Admin. & Waste Management	122	3.8%	93	2.9%	- 29	- 23.8%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accomd. and Food Services	272	8.6%	232	7.3%	- 40	-14.7%
Other Services (except public admin.)	143	4.5%	192	6.0%	+ 49	+34.3%
Public Administration	134	4.3%	117	3.7%	- 17	- 12.7%
TOTAL	3,171	100.0%	3,177	100.0%	+ 6	+ 1.9%

Source: U. S. Bureau of Census, Census of Population, 2000 – 2010

The substantial declines in agricultural employment during the period from 2000 to 2010 has resulted in a notable shift in overall employment in the County as employment is currently more centered in the urban areas of the County and has become more diversified and generally more service oriented. This shift is verified by the fact that the County has experienced modest increases in employment in most other sectors of the County economy since 2000. The gains in these employment categories have been sufficient to make up for the loss of the 296 jobs in the agricultural and other sectors. The net gain of 6 jobs in the County since 2000 indicates a stabilization in the overall economic strength of the County, but limited overall growth.

As noted above, the County also experienced employment declines in the public and quasi-public (tax-exempt) sectors of the economy. This employment, consisting of employment in health care and nursing home care, public education and public administration increased by 150 jobs since 2000. This trend is positive from the standpoint of the overall economic strength of the County economy, but it is negative from the standpoint that it results in an increase in the amount of taxes required to support the employees in this sector.

ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

The importance of agricultural production and certain other sectors of the economy in Cherry County can be examined further through an analysis of basic and non-basic employment in the County.

Basic employment components of the local economy include business activities that provide services and products via sales primarily to entities outside of the County where the money generated by such sales is brought from outside of the County and is directed to the local area (the County) in the form of wages and payments to local suppliers and producers.

Non-basic employment components of the local economy include the sale of goods and services to people and entities within the County where a portion of the money generated by such sales is re-circulated locally in the form of wages and payments, but the balance of the money goes to an entrepreneur or corporate entity that may not be located in the County. In these instances, money is drained from the local economy.

An analysis of basic and non-basic employment is used to better understand which employment categories are exporting goods and services outside of the County and importing dollars into the local economy.

The data in Table 2 indicates the employment category, the percentage of basic employment, the percentage of non-basic employment and the percentage of the State of Nebraska workforce in each employment category. Subtraction of the State's workforce percentage in a particular employment category from the Cherry County workforce percentage for the same category indicates which categories are basic or non-basic. If a County economy indicates a lower proportion of people employed in an employment category than the State as a whole, that employment category is considered to be non-basic.

If the proportion for the County is higher than the State as a whole, that portion of the higher percentage which is above that as the State as a whole is considered to be basic employment, because it is these categories of employment which are exporting goods and services outside of the County resulting in generating an infusion of money into the local economy.

All other employment categories are “non-basic” and the levels of employment in these categories is dependent on expansion of the “basic” employment sectors.

From the data presented in Table 2, the importance of agricultural production and the impacts on the local economy are obvious. The agricultural sector, educational, health and other services employment represent the foremost drivers of the local economy and accounts for nearly 99% of all basic employment in the County.

TABLE 2 BASIC / NON-BASIC EMPLOYMENT - 2010
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Employment Sector	Basic	Non-Basic	% of Cherry County Workforce	% of State of Nebraska Workforce
Agriculture, Forestry and Mining	19.8%	4.8%	24.7%	4.8%
Construction	0.0%	6.4%	6.4%	6.5%
Manufacturing	0.0%	1.9%	1.9%	10.7%
Wholesale Trade	0.1%	3.0%	3.1%	3.0%
Retail Trade	0.0%	11.3%	11.3%	11.6%
Transportation, Warehousing & Utilities	0.0%	3.7%	3.7%	6.0%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	0.0%	3.9%	3.9%	7.6%
Professional, Scientific, Management	0.0%	2.9%	2.9%	8.1%
Educational, Health, Social Services	1.8%	23.3%	25.1%	23.3%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodations and Food Services	0.0%	7.3%	7.3%	7.6%
Other Services (except public administration)	1.5%	4.5%	6.0%	4.5%
Public Administration	0.0%	3.7%	3.7%	4.1%
TOTALS	23.2%	76.8%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, 2010ab

The health care employment in the County has experienced an increase from 2000 to 2010 and represents an important basic industry component. This is due in part to the fact that health care facilities in Valentine provide services to a large geographic area include parts of southern South Dakota which bring dollars from outside the County into the local economy.

ECONOMIC BASE MULTIPLIER

The economic base multiplier is a ratio between the level of employment in “basic” employment categories and the level of employment in the “non-basic” categories. In the case of Cherry County, the economic base multiplier is 1.7, meaning that for each new job added to one of the basic employment categories 1.7 new additional jobs in the non-basic employment categories will result. Similarly, the loss of a job in any of the basic employment categories would result in a loss of 1.7 jobs elsewhere in the non-basic local economy.

The future impact of continuing the historic trend of declining agricultural employment cannot be understated. Either employment in the agricultural sector of the County economy must be expanded or employment in the other basic employment categories, specifically, manufacturing and tourist-oriented businesses serving the recreation and tourism resulting from the Niobrara Scenic River Corridor must be expanded if the County is to have an expanding economy through the planning period.

If there is to be any growth in the agricultural production employment in the future in the County, such growth will probably have to occur in the area of expanded livestock, poultry or aquacultural production.

The importance of expanded livestock or poultry production and expansion in the manufacturing and tourism sectors should not be understated. Expansion in the levels of employment in these components of the local economy is the best and perhaps only way to expand the total overall economy in the County.

AGRICULTURAL TRENDS

Livestock production is the backbone of the economy of Cherry County. It is therefore imperative to evaluate the historic trends in the agricultural sector of the County economy to provide insight into the economic future of the County as well as future land use and infrastructure needs.

The latest data that is comparable with prior year data is that which is available through the 2012 Census of Agriculture. As indicated in Table 3, the number of ranches in Cherry County increased by 9 in the decade between 2002 and 2012. This slight increase is most likely related to land development activity along the Niobrara River corridor. During this time period there has been also be a small decrease in the size of farms and ranches with the average size of the average farm or ranch being reduced from 6,781 acres in 2002 to 6,637 acres in 2012.

TABLE 3 AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION TRENDS
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

PRODUCTION FACTOR	2002	2007	2012
Number of Farms and Ranches	557	560	566
Land in Farms and Ranches (acres)	3,777,285	3,759,629	3,756,545
Average Size of Farms and Ranches (acres)	6,781	6,714	6,637
Total Cropland (acres)	425,907	414,749	358,507
Total Irrigated Cropland (acres)	34,579	44,734	50,879
Cattle Inventory	291,535	264,458	261,834
Market Value of Crops Sold	\$ 11,146,000	\$ 13,908,000	\$ 79,896,000
Market Value of Livestock & Poultry Sold	\$108,140,000	\$128,588,000	\$166,866,000
Average Net Cash Income (per farm)	\$ 33,998	\$ 55,498	\$136,845

Source: Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture, 2002 - 2012

The amount of land in the County that is used for crop production has decreased since 2002, but the amount of crop land that is irrigated has increased slightly since 2002 when slightly over 34,000 acres in the County were irrigated. By 2012, the amount of irrigated land had increased by over 47% to just over 50,000 acres.

The increase in irrigated land, enhancements in crop productivity and increases in commodity prices resulted in substantial increases in the value of crops marketed over the last number of years in the 2002-2012 decade. The value of all crops marketed in the County in 2002 exceeded \$11,000,000 while in 2012 the value was \$79,900,000, a 606% increase in gross income over that in 2002.

Cherry County is not noted for its irrigation and crop production, but is noted for livestock production which remains a major component in the local agricultural economy. Based upon the value of agricultural products sold, cattle production in the County has comprised from 67% to slightly over 90% of all agricultural products marketed per year since 2002.

Cattle and calf inventories in Cherry County have remained relatively stable since 2002. The number of cattle and calves in inventory in 2012 was some 30,000 head or only 10% less than in 2002.

INCOME TRENDS

An important economic trend is that critical to the evaluation of the strength of the local County economy is income. As indicated in Table 4, household incomes in Cherry County have increased substantially in the years from 2000 to 2010. In 2000 41% of all households in the County had incomes of under \$25,000 while in 2010 only 27% of households had limited incomes of \$25,000 or less. The number of households in the County with incomes between \$25,000 and \$50,000 annually increased slightly from 1,242 in 2000 to 1,304 in 2010. Further, the number of households with incomes above \$50,000 annually increased a very notable 80% from 2000 to 2010. This increase in the number of higher income households, from 619 in 2000 to 1,110 in 2010 is an indication of a stronger local economy due in part to higher agricultural commodity prices and increased population and tourism growth related to the Niobrara River.

A comparison of growth in household income between Cherry County and the State as a whole indicates that household income levels in the County increased at a rate slightly greater than the State this time period. Median household income in Cherry County increased at a rate 23% greater than that of the State of Nebraska which is an indication that the economy of the County expanded faster than that of the State. Again, this increase can be attributed mainly to increased incomes in the agricultural sector of the economy as well as increased tourism related to the Niobrara River.

**TABLE 4 HOUSEHOLD INCOME TRENDS
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA**

Household Income	2000				2010			
	Cherry County	% of Total	State of Nebraska	% of Total	Cherry County	% of Total	State of Nebraska	% of Total
Less than \$10,000	273	10.8%	55,340	8.3%	245	9.8%	45,321	6.4%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	255	10.1%	43,915	6.6%	228	9.1%	41,617	5.8%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	507	20.1%	98,663	14.8%	213	8.5%	81,800	11.5%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	415	16.5%	97,932	14.7%	332	13.3%	63,307	8.9%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	449	17.8%	122,654	18.4%	377	15.0%	108,311	15.2%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	378	15.0%	136,141	20.4%	595	23.8%	141,702	19.9%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	125	5.0%	58,361	8.7%	225	9.0%	90,871	12.6%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	87	3.5%	36,565	5.5%	197	7.9%	76,556	10.8%
\$140,000 - \$199,999	10	0.4%	8,551	1.3%	56	2.2%	19,998	2.8%
\$200,000 or more	19	0.8%	8,873	1.3%	37	1.5%	17,288	2.4%
Number of Households	2,518	100.0%	666,995	100.0%	2,505	100.0%	711,771	100.0%
Median Household Income	\$ 29,268		\$ 39,250		\$ 43,431		\$ 49,342	

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, 2000 - 2010

An important factor to consider when analyzing income growth is whether the income levels are keeping pace with inflation. The Consumer Price Index (CPI), a measure of inflation, indicates that from 2000 to 2010 the CPI was 29%. In Cherry County the median household income increased by 48.4% during this time period. This indicates that the majority of household incomes in the County increased at a rate nearly double the rate of inflation which, in turn, indicates that the typical households in Cherry County were earning substantially more in real dollars in 2010 than in 2000.

HISTORIC POPULATION TRENDS

In order to establish a population forecast, it is necessary to evaluate historic population levels and trends and to analyze and understand the various economic and demographic factors which have and will influence population levels in the community. Historic population levels of Cherry County, the incorporated municipalities in the County and the rural, unincorporated area of the County are presented on Table 5.

TABLE 5 1990 - 2010 POPULATION TRENDS
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA & MUNICIPALITIES

County and Municipality	1990	2000	2010	% Change 1990 - 2010	% Change 2000 - 2010
City of Valentine	2,826	2,820	2,737	-0.2%	-2.9%
Village of Cody	149	149	154	0.0%	+3.4%
Village of Crookston	88	98	69	+11.3%	-29.6%
Village of Kilgore	90	99	77	+9.1%	-22.2%
Village of Merriman	121	118	128	-2.5%	+8.5%
Village of Nenzel	3	13	20	+333.3%	+53.8%
Village of Wood Lake	67	72	63	+7.5%	-12.5%
Rural Unincorporated	2,963	2,780	2,465	-6.2%	-11.3%
Cherry County	6,307	6,149	5,713	-2.5%	-7.1%

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, 1990 - 2010

As indicated in Table 5, during the 20 years from 1990 to 2010 the population Cherry County decreased by 9.4% or 594 persons. This 9% decline in population can again be linked declines in the population in the rural agricultural sector and to a lesser extent to declines in several of the urban communities in the County. From 1990 to 2010 the population of the rural, unincorporated areas of the County declined by some 498 persons or 16.8%.

The urban population of the City of Valentine and the villages in the County has also decreased in population since 1990. This lesser decrease of 96 persons since 1990 is primarily a result of the decline in the rural ranch population and the corresponding decrease in goods and services needed to be provided in the municipalities in the County.

POPULATION MIGRATION ANALYSIS

An analysis of the migration of the population over time allows an understanding of a specific demographic factor that influences the overall population of the County and its municipalities. Migration indicates the portion of the population that has either moved into the County or has moved out of the County. Population migration is the remaining portion of the population after natural change, births minus deaths, is subtracted from the total change in the population.

TABLE 6 POPULATION MIGRATION ANALYSES
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Decade	Cherry County Population Change	Total Births 2001 - 2010	Total Deaths 2001 - 2010	Natural Change (Births minus Deaths)	Total Migration
2000 - 2010	-436	655	605	+50	-486

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, 2000 - 2010
 Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Vital Statistics, 2001 - 2010

In Table 6, the total change in population in Cherry County together with the natural increase or decrease (births minus deaths) is indicated for the period from 2000 through 2010. As indicated, during this period the total population of the County decreased by 436 persons and the number of births in the County exceeded the number of deaths in the County by 50 persons, thus the data indicate that since 2001 a total of 486 persons migrated into the County to seek employment or for retirement.

As indicated in Table 7, the limited out-migration of the population of Cherry County for employment is verified by employee commuting patterns. Of the total workforce of 3,177 persons over 89% are employed within the County. In 2010, a total of 327 residents of the County were commuting to work outside of the County. This data indicates that there is a lack of employment opportunities in the County, but it also implies that there is a sizable workforce which could be retained in the County if employment opportunities exist.

TABLE 7 EMPLOYEE COMMUTING PATTERNS - 2010
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Place of Work	Number of Employees	% of Total Employment
Total Employment	3,177	
Within Cherry County	2,850	89.7%
Outside Cherry County	327	10.3%
Travel Time to Work		
Less than 10 minutes	1,864	58.7%
10 - 19 minutes	562	17.6%
20 - 29 minutes	149	4.7%
30 - 59 minutes	517	16.3%
60 minutes or more	85	2.7%

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, 2010

By analyzing the age structure of the population, it can be determined which age groups (cohorts) within the County are being affected.

POPULATION AGE ANALYSIS

The age composition of the population is an important component of this population analysis. By analyzing the age characteristics of the population, it can be determined which age groups (cohorts) within the County are being affected by the changes in the population.

An increase or decrease in each cohort affects the population in different ways. For example, an increase of the 20 - 44 cohort would indicate that the present population will have a greater ability to sustain population growth due to a higher number of females of childbearing age. An analysis of the changes in the population age cohorts also permits a detailed analysis of which age groups are moving out of Cherry County. Detailed data regarding the population cohorts for the County is presented in Table 8.

The data indicate that since 2000, the County has experienced decreases in all age groups except for the 45 and older age groups. The County has also experienced a “brain drain” from persons who are old enough to have graduated high school. The population in the County in the age 17-19 and 20-24 cohorts has declined by an average of 18.6% or 78 persons.

There has been a notable decline in the number of youths of school age. This loss has resulted in just over 300 fewer students, representing a 25% decrease, is due primarily to out-migration of younger persons of child bearing age and the aging of the overall population of the County.

TABLE 8 ANALYSIS OF POPULATION AGE
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

AGE GROUP (Cohort)	2000		2010		2000 – 2010	
	Male & Female	% of Total	Male & Female	% of Total	Net Change	% Change
0 - 4	380	6.2%	310	5.4%	-70	-18.4%
5 - 9	443	7.0%	358	6.3%	- 85	-19.2%
10 – 14	516	8.4%	358	6.3%	-158	-30.6%
15 - 17	271	4.4%	207	3.6%	- 64	-23.6%
18 - 19	180	2.9%	137	2.4%	-43	-23.8%
20 - 24	263	4.3%	228	4.0%	- 35	-13.3%
25 - 34	683	11.1%	592	9.0%	- 91	+13.3%
35 - 44	887	14.4%	639	11.2%	-248	-28.0%
45 - 54	834	13.6%	911	15.9%	+ 77	+ 9.2%
55 - 64	639	10.4%	783	13.7%	+144	+22.5%
65 - 74	534	8.7%	590	10.4%	+ 56	+10.5%
75+	528	8.6%	597	13.5%	+ 69	+13.1%
TOTAL	6,148	100.0%	5,713	100.0%	- 435	+7.1%
MEDIAN AGE	39.4	-	45.4	-	+ 6	+15.2%

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing, 2000 – 2010

The 248 person decline in the number of persons in the 20-44 age groups is very notable as this decline represents a loss of slightly over 15% of persons in the younger working age. This decline occurred as a result of lack of employment opportunities with higher incomes in the County. This loss also implies that if employment opportunities were to become available in the County, there would be an opportunity to retain a significant portion of those persons in these age cohorts in the local labor force.

The County has experienced some very significant increases in 45 plus age cohorts. These increases were the result of the natural aging of population in the County, particularly the rural population.

Over all the County population is continuing to age. As indicated in Table 8, the median age of the total County population increased from 39.4 years in 2000 to 45.4 years in 2010, representing a 15% increase in the median age of the County population. This aging will have implications for additional housing for those of retirement age in future years.

POPULATION FORECASTS

For counties with smaller populations, one of the more accurate ways of forecasting future population levels is known as a trend line projection. This type of projection utilizes historic trends in population change to predict the future. This method of projection is utilized over other forecasting methods because in counties, such as Cherry County, the potential for major changes in the local economy and thus major population changes are less likely than counties with larger urban centers and larger populations.

As indicated in Table 9, utilizing the mid-range projection, the Cherry County population is forecasted to continue to decrease slightly over the next 11 years declining to a total of 4,675 persons by 2030. This would represent a population decrease of 18% over the year 2010.

TABLE 9 POPULATION FORECASTS
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Cherry County	1990	2000	2010	2018 Estimate	Projection Level	2020	2025	2030
Cherry County	6,307	6,148	5,713	5,472	High	5,418	5,283	5,148
					Mid-Range	5,278	4,990	4,678
					Low	5,084	4,890	4,646

Source: Stahr & Associates, Inc., 2018

Should the rate of population decline increase due to limited employment opportunities, the total Cherry County population could drop to just over 4,646 by 2030.

Should economic development in the County occur and additional employment opportunities be made available, the Cherry County population could, however, reach a population of slightly over 5,100 by 2030.

Based upon the 1.7 economic base multiplier discussed previously, achieving population stabilization would require the addition of just over 170 jobs in one or more of the “base” economic sectors of the local economy over the next 12 years.

IMPLICATIONS OF POPULATION AND ECONOMIC TRENDS AND FORECASTS

The analysis of the changes in the components of the Cherry County population and the resulting forecast indicates that the population of the County will continue to decrease slightly over the 10 year planning period. The population of the County will also continue to age as the working age group today, those persons ages 35 to 64 which constitute the majority of the population of the County, will age an additional 11 years.

The only avenue available to enhance the increase in the population levels will be to increase employment opportunities in the County, particularly in the private sector. As noted in the previously presented analysis of the local economy, the most effective method of adding employment opportunities will be to expand employment in the “base” sectors of the local economy, primarily the agricultural and tourism sectors.

If declines in private sector employment opportunities and population were to occur, it will have implications on the physical development of the County including, but not limited to the following:

- Further declines in population, particularly the population of the rural areas of the County, will result in lessening the demand for additional housing and, potentially, an overall reduction in overall housing density as existing ranch dwellings are vacated due to a continuation of the trend in fewer but larger ranches.
- Without additional expansion of employment opportunities in the County, the demand for land for additional commercial and industrial use will also be limited.
- Losses of the segment of the population of school age will result in reduction in enrollment in the school districts serving the County, which may result in higher costs of education and less efficient use of facilities.

HOUSING ANALYSIS

This housing analysis component of the Cherry County, Nebraska Comprehensive Plan identifies and evaluates the existing housing characteristics of the community and provides a forecast of future housing needs in the County.

A primary goal of the County should be to provide safe, sanitary and affordable housing for every family and individual now residing in the County or who may wish to in the future.

In order to project future housing needs with reasonable accuracy a number of factors must be considered. Among these are population change, household incomes, employment characteristics, age of people, land use, the age, condition, cost and availability of housing in the County and attitudes of persons residing in or may wish to reside in the county in the future.

EXISTING HOUSING

An important characteristic with regard to housing in any community is its quality and desirability in the marketplace. One of the factors that determines the overall quality and desirability of the existing housing units is the age of the existing residential structures regardless of whether such housing units are located in one of the municipalities in the County or in the rural area.

A summary of the age of residential structures in Cherry County is presented in Table 10. As indicated, 1,390 or just over 44% of the total 3,157 residential structures were constructed prior to 1959. These structures are now in excess of 60 years old.

TABLE 10 **AGE OF EXISTING HOUSING STOCK - 2010**
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION	NO. OF HOUSING UNITS	% OF TOTAL HOUSING UNITS
2000 or later	214	6.8%
1990 - 1999	260	8.3%
1980 - 1989	412	13.1%
1970 - 1979	479	15.2%
1960 - 1969	393	12.5%
1959 or earlier	1,390	44.1%
TOTAL	3,157	100.0%

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Housing, 2010

Conversely, the number of residential structures constructed since 2000 comprises a respectable 214 units, or almost 7% of the total housing stock in the County. This lesser amount of new housing in comparison to prior years is consistent with the population decrease in the County since 2000.

Although many of the older residential structures have been remodeled and renovated during the last 60 years, the size, number of rooms, energy efficiency and type of design of these older homes often do not meet what persons in the housing market are looking for.

In addition, the fact that over one-third of the residential structures in the County are over 60 years old also implies that a number of such homes are in need of rehabilitation.

Another characteristic of the existing housing stock which is important to determining the ability of such housing stock to provide adequate housing for the future population of the County is the type of housing.

As indicated in Table 11, there is a variety of housing types available in the County. As indicated, the net change in the housing stock in the last decade has been a decrease of 63 housing units since 2000. The largest increase in the types of housing was in single-family housing.

This data also implies that the primary housing demand since 2000 has been for elderly persons requiring at least some assistance in their living environment and for lower income households, thus the increase in multi-unit housing.

The overall net decrease of 2% in the total housing stock is consistent with the slight decrease in population of the County during the last decade.

TABLE 11 TRENDS IN HOUSING STOCK BY TYPE
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Housing Units in Residential Structures	2000 Number of Structures	2010 Number of Structures	Percent Change 2000 – 2010
Single unit (detached)	2,531	2,574	+16.9%
Single unit (attached)	31	72	+132.3.0%
2 or more unit structures	261	305	+15.3.0%
Mobile / Manufactured Home	397	206	-48.1%
TOTAL	3,220	3,157	-1.9%

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Housing, 2000 – 2010

In addition to housing type, another factor to consider in determining future housing demand is what is and should be the mix between owner-occupied housing and rental housing.

The data in Table 12 is provided to allow an analysis of what the housing mix in Cherry County was in 2000 and 2010. As indicated, in the year 2010, of the total 2,530 occupied housing units in Cherry County, 1,634 or 65% of all occupied housing units are owner-occupied. This percentage is 3% larger than the percentage of owner-occupied housing in 2000. The number of rented housing units declined by 48 units or 5% since 2000.

The 4% increase in the number of owner-occupied housing units since 2000, would imply that a majority of the future housing demand will be for owner-occupied dwellings. The slight decline in rental housing and the vacancy rate in rental housing in 2010 tend to verify this trend. Based on the total 980 rental units, 84 or 8.6% were vacant, indicating a reasonable number of rental housing opportunities and choices are currently available.

Overall, the number of occupied housing units in the County has decreased since 2000. In 2010 there were 22 more occupied housing units than in 2000.

TABLE 12 HOUSING OCCUPANCY - 2000 AND 2010
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Housing Characteristic	2000	2010
Total Housing Units	3,220	3,157
Total Occupied Units	2,508	2,530
Owner Occupied:	1,564	1,634
Renter Occupied:	944	896
Vacant Housing Units	712	627
Units for rent	97	84
Units for sale	89	24

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Housing, 2000 and 2010.

Another factor to consider when evaluating the existing housing stock is the affordability of the owner-occupied housing and the reasonableness of rent rates. The data presented in Tables 13 through 16 provide information on which to evaluate the cost of housing in Cherry County.

As indicated in Table 13, the values of the owner-occupied housing units in Cherry County are reasonable. In 2010, the median housing unit value was \$95,300 while the range of values extends from under \$50,000 to over \$300,000.

Based upon standard mortgage industry standards for a 30 residential mortgage and the \$50,000 annual median household income in Cherry County, the median household would qualify for a mortgage of \$100,000. This is an indication that the median priced home in the County would be affordable to a household with a median income.

TABLE 13 HOUSING VALUES - 2010
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Value of Owner-Occupied Housing Units	Number	Percent of Total
Less than \$50,000	322	19.7%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	569	34.8%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	347	21.3%
\$150,000 - \$199,000	136	8.3%
\$200,000 - \$299,999	87	5.3%
\$300,000 or higher	173	10.6%
Total	1,634	100.0%
Median Owner-Occupied Housing Unit Value	\$ 95,300	-

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Housing, 2010

As indicated in Table 14, over two-thirds of those homeowners with a mortgage have mortgage and owner cost which are less than 30% of household income. This data further verifies that median cost housing and selected owner costs are affordable for a typical median income household.

TABLE 14 MORTGAGE & SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COST AS PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME - 2010
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Mortgage & Selected Monthly Owner Costs as % of Household Income *	Number
Less than 20%	356
20% - 29.9%	207
30% - 39.9%	97
40% or more	162

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Housing, 2010

* Selected costs include mortgage, taxes and insurance

The cost of and affordability of rental housing is also an important factor in evaluating the existing housing situation in Cherry County and in forecasting future rental housing needs. As indicated in Table 15, the contract rent rates for housing in the County range from no rent to just under \$1,000 per month. The median monthly rent payment in 2010 was \$341.

TABLE 15 HOUSING CONTRACT RENT - 2010
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Contract Rent for Housing / Month	Number
Paying no rent	
Less than \$200	30
\$200 - \$299	46
\$300 - \$499	44
\$500 - \$749	47
\$750 - \$999	11
\$1,000 - \$1,499	0
\$1,500 or more	0
Total Renter-Occupied Housing Units	178
Median Contract Rent	\$ 341

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Housing, 2010

The data presented in Table 16 verifies that rent rates for 55% of the renters in Cherry County are reasonable. Over one-half of the renters pay less than 30% of their household income on housing rent costs. This level of housing costs is considered reasonable.

It should be noted, however, that 45% of renters are paying in excess of 30% of their household incomes on housing. This level of income committed to housing is high, indicating that a portion of the rental housing is not affordable to nearly one-half of the rental market.

It must be understood that providing of new rental housing at lower rent rates will be very difficult in the future due to the cost of new housing construction. These higher rental rates again point to the need to maintain and rehabilitate the existing housing stock in order to maintain an adequate number of affordable rental units.

TABLE 16 RENT AS PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME - 2010
CHERRY COUNTY, NEBRASKA

Gross Rent As % of Household Income	Number
Less than 15%	144
15% - 19.9%	74
20% - 24.9%	45
25% - 29.9%	37
30% - 34.9%	70
35% or more	175
Total Renter-Occupied Housing Units	545

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Census of Housing, 2010

Housing Needs Forecast

The forecast for the future population of Cherry County is that the overall population will continue the trend of the past decade and thus continue to decrease slightly. The forecasted decrease is expected to be at a rate slightly less than that of the last decade and it is forecasted that the County’s population will decrease by just under 800 persons over the next 11 years.

Based upon this forecast, the availability of over 600 housing units distributed throughout the County which are currently vacant, and the current vacancy rate of rental housing in the County, it is anticipated that a relatively low level of housing development, as occurred during the last decade, will continue. It can be assumed that a notable portion of the now vacant housing is older housing that is in poor condition or is of a size and location that is not desirable in today’s market. For those existing housing units which are now vacant, it may be possible to satisfy future housing demand by initiation of an on-going housing rehabilitation program.

The aging of the population in the County also implies an increase in the demand for group housing in the form of independent or assisted living facilities to provide for these housing needs.