

“Changes in Community Rhetoric and Imagery of Rural Land Uses at the Urban Fringe: Douglas
County from Strong to Slow Growth”

By

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Abstract

Growth and change at the rural-urban fringe of any urbanizing area creates heated debate. The way in which people talk about change is oftentimes through stories, using rhetoric and imagery to paint a picture of what is or ought to be. In this case study of Douglas County, Kansas, imagery and rhetoric of changing rural land uses is analyzed from planning documents, newspaper articles, and interviews with planners and commission members during two distinct time periods, one of high population growth (1995 to 1999), and one of slowing population growth (2005 to 2009). The researcher found that despite differing economic situations, much of the rhetoric between the two time periods was similar. The biggest difference, however, was in the different resource conflicts between the two time periods – water and soils, respectively. Despite the economic recession during the latter time period, much long-term planning resulted. What planner and city officials can learn from this research is that despite economic hardship, periods of slow population growth may be excellent windows for long-range planning to occur. These periods could be used to assess community resources, gather citizen input, and plan accordingly for what the community wants to be like in the future. Stories, in this way, may not just serve as rhetorical fodder. In this way, stories may influence land-use decisions made on a policy level, and consequently, the physical characteristics of a community itself.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose & Problem Statement

Storytelling is a ubiquitous form of human communication, and community imagery is used to paint rhetorical pictures of American landscapes. Rural America is full of rhetorical images. Agriculture, for example, can be described as an essential part of the economy or as an artifact of yesteryear. How a community is described through community discourse provides people with a vocabulary of their place. “Residents provide themselves with a familiar language for telling stories about—for defending, for fighting about, for talking politically about—the place in which they live” (Lofland 1991, 213).

As communities’ circumstances and physical patterns change, rhetoric and imagery change too. There are those who welcome change, and those who abhor it. Urban growth often marches into what had previously been farms and fields, causing conflict and confusion over changing landscapes. Douglas County, Kansas has experienced its fair share of land use conflict. In my research, I ask the question: “does rhetoric and imagery of rural land uses in Douglas County, Kansas change from periods of high to low growth?”

More specifically, this research looks to identify differences in rhetoric regarding the changing role of rural land uses in Douglas County, Kansas from periods of high population growth in the 1990s to times of slow population growth in the first decade of the 21st century. I want to know whether the city of Lawrence and Douglas County talked about the role of rural land uses, especially at the urban fringe, differently when population growth slowed as opposed to when growth was strong. I postulate that rural land uses would take a more prominent

rhetorical role when growth was slow (2005 to 2009), than when population growth was high and the city of Lawrence and Douglas County were expanding rapidly (1995 to 1999).

Study Limitations

I limit my research to determine whether community rhetoric changed between these two periods, as reflected in the data sources described below. I cannot claim a causal link between changes in rhetoric and changes in planning policy or city growth, but instead find whether rhetoric did change, and if so, in what ways. If my proposition is correct, this might provide an avenue for further research for understanding how rhetoric influences decisions about physical development.

Importance of Findings

The findings of my research could be useful for city and county planners and commissioners as a way of understanding the importance that community rhetoric has on public opinion. In this way, it is important to distinguish between rhetoric and opinion. Rhetoric is the way in which people talk about things, while opinion is how people think about things. Bridger suggests in his 1996 article that rhetoric can hold influence over the physical environment. “This rhetoric, in turn, is held to be a powerful social force with important consequences for the physical form of communities” (Bridger 1996, 354). If this is true, planning staff and commissioners may use these findings to become better attuned to changes in rhetoric that may influence the city’s growth pattern. Bridger looked to see how zoning changed based on what rhetoric was available for land use debate. In this way, planners may then try to understand the ways in which community rhetoric may play a part in different types of growth on the urban fringe.

Understanding how people talk about agricultural and rural land uses in an urbanizing county between times of high and low population growth may help inform planning documents and policy choices as to how the land should be used in the future. Many times, stories about a community's past and hopes for its future are the ways in which these are communicated. "Story and story telling are at work in conflict resolution, in community development, in participatory action research, in resource management, in policy and data analysis, in transportation planning, and so on" (Sandercock 2003, 12). Community rhetoric can help inform decision-makers and planners alike, and better equip them to approach growth management. Further, planning for agricultural land and rural land uses (as a right in themselves) will continue to be an important issue in Douglas County (and many other communities across the United States), so this analysis will contribute to the larger discussion about agricultural and open space preservation.

This thesis is organized as follows: Chapter Two describes the literature on the effects of storytelling and community rhetoric on planning and land use change. Chapter Three provides background information, census data, and satellite imagery for Douglas County, Kansas. Chapter Four lays out the research methods used. Chapter Five describes the findings of the research. Chapter Six concludes the thesis with directions for future research and implications for planners.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The examination of rhetoric and imagery that surrounds rural land uses stems from the idea that the practice of planning is essentially one of storytelling. Alkon, influenced by Leonie Sandercock and Jeffrey Bridger, writes that “Social interaction often occurs in the form of stories. Each day we interact with friends and acquaintances, telling tales of past occurrences and employing narratives to support arguments and color casual conversation” (Alkon 2004, 147). Storytelling plays an essential role in helping people in a community understand things about themselves and about their place. Sandercock writes, “The way that we narrate the city becomes constitutive of urban reality, affecting the choices we make, the ways we then might act” (2003, 12). In this way, the rhetoric and imagery about a place may influence the way in which its future is carried out through planning and development, mediated by politics. Themes related to these ideas include narrative and social science, storytelling and land use, regional metaphor, and policy and place.

Narrative and Social Science

In his 1996 article “Community Imagery and the Built Environment,” Jeffrey Bridger explains how imagery and rhetoric can affect changes in land use. Through a discourse analysis using historical documents, newspaper articles, editorials, letters to the editor, and public policy documents, Bridger examined the effect of community imagery and historical narratives on land use in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Through identification with the agricultural narrative, proponents of the slow growth, agriculturally-centered growth ideology “limit(ed) the acceptable discursive boundaries surrounding land use, thereby legitimizing certain lines of action while delegitimizing others” (Bridger 1996, 371). In this way, rhetoric and community imagery redefined the planning agenda and what constitutes acceptable forms of county growth.

I use Bridger's study as a jumping-off point. Rather than asserting that rhetoric and imagery have affected land use change in Douglas County, I want to describe the ways in which the rhetoric and imagery change between periods of rapid and stagnant population growth, and how county planning entities and media discuss planning for rural areas during these periods. Like Bridger, I do this "by considering the role that collective representations, or images, play into attempts to alter or maintain the physical form and spatial configuration of the built environment" (Bridger 1996, 354). "According to this line of thought, imagery shapes the rhetoric available for political debate and provides residents with 'a familiar language for telling stories about, for talking politically about—the place in which they live'" (Bridger 1996, 354).

Bridger and Maines address the role of narrative in communities' land use conflicts by analyzing the rhetoric surrounding a rural Lancaster County, Pennsylvania township experiencing major growth. Narratives, they find, are embedded in both consensus and conflict, and the authors advocate for a narrative approach to understanding community conflict. "To remove stories from communities thus is to obliterate communities and their character" (Bridger and Maines 1992, 363).

Storytelling and Land Use

Alkon says that stories about a community have consequences for its land use decisions. "The availability and *employment* of a particular narrative has observable consequences for the community that tells and is told it. Through the ensuing land-use decisions, the consequences of this story are sculpted into the physical landscape. Stories matter. Place matters. And stories affect place" (Alkon 2004, 147, emphasis in original). "Peoples' ideas about themselves and their daily lives mediate specific political decisions. Place is one thematic aspect around which these ideas take shape. Heritage narratives are stories about the character of a place and its people and

often influence peoples' thinking concerning future political decisions" (Alkon 2004, 148).

Regional Metaphor

Regional metaphor is a concept used by Frank and Deborah Popper, through their notion of the Buffalo Commons, to change perceptions of a region's land use. "We conceived the Buffalo Commons in part as a literary device, a metaphor that would resolve the narrative conflicts- past, present, and, most important, future- of the Great Plains" (Popper and Popper 1999, 493). Regional metaphor as a narrative tool is a "proposal and prediction" for land. Rather than employing official public policy, "soft-edge planning" through regional metaphor, is an informal narrative. "We saw in the Buffalo Commons the potential for a serious but long-term proposal, a public policy response to deep-seated trends. But we relied on metaphor to gives shape and words to the intrinsically unknowable and unpredictable, the Great Plains' future" (Popper and Popper 1999, 494). This dialogue, as a tool for imagination and visioning, works to create discussion and dialogue from informal to formal spaces. "Metaphor as method" encourages and discourages certain land uses; it invites the public and officials to think about regions in understandable and relatable terms thereby suggesting possible futures for their region. In this way, I think there exists a link between community rhetoric serving as an "on the ground" version of "metaphor as method." It serves as an unofficial, community-driven planning practice, employed by a community to explain who they are and what they want to become.¹

Policy and Place

Alkon and Traugot (2008) address the relationship between environmental policy and the place constructions of neighboring communities in California. In understanding how place is constructed, they find that comparing their place to others, citizens draw on "culturally available

¹ However, the Buffalo Commons idea was widely reviled in Kansas. As professors from New Jersey, the Poppers may have been seen as outsiders, imposing their ideas without real knowledge of the Great Plains or the people who live there.

notions” of types of places, and begin to tackle the idea that policy choices may be shaped by a community’s place narrative, and ultimately, its physical form. “The construction of places as rural, and of rural as an attractive alternative to sprawl, can be used to legitimize policy moves that favor agricultural over environmental interests” (Alkon and Traugot 2008, 109).

Conflict at the urban-rural fringe

Tom Daniels probes the issue of growth management at the urban-rural fringe, especially as it conflicts with agriculture. “The rural-urban fringe is America’s land-use battleground. Here, developers, long-term landowners, quick-buck land speculators, politicians, and realtors are matched against other long-term landowners, politicians, environmentalists, and newcomers who want to keep their new communities attractive and fiscally manageable” (Daniels 1999, xiv). This type of conflict is not unique to Douglas County – the same issues are being heard throughout the United States. This research will analyze the rhetoric and imagery of this particular space in Douglas County, through planning documents, newspaper articles, and interviews with local officials.

The literature on community rhetoric and land use is not large, but demonstrates several important ideas that inform this research. What remains is to use these ideas to explore agricultural and rural land use imagery at the urban fringe of Douglas County, Kansas.

Chapter 3: Lawrence – Douglas County Background

Douglas County, Kansas was selected for this study because access to public records are easily accessible, and because the county has experienced both rapid and considerably slowed growth in the past twenty years. The main campus of the University of Kansas is located in Lawrence, its largest city and county seat. The rest of the county is made up of nine townships, with population centers distributed between Eudora, Lecompton, and Baldwin City. The city of Lawrence is largely defined by the University. The population of Lawrence grew substantially during the 1990s, but slowed substantially around 2007. Conflict over the proper course of suburban advancement has been a defining feature of planning conflict in the county.

Lawrence has always been a city of controversy. From its Bleeding Kansas beginning to civil rights sit-ins and strife, and Vietnam-era unrest – Lawrence is politically unique. Conflict has also defined Lawrence’s planning landscape, from prairie preservation to rural platting to water meters to very public city-county conflict.

The following three tables of census data “set the stage” for discussing my results. Decennial census data was gathered from the Institute for Policy and Social Research Kansas County Profile for Douglas County. Table 1 shows population change and percent change for Douglas County as a whole. Average percent change in population growth from 1995 to 1999 was 2.05 percent, while from 2005 to 2009, the population grew an average of 1.41 percent. Table 2 and 3 break down Table 1 to show the rural and urban portions of Douglas County’s overall change, though the county profile only provided data up to the year 2000 for the urban/rural population breakdown. Table 3 shows that growth in the rural areas of Douglas

County was considerable between 1990 and 2000, a 20 percent change, up from 10 percent from between 1980 and 1990. Douglas County's percent change in urban population growth between 1990 and 2000 was about the same as between 1980 and 1999, about one percent less.

Table 1: Douglas County Population and Change, Decennial Census

Year	Population	# Change	% Change	Avg % Change
1990	82,229			
1991	83,683	1,454	1.74%	
1992	85,379	1,696	1.99%	
1993	87,926	2,547	2.90%	
1994	89,683	1,757	1.96%	
1995	91,408	1,725	1.89%	
1996	93,381	1,973	2.11%	
1997	95,706	2,325	2.43%	
1998	97,566	1,860	1.91%	
1999	99,490	1,924	1.93%	2.05%
2000	100,295	805	0.80%	
2001	102,292	1,997	1.95%	
2002	104,408	2,116	2.03%	
2003	106,231	1,823	1.72%	
2004	108,385	2,154	1.99%	
2005	111,519	3,134	2.81%²	
2006	112,559	1,040	0.92%	
2007	113,409	850	0.75%	
2008	114,752	1,343	1.17%	
2009	116,383	1,631	1.40%	1.41%

Source: IPSR, Kansas County Profiles, Douglas County

Table 2: Douglas County Urban Population, Decennial Census

Year	Population	# Change	% Change
1980	58,573		
1990	71722	13,149	18.33%
2000	87182	15460	17.73%

Source: IPSR, Kansas County Profiles, Douglas County

² The reader may notice that the highest percent change of any year occurs during the “slow growth” period. It may be considered an outlier.

Table 3: Douglas County Rural Population 1980-2000, Decennial Census

Year	Population	#Change	% Change
1980	9,067		
1990	10,076	1,009	10.01%
2000	12,780	2,704	21.16%
Source: IPSR, Kansas County Profiles, Douglas Co.			

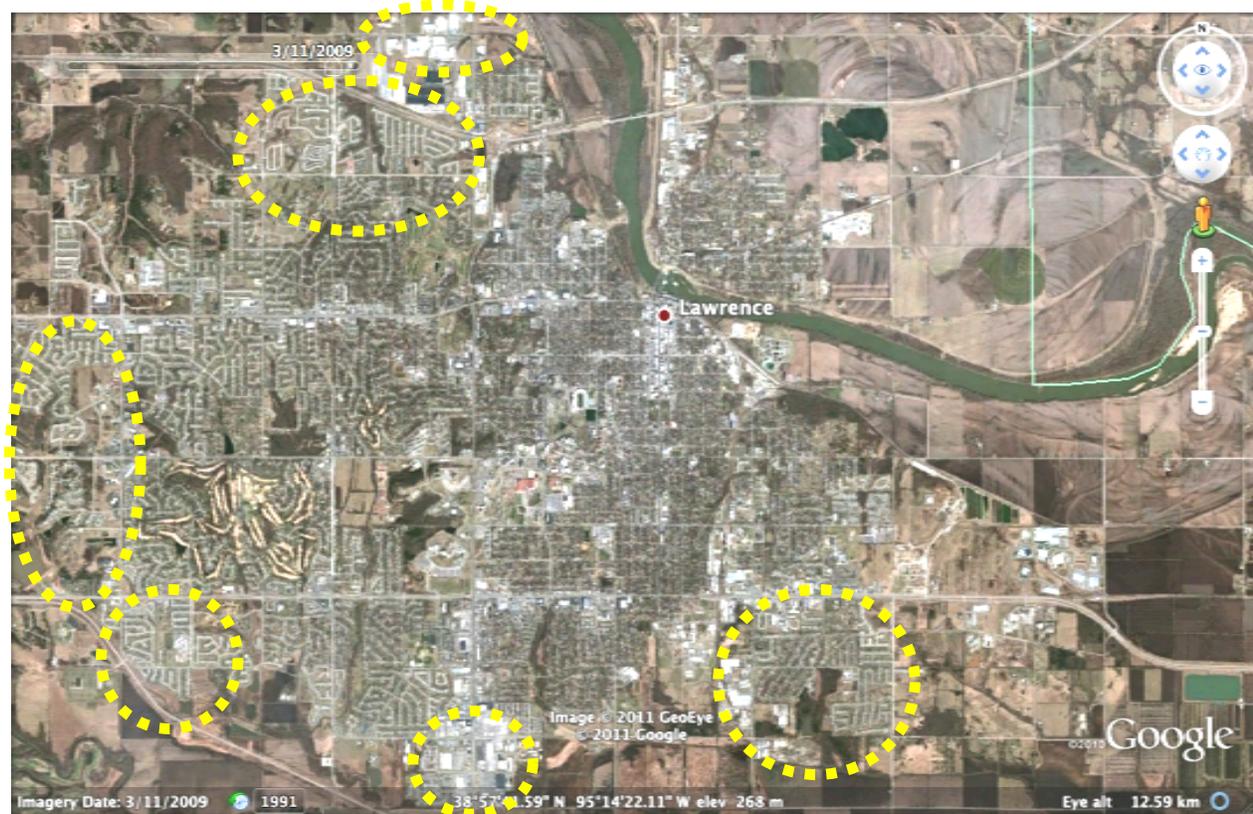
Satellite Imagery

The purpose of showing the satellite images of Lawrence and its urban-rural fringe is to illustrate the study area and show how the urban-rural fringe has changed over the study years. The dates selected were what was available from Google Earth. There were no images available between 1995 and 1999, so 1991 was the next best choice. Circled areas show just a few of the more obvious physical changes to have occurred at the urban-rural fringe. While it may be difficult to discern changes, Figure 1 illustrates a satellite overview of Lawrence and its fringe in 1991. The circled areas shows where visible growth and development can be observed in comparison to Figure 2, which shows the same area in 2009. Figure 2 illustrates the observable differences in Lawrence's urban-rural fringe. The most noticeable are the unmistakable cul-de-sac patterns of single-family housing developments.

Figure 1: Google Earth Satellite Imagery, October 6, 1991



Figure 2: Google Earth Satellite Imagery, March 11, 2009



Chapter 4: Methodology

Case Study Method

This research was carried out as a case study, which is appropriate here because it collects and presents rich, detailed descriptions of how people talk about the study subject and how that subject has changed over time. The results of this study should present the researcher and others with a detailed understanding of how imagery and rhetoric about how the urban-rural fringe in Douglas County differ between the two time periods. It uses multiple ways of collecting data, including interviews, mass media, and official planning documents. This allows the researcher to triangulate findings from each source, by analyzing and comparing results from each, demonstrating the validity and reliability of the methods used (Patton 1990).

Yin identifies five components of case study design research: the study's questions, its propositions (or hypotheses), units of analysis, the logic that links the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin 1994).

Research Questions

Research exists about imagery and rhetoric about rural land in times of changing land use decisions and how a community's rhetoric may alter the built environment, but much remains to be studied. My questions center around perceptions of rural land use changes, and whether these perceptions change from periods of high to low growth. The main question that guided this research is: "Does rhetoric and imagery of rural land uses in Douglas County, Kansas change from periods of high to low growth?"

The subquestions that allow me to address this overarching question are:

1. *What are the population representations of growth in Douglas County during the two time periods and how did they change?*

This question addresses how people perceived the role of rural land uses and agriculture in Douglas County, and whether they were perceived as vital to the economy, or a dwindling vestige of the county's rural past. This question helps to understand how it may have been easy for landowners on the urban fringe to sell land they saw as eventually becoming a "higher and better use" in the future, as the county began to rely less and less on agriculture.

2. How did planning change during these two periods?

This question seeks to identify and describe events during the two time periods that reflected tension and conflict – those events that pitted neighbor against neighbor, or city against county. Understanding how people talked about controversial decisions and changes gives me insight as to what was important to people, and why.

3. How did community discourse about agricultural and rural land use effect change on public policy during these two periods?

This question looks to determine whether official planning documents reflect the planning conflicts and community rhetoric found in the local newspaper, through articles, letters to the editor, and staff editorials. This question was also utilizes transcripts of interviews taken with those involved in planning during the time periods. Horizon 2020, the joint city-county comprehensive plan states that "The Plan is based upon goals and policies which the citizens of Lawrence and Douglas County have defined" (Horizon 2020, Revised 2011, 1-2), so the results of this research would hope to confirm that the policy reflects the public's voices, identified and analyzed through interviews and mass-media analysis.

Propositions

Yin uses the word "propositions," rather than "hypotheses," to describe why an observed outcome is the result of a specified intervention (Yin 1994). Qualitative studies instead utilize

patterns and comparisons of qualitative data to reach conclusions. For this study, the propositions for each research sub-question are as follows:

Question 1: How did people talk about the role of agriculture and rural land uses in Douglas County during the two periods and how did they change?

Proposition 1: Because the population was growing rapidly during the 1995 to 1999 period, I propose that rural land uses were becoming less of a county economic driver, and were pushed to the background of discussions about economic development. During the period of slow growth (2005 to 2009), I propose that more recent haphazard growth along the urban fringe and depressed housing market will revive interest in agriculture as a local source of food in uncertain economic times.

Question 2: What land use conflicts occurred during these periods? How were they discussed?

Proposition 2: Conflicts at the urban fringe many times are based on people's expectations of what the fringe is supposed to look like – rather than sprawling “cookie cutter” housing developments, residents of the rural area may prefer that their view be of open space and agriculture. One landowner's vision of a business park on their land may clash with a rural residents' vision of a “rural paradise.”

Question 3: How did community discourse about agricultural and rural land use effect change on public policy during these two periods?

Proposition 3: Based on prior knowledge of Lawrence's planning policies, I expected public policy to reflect people's desires that suburban sprawl be kept in check, through stricter growth management.

The analysis of these specific questions allows the researcher to return to the overarching question: “does rhetoric and imagery of rural land uses in Douglas County, Kansas change from

periods of high to low growth?” The researcher expects to find that rural land uses will be perceived as less important during times of high population growth, but later in the period of slow growth, will be perceived as a valuable community asset.

Units of Analysis

Units of analysis in this case study are identified from the research questions (Yin 1994). The research questions are intended to provide understanding of how change at the urban fringe is perceived in Douglas County during the two time periods. The primary unit of analysis, or the case, is Douglas County, and the research questions require that attention to individuals’ perceptions as an embedded unit of analysis. In order to understand perception of rural land uses in Douglas County, the researcher must pay attention to the perceptions of citizens and officials who were involved with planning, or who were quoted in the media.

Linking Data to Propositions

Table 4: Area of Influence, Proposition, and Supporting Data

Area of Influence	Question	Supporting Data
Role of rural land uses	1) How did people talk about the role of rural land uses in Douglas County during the two periods?	Documents, articles, interviews
Land use conflict rhetoric	2) What land use conflicts occurred during the two periods and how were they talked about?	Documents, articles, interviews
Public policy change	3) How did community discourse about rural land use change public policy?	Document, interviews, articles

Methods and Analytical Procedures

Analyzing complementary sources of qualitative data allowed the researcher to explore the propositions of this case study. Table 4 shows that the data about each proposition can be gleaned from all three sources, planning documents, newspaper articles, and interviews. Each data source was analyzed individually and then compared to the other sources to triangulate findings. Patterns, themes, and main ideas from each source reflect how urban-rural issues were perceived in the present (interviews) or in the past (newspaper articles). Each source describes peoples' understanding of reality about a given topic. The interviews allow the researcher to describe how participants' remember events and reflect on them today. The planning documents were used to determine whether planning policies reflected public perceptions of how the county should be planned.

I chose to analyze two time periods to illustrate changes in rhetoric and community imagery – 1995 to 1999 and 2005 to 2009. The first time period is known to be one of rapid population growth, and the second time period is one of slowing population growth (see Table 1: Douglas County Population and Change, Decennial Census).

The first source of data was planning documents. For the 1995 to 1999 time period, I analyzed Horizon 2020 and the amendments that were made until 1999. I compared the Horizon 2020 comprehensive plan as it was at final approval in 1998 to how it changed up to 2009, the upper limit of my second time period. What amendments were made? Did those amendments reflect what planning issues were reported on in the newspapers? I also analyzed the rural subdivision regulations that were passed in 2007 to determine if policies that were enacted in this document had been a source of conflict or public interest, which would be reflected in newspaper articles and in interviews.

The second source of data I used was newspaper articles from the Lawrence Journal-World. Using Google News Archive, I used keywords (including Douglas County, rural, growth, agriculture, and farming), and set search limits to reflect only articles gathered between the two time periods. For the 1995 to 1999 time period, I analyzed 57 articles, including seven letters to the editor and four staff editorials, and 2005 to 2009 yielded 42 articles relevant to my research questions, including three staff editorials and six letters to the editor. The articles helped me to determine what issues arose regarding rural land uses and the urban-fringe during the two time periods. I also used these articles to develop an understanding of the planning landscape in Douglas County since 1995, and the articles helped inform my interview questions. With the articles, I identified themes and patterns that emerged, and considered whether these may help craft a narrative of Douglas County and the conflicts surrounding its growth. In looking for themes and patterns, I looked for illustrative quotes that dealt with political language, or ideographs. I also looked for heritage narratives, or the stories about a community's past, its origins, characterizations, and trials and triumphs of its people that drive action. "Heritage narratives are stories about the character of a place and its people and often influence peoples' thinking concerning future political decisions" (Alkon 2004, 148). With these types of rhetoric in mind, I looked for language and quotes that would be especially descriptive of a particular conflict or event that arose.

The third, and richest method of data collection was interviews with current and former planning staff and elected officials. A total of eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with Lawrence-Douglas County planning staff, county commissioners, and planning commissioners. Semi-structured interviews helped to create consistency in response, to help code themes and patterns, while allowing flexibility to explore relevant topics that emerged from our

conversations. I had one main set of interview questions, and deviations reflected the respondents' job or elected body, and whether they were currently involved in planning or local government. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and coded using a goal-oriented technique to uncover patterns and themes that emerged from the data, as well as the ideographs and heritage narratives that illuminated the patterns and themes that I was to analyze. The questions asked respondents to recall past events and attitudes about rural land use changes (and conflicts) in Douglas County, and allowed me to develop tentative explanations of these differences between the two time periods. The questions looked to understand how these persons perceived not only rural activities, including agriculture, but the community's perceptions of population growth, and conflicts that may have arisen between rural areas and an expanding residential sector.

The eight interviews were with: three Lawrence-Douglas County planners, three current county commissioners, one former county commissioner, and one current planning commissioner. I chose to interview planners and commissioners because these people sit in important places with respect to hearing different stories about land use change – in order to be fulfill their job or appointment, they must hear from all sides of each land use conflict, from farmers, developers, neighbors, and anyone else who wants their opinion heard. Interviews were mostly conducted in person, with two over the telephone, until responses indicated redundancy. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis and Triangulation

Planning documents, newspaper articles, and interviews provided the data for this research. The small number of interviews allowed the researcher to transcribe and analyze them in detail, providing rich descriptions and the flexibility to ask more questions. The process of

data analysis was of pattern-matching. From the articles, interview transcriptions, and planning documents, I coded the data (Yin 1994) and from these codes, identified themes. The process was both goal-oriented, and exploratory. Rather than identify themes beforehand, I allowed the themes to emerge from the data as I progressed, but kept in mind what would be pertinent to my research questions and literature review. Patterns were matched across data sources – firstly identified from each source, then cross-checked with themes from other sources. The patterns and themes that emerged were then linked to existing theory identified in the literature review.

Study Limitations

Several difficulties emerged along the way in this study. First, it was difficult for interviewees to recall events within my relatively narrow time periods, 1995-1999 and 2005-2009. Second, my number of interviews was limited. At eight, I did find a saturation point at which the data from each additional interview repeated what had already been collected, but it would still have been helpful to have more interviews, given my timeframes. Third, my use of search terms ("growth", "change", "agriculture", "rural", "urban") may have captured a particular angle while omitting others. I did not intend for the terms to appear leading, but to be able to understand these changes at the urban-rural fringe, I found it necessary to include such terms as "change" and "growth."

Chapter 5: Findings

Analysis of plans, newspaper, and interviews resulted in a number of themes related to growth and change in the county for each time period. Some themes were the same between the two time periods (including growth management, property rights, and economic development), but many of these were hotly contested - such that while “growth management” may seem like a neutral term, there were those who saw growth management as a tool for staying a small town and those that saw it as rhetoric for growth. The resource conflicts over water meters in the first time period and soils in the latter time period illuminate heated contestations over community resources and property rights.

This chapter is organized by time period. A table of data sources and themes derived from those sources begins each period, including the number of mentions of that theme in the respective data source, and illustrative quotes reflecting that theme. After introducing the growth period’s main themes through the table, the results are presented from each source (plan, newspaper, interview).

The following results table for the high growth period shows the major themes that were derived from Lawrence Journal-World articles about growth and change at the rural fringe of Douglas County between 1995 and 1999, plans that were written and adopted during that time period, and recollections from planners and commissioners about growth in the rural areas during that time period. The main themes that emerged within the three sources were protecting property rights, investment in economic development (i.e., industrial developments to create jobs), water as a resource conflict, rural development standards, and distaste for rapid growth, as

typified by south and western Lawrence sprawl. The main themes in Table 5 are highlighted in bold, and are organized by data source in the following results narrative.

High Growth Period, 1995 to 1999

Table 5: High growth period themes, 1995-1999

	Data Sources	Patterns/Themes	Number of Mentions	Illustrative quotes
High Growth	Plans	Protect property rights – balance freedom with public good	7	“achieve a maximum of individual freedom” “safeguard individual rights”
		Growth management needed to keep rural/urban distinction	5	“strong and clear distinction between the urban and rural”
		Growth expected to continue	5	“continue to extend and expand the necessary infrastructure”
		Economic development necessary for city	8	“Industrial and non-retail commercial growth must at least keep pace”
	Newspaper Articles 36 Staff Editorials 4 Letters to Editor 7	Resource - Water	7 articles, 1 editorial, 1 letter to the editor	“Standoff” “water meters held hostage” “reduce the restrictions on rural water meters in exchange for more planning standards”
		Rapid Change	12 articles 2 letters to the editor, 1 editorial	“Steady growth” “sixth fastest growing county in Kansas”
		Rural development standards needed to curtail growth in rural areas	8 articles, 2 letters to the editor, 1 editorial	“Battle weary” “growing too fast for our own good”
		Property Rights	2 articles	“root of the problem was a failure to communicate, a philosophical clash between rural property rights and the interests of city taxpayers, or a trust issue”
		Growth management/planning needed	3 articles, 2 editorials, 2 letters to the editor	“help end haphazard growth outside the city limits” “prevent leapfrog development into rural”
		Economic development necessary for city to grow economically, create jobs	4 articles, 2 editorials, 1 letter to the editor	“County needs to create new jobs” “Nurture “home grown firms”, and attract new companies”
		Interviews	Water meters as major resource conflict of the 90s	6/8 interviews
	Rapid growth and sprawl was led by speculators, little oversight by planning staff		7/8 interviews	“Land speculators spent a lot of money on getting people elected.” “Speculators drug infrastructure and that's where Lawrence grew” “Let's grow, growth is good”
	Property rights as a political stance to oppose planning		6/8 interviews	“High on personal property rights” Property rights = “Guiding factor” in land use decisions by County Commissioners

		measures (e.g. water meter limits, repealing 5-acre exemption)		“Whatever I want to do with my land, I ought to be able to do”
		Growth management/good planning needed to curtail sprawl	3/8 interviews	“And you don’t want to grow so big that you can’t support your growth and then find out that you’ve used of all of your land. “

Examining planning documents, articles, and interview data related to the period of rapid growth reveals a variety of themes relating to rapid growth and change, property rights, and water rights. Horizon 2020 acknowledged the rapid population growth occurring, and attempted to mediate property rights with growth management. Articles from the Journal-World indicated that Douglas County was a changing place, and that conflicts over resources like rural water were occurring as people moved to the rural areas. Interviews with planners and commissioners illuminated the tensions between the city and county over rural development standards, water rights, and property rights. The subsections below explain these themes by data source.

I. Plans

Horizon 2020 during this time was being finalized, debated, and approved. It dealt with planning for a rapidly urbanizing county, mediating individual freedoms with community needs, and planning for economic development and business investment.

Horizon 2020

Themes that resulted from analyzing Horizon 2020 included planning for growth, growth management, and individual freedom. The stated goals of Horizon 2020 included “Planned and Managed Growth: Douglas County will experience growth. We will remain a separate and identifiable community, and face the challenge of encouraging growth in a planned and responsible manner” (Horizon 2020 1-3). The plan states that “It is the goal of the planning process to achieve a maximum of individual freedom, but public welfare must prevail. It is the

intent to meet and safeguard individual rights and vested interests in a manner which will create the minimum disruption in individual freedoms and life values” (H2020 1-3).

The plan acknowledges that the unincorporated area has experienced “a 61 percent increase in population” from 1960 to 2000 (H2020 2-5), and with that, makes the stated assumption that Lawrence and Douglas County will continue to expand and grow. “The area’s rate of population growth for the next three decades will be similar to the population growth rate the area has experienced in the last five decades. Lawrence experienced a 243 percent increase in population between 1950 and 2000, and the unincorporated areas of Douglas County had an increase of almost 48 percent in this 50-year period” (H2020 2-6), and with that, the city and county will “continue to extend and expand the necessary infrastructure (water treatment, sewer treatment, water and sewer lines, roads, fire, medical, and police protection, etc.) to support the projected population growth. If the necessary infrastructure is not built, the population growth for Lawrence will slow” (H2020 2-6).

Regarding the rural character of Douglas County, the plan promotes maintaining “strong and clear distinction between the urban and rural characters of Lawrence/Douglas County. The Plan defines areas anticipated to receive new urban growth near existing urban areas and establishes parameters for non-farm development in Douglas County” (H2020 3-2), at the same time encouraging all land within the urban growth area (UGA) be annexed. “The Plan promotes development in the UGA through an adopted annexation policy which anticipates well-planned development of fringe areas” (H2020 3-1).

Another theme pertinent to the time period in which Horizon 2020 was developed was *economic development*. The plan stated the economic development goal that “Jobs will grow at a

rate greater than or above that of population and housing in pursuit of enhanced quality of life” (H2020 12-1). Additionally, increasing tax base at a rate greater than the population and housing growth, they wrote, would be necessary to enhance “quality of life,” and that to achieve this goal, “industrial and non-retail commercial growth must at least keep pace with population growth” (H2020 12-1).

II. Articles

Articles and editorials from the Journal-World between 1995 and 1999 depicted a changing landscape and “blurring” line between city and county, and a factious city-county relationship “at war” over water meters and rural development standards.

Rapid Change

Results of studying archived Lawrence Journal-World newspapers between 1995 to 1999 portrayed Lawrence and Douglas County as a burgeoning place. The words “Change” and “growth” were both terms used very frequently. The county’s population was rising, referred to as “growing pains” or “growth-spurts” (April 17, 1995 “City growth keeps planners busy”). There are three major themes throughout this period. First, the character of the city and county were changing rapidly, “becoming more suburban” (John Nalbandian, Jan 8 1998 article) within Lawrence, Eudora, Baldwin, Lecompton, and the unincorporated area. Second, this change created or exacerbated tensions between the city and county with respect to planning standards, planning for infrastructure – this chiefly was over control of rural water permits. Third, there was concern that industry wasn’t “keeping pace” with population growth; there was much concern, rather than fanfare, over the prospect of becoming a “bedroom community” like Olathe or Overland Park.

County Administrator Craig Weinaug was quoted in a September 1995 article saying that Douglas County was “among the fastest growing counties in term of population.” On April 4, 1995, Nancy Price, LJ World reported that “Lawrence is flourishing, expanding in almost all directions.” With both the population and physical expansion, Horizon 2020 was being finalized, with adoption by the City Commission in January 1997. A February 24, 1996 LJ World article reported on the progress of the comprehensive planning process, reporters Mark Fagan and Gwyn Mellinger acknowledged the “blurring line between city and countryside as more of the rural areas of Douglas County have been transformed into suburbia...A countywide planning guide recognizes that blurring line between city and countryside” (“Horizon 2020 Draft Summary).

Acknowledging that the city of Lawrence and Douglas County are growing, many articles and letters to the editor talked about the need to maintain Lawrence’s “quality of life” (Fagan, 1996, p. 5B, article) and the need for “planned growth” (Toplikar, 1996, p. 4B, article) (Hoeflich, 1999, p. 7B, letter to the editor), “good planning” (Mellinger, 1995, p. 1B, article), and “finding balance” between rural and urban land uses (Stevens, 1998, p. 1B, article). This article observes: “The county is moving towards being less agriculturally focused...In the latest review of the Douglas County Guide Plan, county planners noted the continual decline in agricultural acreage and rise of residential, particularly subdivision, development...in the last 10 years, the county has lost more than 40,000 acres of farmland, much of it to residential development.”

Resource – Water

The City of Lawrence had a contract with the county's rural water districts to treat water for household consumption, and city used its power to issue only a certain number of water meters per year as a tool to curb growth in the unincorporated areas. The issue of water meters was intense in newspaper coverage at this time. The "standoff" over the issue was to be "nearing an end" (Mellinger, 1995, p. 3B, article). Douglas County Commissioner Jim Chappell invoked that the water meters were being "held hostage" - as availability of water meters to the county were controlled by the city as a way to control residential growth in the unincorporated areas, where planning and infrastructure standards were not required, exacerbating growing infrastructure issues. (Mellinger, 1995, p. 3B, article).

John Nalbandian, then Lawrence mayor, wrote in a July 5, 1996 guest editorial: "We will reduce the restrictions on rural water meters in exchange for more planning standards in areas that are likely to become part of the city in the future." Living outside of the realm of city services, one must be "willing to give up municipal type services," (Nalbandian, 1996, p. 7B, letter).

Development Standards

In a January 7, 1999 letter to the editor, Larry Kippone of the consultants from Landplan Engineering, wrote a letter to the Journal World, clarifying a previous article where he had been quoted about Lawrence's growth. In the letter, he said, "I am concerned that population in Lawrence is at present growing too fast for our own good," and that an imbalance in between residential growth without parallel industrial growth is unsustainable. Because of demands for tax revenue and infrastructure, "Industrial growth reduces the overall tax burden, but higher growth in residential increases it. Douglas County's trend is residential, and this should be reversed" (Kippone, 1999, p. 4B, letter). In a January 15, 1998 staff editorial, the Journal World

wrote that “It’s obvious that Lawrence has been growing in recent years, but the perception is that business growth is not keeping up with residential growth” (Staff, 1998, p. 4B, editorial).

On the other side of the rural water meter debate was the 5-acre exemption and rural subdivision regulations that would, according to then-Planning Director Linda Finger “help end haphazard growth outside the city limits. The concept behind it is primarily good planning” (Mellinger, 1995, p. 1B article).

Making new rural development compatible with existing Lawrence infrastructure standards was important to the city – as residential areas within the urban growth area are annexed into the city – rather than retroactively improve infrastructure after annexation – asking developers to attain certain standards during construction, according to Finger, “would save money in the long run” (Mellinger, 1995, p. 4B, article). Until there was political will, consensus on rural subdivisions regulations, the water meter limits controlled how many rural developments could be built without the planning process or infrastructure standards.

By late 1996, the dispute remained unsettled, and there was a rumor that the joint city-county planning commission would split. The Journal-World editorialized that “as Lawrence continues to grow, those tensions will increase, they will not go away,” yet “if Horizon 2020 is to be salvaged as a joint document of the county’s future, a “separate city planning body would end whatever cooperation there is.” The editorial demanded that the city and county commissions “reach compromise” (Staff, 1996, p. 4B, editorial). Similarly, a November 24, 1996 article “Land plan divides city, county officials: compromise grows elusive,” said “battle weary city and county commission are anxious for the day when working toward the common good is a higher priority than protecting their separate interests” (Mellinger, 1996, p. 1A, article). At this point

with Horizon 2020, the joint plant had not received approval from the county. The article posited that “depending on who’s talking, the root of the problem was a failure to communicate, a philosophical clash between rural property rights and the interests of city taxpayers, or a trust issue” (Mellinger, 1996, p. 1A, article).

III. Interviews

Interviews with planners and commissioners about this time period reflected city-county tension about permits for water meters and property rights. With county population growing more quickly than city growth (see Figure 2), arguments arose between the city and county over development and infrastructure standards.

Rapid Change

The time period between 1995 and 1999 was characterized as rapid residential and retail development and of politics. One planner said that the unofficial motto of the city during this time was “Let’s grow, growth is good” (Planning Staff 2). One planner said that during the 90s, it was anticipated that the county would become suburban, and there was very little discussion of agricultural land, until more recently. Also mentioned by the same planner was that when a property owner wanted to annex land into the city, there was no discussion or evaluation of whether the additional property would impact city services, a harbinger of infrastructure debates to come. All three planners interviewed, former county commissioner and current planning commissioner mentioned that at this time, the planning commission was very “developer-heavy,” and “The developers were happy to be so busy,” yet the city as a populace still maintained a “no-growth reputation,” and there was enormous economic pressure at the periphery, because “land speculators spent a lot of money getting people elected.” (County Commissioner 1). Another County Commissioner indicated that the changes to landscapes seemed to happen overnight. “And you’d see whole rural landscapes kind of suddenly, you know the perception is

‘overnight’ whole housing developments would spring up. Often, and the perception is it’s in the hands of just a few development powers in the community” (County Commissioner 3).

Further, both planners and commissioners alike talked about how the city, county, and planning commissions, and planning staff, are not proactive bodies and indicated that this corporate culture may have contributed to Lawrence and Douglas County’s growth patterns. "We had pretty much as a city up until early 2002-2002, been more of a city that responded to where individuals wanted to put businesses, rather than wanting to plan our growth” (Planner 1). Additionally, five participants (County Commissioner 2, County Commissioner 1, Planner 1, Planner 2, Planner 3) all indicated that Lawrence prides itself on not being another “bedroom community” like Johnson County, specifically, Olathe or Overland Park, KS. "The growth in residential, though, by the late 90s, early 2000s began to concern them because it wasn't keeping pace with economic development and business. It wasn't keeping pace with economic development and business and they did not want to become a bedroom community and it became more and more likely that if we only grew in population, that that was not a good thing, that we needed balanced growth” (Planning Staff 1).

One planner talked about cronyism and “good ‘ol boy politics” (Planning Staff 1) on the two county commissions prior to the current commission. Partisan politics ruled, whereby commissioners “didn’t look at the impact or the value a project would take away, only that it was something they could pay back to constituents, not the perspective of what’s good for the community” (Planning Staff 1).³ It was also noted by two respondents (both planning staff) that before Horizon 2020, there were two comprehensive plans, one for the county (Douglas County

³ That respondent quickly qualified that “this is not the case with the current or former county commissions” (Planning Staff 1).

Guide Plan) and one for the city (Plan 95), and that the goal of the Douglas County Guide Plan was the preservation of agricultural land, though the planner mentioned, this goal was either forgotten or ignored in implementation.

The Elkins Prairie was mentioned by County Commissioner I and Planning Staff 1. Kansas, pre-development, contained millions of acres of prairie. Today, less than four percent of that original tallgrass prairie remains. The Elkins Prairie in Douglas County was an undisturbed 80 acres of tallgrass prairie. In 1990, the landowner was underwhelmed by The Nature Conservancy's offer to buy the land, and received a higher bid from a residential developer. The landowner plowed the irreplaceable swath of prairie in the early hours in the morning. "Because by destroying it, there was no value in trying to preserve it anymore, so that all the development you see out there is tied to the plowing of the Elkins Prairie" (CC1). Both residential and commercial development in Douglas County was the source of much conflict – developers saw the city as being obstructionist, and citizens saw the city, county, and planning commissions as being friendly to developers: "As it became more difficult for people to develop, to get funding for property, for development for residences, some developers became less conscientious about community good and were looking more at bottom dollar."

Resources – Water

The issue of water meters was also raised by six of the eight people I interviewed. The City of Lawrence, as the entity that issued water meters, limited the availability of meters and used this as a growth management tool – the city would only issue a limited number of permits per year. Whether a potential home in the unincorporated area had access to a rural water district was a limiting factor for development. "So the city in effect controlled rural growth by not

allowing them to have more meters than actually demand was for, there were actually quite a lot of backlogs, there were lists that went back five years when people needed rural water” (Planning Staff 1). As this respondent said, this created enormous animosity between rural property owners. [The city was seen] “as the gorilla literally maintaining their iron fist over what you could grow and how you could grow” (Planning Staff 1).

Property Rights

On one hand was the idea that a landowner’s prospect of selling their farmland to become a residential subdivision a “higher and better use” was essentially the equivalent to a 401(k) retirement plan (Planning Staff 1, 2 and 3, County Commissioner 3 and Planning Commission 1). On the other side, the need for growth to occur in a more “planned manner” (Planning Staff 3) rather than piece-meal; “developers bought and developed without any planning oversight” (Planning Commissioner 1).

Planning Commissioner 1 talked about the legacy of county commissioners’ attitude towards property rights. “It was their guiding factor. ‘Whatever I want to do with my land, I ought to be able to do.’” This attitude was reflected in both rural residents and their commissioners. Planner 2 talked about an instance in which planning staff went to Lecompton to talk to citizens about how the county was expected to grow in the 90s; they were called communists by the citizens who feared that planning and zoning meant losing their property rights. As mentioned before, while the goal of the Douglas County Guide Plan was preservation of agricultural lands, planning staff said that this goal was mostly overlooked, and county commissioners during the 90s came out against agricultural preservation and overruled preservation recommendations by staff. “I think even though the goal was agricultural preservation of lands, because the county commissions hadn't supported it, even when staff came

forward with a recommendation of denial, it was overruled by the county commission” (Planner 1).

While each data source contained somewhat different themes, the major ideas about growth and change that emerged from the planning documents, articles, and interviews appear to focus around conflicts over water meters, property rights, and rapid change. City-county tensions around water meters and planning standards almost boiled over with talks of splitting up the joint planning commission. Horizon 2020 was approved midway through this time period, after a planning process that spanned almost seven years – five years of citizen participation and two of revisions until it was eventually approved in 2008 – a testament to Douglas County’s perpetual city-county conflict.

Slow Growth Period, 2005 to 2009

Table 6 shows the patterns and themes that arose from the three sources. The main themes (highlighted in bold) were those themes that presented themselves many times across and within sources: growth management, economic development, and soils. Within all three sources were suggestions that Lawrence had maybe grown too fast or without proper planning standards. The five-acre exemption was still allowing landowners to bypass planning administration in developing residential subdivisions in the unincorporated area, and a lack of subdivision regulations made that possible until 2007 when the Lawrence/Douglas County Subdivision Regulations were passed. In debating a proposal for an industrial development near the airport, ideas about growing Douglas County sustainably – factors in to the debate as high-quality soils were to be lost. With fewer construction projects and a global recession, the commissions and planning staff had more time to work on sector plans and amendments to Horizon 2020.

Table 6: Slow growth period themes, 2005-2009

	Data Sources	Patterns/Themes	Number of mentions	Illustrative quotes
Slow Growth	Plans	Resource - Soils	4	“Protect the quality of existing high-quality agricultural land”
		Economic Development - increasing efforts to create businesses and jobs	7	“Stabilize the future employment base”
		Upgrading rural development standards	6	“Water, sanitary sewer, streets, curbs, gutters, storm sewers and storm drainage”
	Newspaper 32 Articles 3 Staff Editorials 6 Letters to the Editor	Slowdown in population growth	5 articles, 1 staff editorial	“Dramatic slowdown from Lawrence’s traditional growth rate”
		Economic Development	8 articles, 1 editorial	“Too few industrial properties to offer prospects”
		Growth Management – needed to manage and curb existing and future sprawl	7 articles, 2 editorials, 3 letters	“Lawrence is at a crossroads”
		Resource - Soils	8 articles, 2 editorials, 3 letters to the editor	“Not opposed to development...but we’re not sure this is the right way to do it”
	Interviews	Resource - Soils	7/8 Interviews	“Soils being uniquely special and no where else concentrated” “Agricultural, farming, rural residential are uses of their own right.” “They’re not there on reserve for someone to develop later as a higher & better use.”
		Slowdown	7/8 interviews	“If you go west there’s a lot of empty houses”
		Economic Development	6/8 interviews	“Being a university community is a good thing, but you don't hang your hat on it.” “If you’re growing residentially, you also need economic development because you don’t want to be the Olathes, and the Overland Parks.”
		Growth Management	7/8 interviews	Planning staff took a “more deliberate response to growth”

I. Plans

Horizon 2020 saw a high number of amendments made ten years after its initial approval. Between 2008 and 2009, 18 amendments were made; they reflected a changing population, and the need for better growth management and infrastructure planning. They also reflected the idea that standards should be used to evaluate potential locations for industrial sites, to better plan and preserve good soils and open space. The new subdivision regulations were passed during this

time to guide rural residential developments in ways that, when the land is eventually annexed, will create a more uniform and consistent infrastructure and physical landscape.

Horizon 2020

Between 2005 and 2009, 23 amendments were made to Horizon 2020. Comparatively, two were made in 1998, and seven between 2000 and 2004. Clearly, during this slower growth period, planning staff and commissioners had time to do more long-range planning. The amendments made were long-range in nature – for example, the addition of Chapter 14 Specific (or area) Plans, which included the West of K-10 Plan, Lawrence SmartCode Infill Plan, Southeast Area Plan, Farmland Industries site plan, and Southern Development plan. Additionally, six amendments were made to Chapter 6 Commercial Land Uses, two were made to Chapter 4 Growth Management, two were made to Chapter 5 Residential Land Use, and one was made to Chapter 7 Industrial and Employment. This amendment added the work of the ECO² Commission, which developed a long term plan “of public/private partnership for the advancement of industrial/business parks and open space preservation in Douglas County” (Horizon 2020, 7-1), and provided a methodology with which to weigh criteria to identify and recommend new business and industrial site locations within the city and unincorporated area. One goal of this part of the plan was to “Increase the number and diversity of jobs available to the citizens of Douglas County to stabilize the future employment base and generate additional wealth in the community” (H2020, 7-1).

The issue of planning for high-quality soils also comes out in this amendment. “The preservation of high-quality agricultural land, which has been recognized as a finite resource that is important to the regional economy, is of important value to the community...At least one of the sites identified above (Airport) has some amount of high-quality agricultural land. Soil

conserving agri-industry businesses that will protect the quality of existing high-quality agricultural land either through agricultural use or preservation for future agricultural use should be encouraged to locate in these areas” (Horizon 2020, 7-8).

Article 8, Subdivision Regulations

The *Subdivision Regulations for Lawrence and Unincorporated Areas of Douglas County, KS* were passed January 1, 2007, with five amendments between 2007 and 2009. The plan states that “The purpose of the Subdivision Regulations of this Article is to ensure that the Division of land, which, in many instances, is an initial step in urbanization, will serve the public interest and general welfare” (Article 8, Subdivision Design and Improvements 2009, 6). Also, “to provide for the harmonious and orderly Development of land,” but also to “provide for the conservation and protection of human and natural resources” (Article 8, Subdivision 2009, 6).

The subdivision regulations also provide for public improvements. “All Public Improvements, including but not limited to water, sanitary sewer, Streets, curbs, gutters, storm sewers and storm drainage, roundabout, pedestrian facilities, traffic calming devices or traffic control devices shall comply with the construction standards established by the City Engineer or County Engineer, as applicable. Such standards are incorporated herein by reference” (Article 8, 55).

II. Articles

Journal-World articles reflected planning strategies to manage growth like the subdivision regulations, declining population, cries for economic development and new industry to create revenue and jobs, and a movement to protect soils.

Population Decline

The Journal-World, on October 2, 2005, included a staff editorial entitled “Thinking small.” This editorial blames the city and local officials for serious infrastructure problems – like the overflow of a sewage pumping station at 6th and Kentucky: “The bottom line is that the city wouldn’t be in this situation if it had more accurately projected future development and utility needs.” (Staff, 2005, p. 6B, editorial). In an “Our View: Growth demands taking broader view” editorial three days later, “This area of the state is growing at an amazing clip, and as agricultural land in northeast Kansas continues to go the way of housing developments, construction of new roads and the improvement of existing ones will become increasingly important” (Staff, 2005, p. 4A, editorial).

Douglas County grew fast – residential and commercial development thrived until 2006 or 2007. When the “second great” recession put a halt on the national economy, Lawrence was no exception. With the growth came change, and fear. Lawrence was known for the University, its downtown, these things that gave it a high quality of life – seemed in peril. In a column, George Gurly wrote, “I sympathize with those who fear that Lawrence is threatened with change and the possible loss of its charm. I dread the inevitable spoiling of the bucolic countryside I enjoy today... The proliferation of apartment complexes and retail strips have made parts of Lawrence indistinguishable from most other American towns” (Gurley, 2007, p. 7B).

The April 26, 2008 issue of the Journal-World was called “Progress 2008 – Economic Review and Forecast.” Despite the optimism implicit in the name, the Progress edition had to acknowledge the population decline. “After years of enjoying a slow, steady drumbeat of population growth, economic expansion and employment additions, Lawrence leaders are

finding themselves grappling with some unfamiliar feelings these days” (Fagan, 2008, p. 4A, article). They attributed a decline in home-buying to a lack of industrial job opportunities.

Another angle on the story of declining population and job growth is of quality of life. “That’s because the community – anchored by a major state university and buoyed by its high quality of life and perch between the state capital to the west and a major metro area to the east – isn’t about to change its steady ways” (Fagan, 2008, p. 2E, article).

Economic Development

A familiar theme emerged during 2005 to 2009 as did 1995 to 1999: the need for economic development through industrial projects. In October 2006, Dolph Simons, Jr., Journal-World Editor, wrote a personal editorial titled “City, county in power struggle over city’s growth.” In it, he argued that the root of the lack of development is due to a “power struggle...over growth and development of the city and county...A significant slowdown in the city’s growth, a possible embarrassing loss in population, a growing business vacancy rate in Downtown Lawrence, and lower construction numbers comes the somewhat sudden realization by some officials that more new business and industry is needed to pay the bills Lawrence will incur as it updates and improves the city’s infrastructure” (Simons, 2006, 1B, editorial).

While Mr. Simons wrote about a population, business, and construction slowdown in 2006, that next summer, the realization that Lawrence was no longer a “boom town” set in. “The significance of the new numbers is that they represent a dramatic slowdown from Lawrence’s traditional growth rate of 1.5 to 2.5 percent per year” (Lawhorn, 2007, p. 4A, article). And the city was counting on that steady population growth to fund a new wastewater treatment plant – the project was never approved.

One month later, on July 30, 2007, the Journal-World ran a story on a proposed industrial park near the airport titled, “Development plans may create farmland battle.” The city’s answer to slowing population growth and lagging industrial development would then set off another controversy between rural land uses and industrial development (Lawhorn, 2007, p. 1A, article).

Growth Management

2005 to 2009 overwhelmingly felt the recognition that if growth that had occurred in the 90s had been planned, it had not been planned well. The phrase “controlling growth” was used many times in newspaper articles. In 2005, articles still expected and looked to accommodating more population growth, especially rural. The county “wanted a better understanding of what the problems are and what needs to be fixed concerning policies for controlled growth” (*Briefly* Column, 2005, 1B).

Infrastructure at this time was still a concern for the county. Commercial, residential, and population growth pushed the city of Lawrence to its wastewater limits. At this time, the 5-acre exemption was still actively being used, allowing rural landowners to break off 5, 10, and 15 acre parcels, and bypass zoning (Henrikson, 2005, 3B).

Making sure that planning standards were being met in rural subdivisions under the 5-acre exemption was virtually impossible – and city-county conflict that had previously revolved around the issue of rural water meters gravitated to the elimination of the 5-acre exemption. August 9, 2005: “The proposal prevents subdivisions from forming on 5 acres of land in rural parts of Douglas County – a practice that has irked commissioners” (Henrikson, 2005, 6B). But it wouldn’t be until late 2006, officially January 1, 2007 that the rural subdivision regulations would take effect.

Charles Jones, county commissioner, in an October 18, 2006 article, was quoted saying “The rural subdivision regulations were the “most important issue he’s dealt with” – “we’ve been talking about these issues, it seems, for decades, and I’m pleased that this commission decided to take them on” (Belt, 2006, 2B).

A December 3, 2006 column from rural resident George Gurley bemoaned the loss of the farms and open space to Johnson County developers, enticed by Douglas County’s “lax regulation governing rural subdivision. In Johnson County, he’d have to submit his plan for zoning approval.” But with Lawrence and Douglas County threatening to disengage, “the future of rural Douglas County is being handed over to speculators from Johnson County.” He summed up his thoughts by saying, “Lawrence and Douglas County face the same challenges faced by communities everywhere: how to balance our need with nature’s; how to preserve the things we value and grow” (Gurley, 2006, p. 3B).

On January 1, 2007, county commissioners unanimously adopted new rural subdivision regulations which eliminated the 5-acre exemption and required all new houses in the rural areas go through administrative approval by the Lawrence-Douglas County Planning Department. In a January 2, 2007 article, “Water restriction has some using rural water” (Lawhorn, 2007, p. 1B, article) county commissioners ask city commission to loosen restriction on rural water meters, and Charles Jones calls Douglas County “an urbanizing, progressive county.” Additionally, the commissioners add that placing limits on water meters would become unnecessary as a growth management tool if new subdivision regulations and development planning standards were put in place.

Resource - Soils

Industrial projects, with promises of jobs and tax revenue became the ideal approach to economic development. In the case of the proposed airport industrial park, 144 acres of land owned by Pine Family Farms near the Lawrence airport, was no exception. It was quickly met with opposition, and community desires versus private property rights collided, as did preservation versus development. What emerged was a conversation about unique, high-quality soils.

The developer hoped to acquire the surrounding land for a total of 900 acres, but was not successful in persuading neighbors. “We’re not anti-growth, and we’re not anti-development. We just want this project to meet some serious scrutiny before it is passed through” said Nancy Thellman in a July 30, 2007 article, before she was elected to the county commission. The crux of the opposition to the development project was that the land sat on Class I and II soils, prime soil for agricultural uses, with ample moisture as the land sits lows in the Kansas River Valley. Barbara Clark was quoted in the same article, saying “My concern is that we’ll be losing some of the most fertile ground in Douglas County. I just hate to see it covered up with concrete.” With the future of oil uncertain, local food production has become an interest to many communities. “Clark and her neighbors said they think the ‘bottom ground’ of the Kansas River Valley will be valuable asset to the city in future years when it may become too expensive to routinely import food from thousands of miles away” (Lawhorn, 2007, p. 7A, article).

From the Pines’ and developer’s perspectives, the land was valuable for an industrial development for another reason – location. It sits near a railway, I-70, and K-10 highway. “The business park could attract new employees to town because the site is a natural for distribution centers, warehouses, and other businesses that need to be located near major roadways”

(Lawhorn, 2007, p. 7A, article). The developer was quoted saying the development would “produce 1600 jobs and \$54 million in taxes and fees” though it should be noted that these numbers did not change from when the development size changed from 900 to 144 total acres.

Opposition did not just hang on the prime soils argument – because it is a river valley, flooding and stormwater were concerns from neighbors, as well as the cost of extending sewer and water infrastructure. Douglas County citizens knew by now that infrastructure costs taxpayers.

Another proposed business park, 155 acres north of Lecompton, met opposition as well. “Many know its long-term future isn’t to grow grass and fatten cattle, but they say the fact is it is still two miles outside the current city limits of Lawrence means it isn’t suited for industrial development today” (Lawhorn, 2008, p. 4A, article).

III. Interviews

Interviews with planning staff and commissioners illuminated a lot of the planning, growth, and infrastructure issues that faced Douglas County in the latter half of the first millennial decade. For a county that had such high population growth rates, even a one percent drop in growth spelled disaster for city and county officials who were relying on a steady stream of incoming population to help pay for a new wastewater treatment facility. Constant growth also led to an overabundance of vacant residential and commercial properties as housing and retail demand waned. Local interest in sustainability and food production took center stage as prime agricultural land was pinpointed for industrial development.

Resource – Soils

It was also in this time period where the recent debate over industrial development versus agricultural preservation became an issue, and issues of community versus landowner rights

picked up speed around issues of industrial development on agricultural land. Prior to around 2007, rezoning farmland to accommodate industrial uses was not an uncommon practice. One county commissioner said that in terms of industrial development projects, the developers would say “‘Give me something and I’ll make a bunch of jobs’ and we’d waive rules and give incentives,” and “Someone could come in with the worst idea in the world and say it would create 50 jobs to this town and the city and county commission would be all over it” (County Commissioner 1). Around 2007, high-quality soils in the area around the Lawrence Municipal Airport in North Lawrence became a topic of much conversation. A citizen-led group representing farmland preservation interests north of the Wakarusa River, Citizens for Responsible Planning, advocated for the preservation of high-quality soils located on the land slated to become the Airport Business Park. This new voice in the conversation surrounding agriculture in Douglas County was a common thread throughout all the interviews conducted. It was spoken as if this line of thought was the turning point in which agricultural preservation was taken seriously as an alternative to development.

The immediate response to the airport industrial park was spearheaded by Nancy Thellman and Barbara Clark. To planning staff, the proposal looked ready for approval, but the issue of its high-quality soils came to light under aforementioned Citizens for Responsible Planning leadership. To Planning Staff 2, the soils debate “helped us to say ‘this is a valuable resource, let’s look at protecting it where it shows up a lot, and not necessarily apply those policies to every part of the county.’”

Slowdown

Planners and commissioners interviewed indicated that there have been markedly fewer projects brought before the staff and commissions since 2007, and especially since the 2008

housing bubble burst. “Less current development meant more time to work on long-range and policy issues” (Planning Staff 2). The overwhelming response to the idea that the population was slowing indicated by respondents was to find ways to broaden the tax base. To date, this has been in the form of enticing business and industrial activities. As businesses are taxed at a higher rate than residential, development of these types help create new sources tax revenue for the city. The economic slowdown since 2007 was indicated as part of the efforts to increase economic development through industrial activities. As we will see later, expansion of industrial activities would impact talks about agricultural land; the best-suited land for industrial and agricultural activities is similar and many times overlapping. Despite the slow-down of development activities, one county commissioner said that “The development pressure is off right now, but it’ll come back” (County Commissioner 1). Two respondents remarked on the “overbuilt” nature of the housing market in the city of Lawrence. “Now it’ll be years before we’ll absorb the housing stock that we have out, if you go west there’s a lot of empty houses” (County Commissioner 1). In addition to the “shock and disbelief” (Planning Staff 3) that the population wasn’t as high as in the 90s, all the planners interviewed talked about an issue that began in 2005 in response to new census figures, that “In 2005 [the commissions] didn’t like the fact that we were growing slower, and they thought it was staff’s fault, that we had done the population projections wrong.” This led to the city commission challenging the federal, state, and local population figures “because they understood that census figures, whether they are state, biennial, or federal census impacted the flow of dollars we got for transportation, housing, and development” (Planning Staff 1).

Planners unanimously said that during this time period, they made an effort to be more “flexible” with applicants, to keep projects moving along. From Planner 3, “One of the responses

[to the slowdown] internally was to say, let's work with people, we were more flexible with deadlines and submittals. Maybe your application isn't 100 percent complete but get me this study by this date, or instead of doing a full study, get me this documentation. So we've tried to work with people in that way, to keep it moving, keep it reasonable." By contrast, all current county commissioners indicated that during this slow-down, their review became more "deliberate," and "thoughtful," and to examine critically what was "good for the community," and "look at things more long term" (CC2). Commissioners interviewed talked about responding to stagnating population growth in terms of jobs, economic development, and broadening the tax base.

Growth Management

The five-acre exemption was a loophole in the county's subdivision regulations that was originally intended for a farmer to be able to build a home for a child on their existing land, without having to go through platting procedures or planning approval. The loophole was utilized heavily, instead, by farmers who sold off five, ten, and fifteen acre parcels of land to developers for rural subdivisions.

The five acre exemption was eventually defeated in January 2007 after five attempts between 1978 and 2006, according to Planning Staff 1. The purpose of replacing the five-acre exemption was to deal with scattered suburban residential development – but it was about more than just sprawl. The five-acre exemption allowed landowners to skip the platting and administrative review of a new development within the urban growth area. For areas identified in Horizon 2020 as future areas of growth, the developments were required to adhere to city infrastructure requirements – things like providing paved roads, water, and sewer services. This avoidance of implementing city-level service infrastructure would then require the city to make

the necessary improvements once that the area is annexed into the city. Replacing the five-acre exemption with rural subdivision requirements was achievements in 2007, but not without bitter conflict. This loophole was the easiest way for farmers to cash in on their “401(k)” (County Commissioner 3, Planning staff 1, Planning staff 2, Planning Commissioner 1).

Again, the data sources yielded many themes, but those that stood out among sources revolved around managing growth, economic development (especially through industrial projects), and soil preservation.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The research question I organized this study around was “Does rhetoric and imagery of agriculture at the urban fringe change from periods of high to low growth?” The purpose of this research was to identify differences in rhetoric surrounding rural land uses in Douglas County’s urban fringe when population growth was booming (1995 to 1999) and later when it was stagnating (2005 to 2009). I posited that between 1995 to 1999 when population growth was high, that preserving rural and agricultural land would be less of a priority to overall development, and that between 2005 to 2009, when population growth slowed, construction of new suburbs dwindled, and the global recession took hold, rural land would be talked about as having a value unto itself – rather than being a “placeholder” for future development. Indeed, I did find that different concerns arose between the two times. In 1995 to 1999, rural water was a very contentious issue between the city and county, as the city limited growth in the unincorporated area by setting a limit to how many rural water permits could be issued per year.

Rural water meter limits was such a contentious issue because water, as a resource, is immediately necessary, and was seen as infringing on rural property owners’ constitutional rights. By limiting the availability of permits, the city was, in effect, telling property owners that they could not develop their land, because if a property owner wanted to build a residential development on their land, they could not provide it with city-treated drinking water. In discussions about increasing the number of available water meters per year, the city maintained that rural residential development would not be hindered if more strict rural development standards were adopted. City officials, in acknowledging the city’s future as a “growing” city, wanted to make sure that when infill development occurs between the current city limits and

rural residential developments, the infrastructure would be such that connecting the areas would not pose a financial burden on the city to retroactively improve the rural residents' infrastructure. Again, emphasized in this natural resource conflict is the immediate nature of the need for treated water; it was necessary for planning staff and officials to reach an agreement quickly, and in reaction to the problem, which is a good example of how planning during the 1995 to 1999 high growth period was reactive in nature.

The biggest source of contention between 2005 and 2009, as indicated by interviews and newspaper articles, was that of the proposed airport business park – because of its unique, high-quality soils. As with the issue of water meters, the perceived infringement of property rights was the major reason why the project was such a conflict. Despite the landowner wanting to develop it for industrial uses, the issue of soils as an irreplaceable, community-valued good played a large part in the discussion and may have contributed to the project's eventual discontinuation. It cannot be said for sure that the soils debate shelved the project, or whether the global recession played a bigger role, but nonetheless, the efforts of a small but vocal group of concerned citizens changed the way Douglas County viewed finite natural resources. “If a large, vocal, and voting growth management constituency can be formed, politicians will have to deliver growth management programs or else face defeat” (Daniels 1999, 156). And official plans reflected that – from Horizon 2020 and the subdivision regulations, to even more recent plans like the Northeast Sector Plan and Environmental Chapter for Horizon 2020 (neither is included in analysis because neither has been approved yet). The goal of the Northeast sector plan is agricultural preservation – it acknowledges agriculture as not a means to an end, but a valid, worthwhile land use in itself, not always a future subdivision. In the slow growth period,

the major natural resource conflict, of preserving high quality soils, was much less immediate, as people don't need good soil to survive in the short-term, like they need water.

Because 2005 to 2009 were years of slower population growth and fewer development projects, perhaps the reason why the airport business park's development was slowed was because staff had time to fully engage the public in a meaningful discussion about the role of soils in the county – something that in the development hubris of the 90s would have been overlooked. Meaningful discussion about a possible development project not only brings disparate stakeholders together, but good public participation reflects positively on the city. Citizens may take pride in playing a greater role in a tangible project, and feel as if the democracy is really “working for them.” Additionally, while planning staff shrink in response to government austerity measures, the case could be made that more planners are needed to be able to adequately engage the public in this sort of meaningful discussion. Put plainly, planning is even more necessary when the economy is slow and development projects are scarce.

Further Research Ideas

Further research should seek to identify stories from a wider audience. In my research, I drew from city officials and the local newspaper, but that doesn't include the breadth of stories that have been or could be told by Douglas County citizens and those whose land at the rural-urban fringe is changing, like farmers and rural residents. Further research could incorporate interviews with farmers, rural residents, and developers. Another source that would be rich with stories is planning commission minutes, whereby citizens, commissioners, and interested parties are given time to express their support or misgivings for a Lawrence/Douglas County planning issue. Those interested in continuing this could analyze these planning minutes to see what stories emerge.

Implications for Planning

What can planners learn from this research? If planners can better understand the stories that citizens tell about their “place,” they may be able to organize and implement planning efforts. One of the biggest “take-away” points that I personally found was that despite different time periods and circumstances, many of the same types of concerns are brought up between the two decades. The context and details of the stories may be different over time, but the plots are usually similar: “growth is good versus growth is bad.” Planning for and understanding the concerns that will arise before they are voiced could aid planners in becoming more proactive. The planners I interviewed all spoke about being in an office where most of the work that they do is reactive in nature (despite “planning” being a synonym for preparing or having forethought), and that the period of slow growth allowed them to make many long-awaited changes, including the elimination of the 5-acre exemption, and planning for the conservation of prime farmland in North Lawrence.

Understanding how stories may influence the rhetorical landscape may be a crucial way for planners to understand an issue, but also “market” planning. Planning is an oft-misunderstood field, and planners themselves find themselves trying to do “good planning” in the face of politics. During one of my interviews, Planning Staff 3 said that “We don’t market ourselves very well.” Stories and storytelling, as a vehicle for rhetorical and perhaps policy change could help planners influence citizen support for projects that serve the public good. Whereas planners must always be attuned to stakeholders’ stories, planners may also serve as storytellers; they tell a story about a place in the plans that are written, and should be aware that these stories hold community influence. Because my research indicated that much of the “plot” over time is similar with respect to growth and change in a county, where the details shift with circumstances over

time may illuminate “windows” for planners to really “plan.” This was demonstrated by the nature of the difference resource conflicts between the two time periods: water versus soils, short-term versus long-term.

The nature of the two resource conflicts, water in the nineties and soils in the new millennium may have implications for how we as planners, citizens, and officials pick our battles. When population growth was high and people wanted to move into the unincorporated areas and get hooked up to municipal water, that was a very short-term immediate need – people needed water. For someone to raise an issue about soils at this time may have seemed “out of touch,” with the importance of more immediate needs, like economic development. Being able to communicate the value of both the need for long-term and short-term planning should be a skill every planner should carry in his or her planning “tool belt.” Understanding how short- and long-term resource needs are communicated in stories may help planners develop strategies for dealing with resource conflicts before they arise.

Likewise, my second study period suggests that when growth and development slow their pace, deliberate long-term, “good planning” can occur. For example, 18 amendments to Horizon 2020 were made between 2008 and 2009. Planning Commissioner 3 said, “All the different elements of urbanization that go along with growth and all of that I believe is being handled at a much more deliberate and thoughtful pace than it was probably in the last decade.” This sentiment was echoed by planners and all commissioners interviewed – the circumstances of the economy allowed them to have the time to make thoughtful, deliberate decisions about growth in Douglas County. Rather than to wait for a slowdown in development, perhaps planners (in the face of local government austerity measures) could plan ahead for how to best utilize “slow

periods” for long-term planning, and how to maintain long-term planning measures even when population growth and economic development are growing.

How the community talks about a changing urban-rural fringe in Douglas County may have significant implications for how the county plans for its growth in the future. Assuredly, the same issues of economic development, infrastructure, and planning standards in the wake of an urbanizing county will continue to remain on citizens, planners, and commissioners’ minds. Planning for the things that citizens value, be it freedom, sustainability, privacy, or preservation, as understood through their stories and rhetoric, may help city officials better plan for the things that the community hold dear. Understanding that storytelling and rhetoric may influence the physical development could be a powerful tool for planners and commissioners to harness as they use citizen input to make decisions that will impact the future shape of Douglas County.

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