

Housing

Housing is an essential component of each community. This comprehensive plan assesses the current housing situation within the county, as well as the future needs of the county as a whole. While the housing stock may represent the unique heritage of Dickinson County, the future needs of the community may be changing. This will require adaptation to economic, demographic and social advances so that these needs can be met. This chapter examines the current housing conditions in the county and provides updates and policy recommendations in terms of the future of Dickinson County housing.

The population of Dickinson County is very important when analyzing the housing element of the comprehensive plan because the housing stock needs of the community in conjunction with demographics. The total number of housing units is important but the number and *type* of housing units in the county is even more relevant. An understanding of housing terms is also necessary. For example, a household may be defined as all people living in one housing unit, regardless of any relation to one another. Average household size is the average number of persons that reside in one housing unit.

Housing Survey

The Planning Team has conducted a housing survey of Dickinson County for this comprehensive plan. The survey consists of simple observations in five towns: Solomon, Chapman, Hope, Enterprise and Herington. For Abilene, the County Appraiser's information on housing conditions has been used to analyze its 2,500 homes. Of 8,686 housing units in Dickinson County (2000 U.S. Census), 3,352 of them (38.6%) are included in this survey. The following section documents how the housing survey was conducted and the elements which were examined.

Dwelling Units

For the purposes of this comprehensive plan, three types of identifiers are used. The type of dwelling is mainly determined by how many individual housing units are present in a single lot or structure. This can be determined many ways, and the indicators used for this survey include: number of meters, mailboxes and parking spaces. The correct configuration of dwelling unit types within the county is essential to determining how the density of housing is developed. The following categories were used in our survey:

- Single-Family Unit: a completely independent structure designed to house one family with only one unit within the entire structure.
- Duplex: a single structure divided into two separate dwelling units
- Multi-Family Unit: a single structure containing five or more dwelling units

Yards / Outside Condition

One large part of the housing element in any community is the visual appeal that each lot holds. In fact, many cities have adopted ordinances to fine a landowner for failure to maintain a well-kept lawn. The outside environment is essential in the evaluation of a piece of property's overall character. In this housing survey, the Planning Team rates the yards and outside condition of each lot as poor, fair or good. A poor yard rating indicates minimal care, lack of grass / groundcover, trash / litter, and debris as factors of an overall disappointing appearance. A fair lot is an average lawn showing signs of maintenance and regular upkeep, but maybe having signs of distress. A good yard is one classified as above average, with regular upkeep and good maintenance. Evident landscaping efforts may be one element of a yard classified as good.

Sidewalks

The sidewalk is a part of the outside condition of a piece of property, but is rated separately from the yard. The sidewalk gives a feeling of continuity to the community; places where the sidewalk is missing, unleveled or poorly kept lends to an air of indifference to the community at large. Sidewalks are essential pedestrian links. Sidewalks are also rated as in poor, fair or good condition, similarly to the yard.

Overall Rating

Each dwelling is surveyed by the Planning Team and is assigned an overall rating based on its condition, desirability and utility, according to the following four (4) categories:

- Standard: The overall structure is sound, habitable and attractive for standard residential purposes.
- General Repair Needed: The structure is in sound condition, but repairs need to be made. It may be said that repairs needed are mostly cosmetic and the structure is not deteriorating.
- Deteriorating: The structure is in need of extensive repair or replacement of major components.
- Practically Dilapidated: The structure is deemed almost uninhabitable or is unsafe for residence; it should be considered for demolition.

To save time and resources after surveying five towns outside of Abilene, the Abilene housing condition was obtained from the County Appraiser's office. It consists of eight categories: EX (excellent), VG (very good), GD (good), AV (average), FR (fair), PR (poor), VP (very poor) and UN (undesirable). For the purposes of compatibility, the categories are combined to fit with the results from the Planning Team's physical survey as follows:

- EX, VG and GD are combined to equal the Standard overall rating.
- AV and FR are combined to equal General Repair Needed.
- PR equals a rating of Deteriorating.
- VP and UN are combined to equal Practically Dilapidated.

Photographic examples of each category for the overall rating follow.



Standard



General Repair Needed



Deteriorating



Practically Dilapidated

Analysis of Results

Structural Age

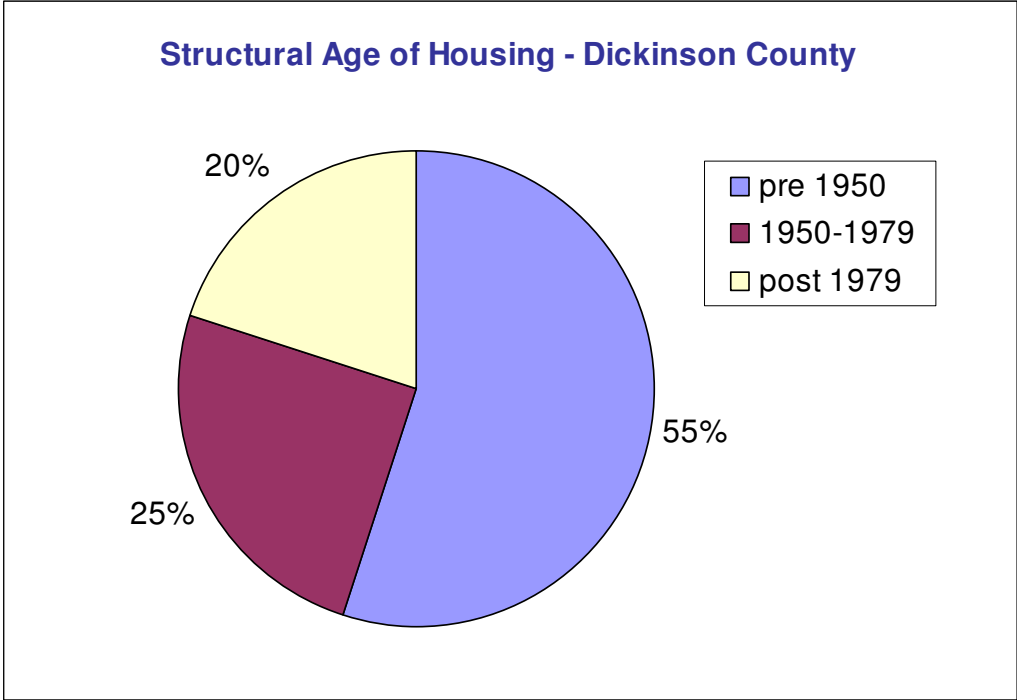
The age of the housing stock in any community is one strong indicator of trends and characteristics. According to the United States Census Bureau (2000), the median year built for all structures in Dickinson County is 1951. In fact, out of the total 8,686 structures in the county, almost 40% of the houses were constructed before 1939. The housing stock in Dickinson County is extremely old, especially when it is compared to the median built years for the state of Kansas (1966) and the Nation (1971). **Table 5.1** below shows the ages of housing stock in Dickinson County.

Table 5.1

Median Year Structure Built Dickinson County, Kansas	
Total # of structures	8686
Built 1999- March 2000	117
Built 1995 to 1998	423
Built 1990-1994	317
Built 1980-1989	668
Built 1970-1979	1063
Built 1960-1969	805
Built 1950-1959	1088
Built 1940-1949	770
Built 1939 or earlier	3435
Median year structure built	1951

Because the housing stock in Dickinson County is older, the county may not be as attractive to incoming population. There is a lack of modern housing in the county, which has implications such as major repairs, inefficient heating and cooling systems, structural wear and tear, and overall appearance. Only 1.3% of the total housing in Dickinson County has been constructed since 1999, which illustrates how slow growth in the county has been. **Graph 5.1** below shows the structural age of housing in Dickinson County and splits the age groups into three: Pre-1900, 1900-1949 and Post-1950.

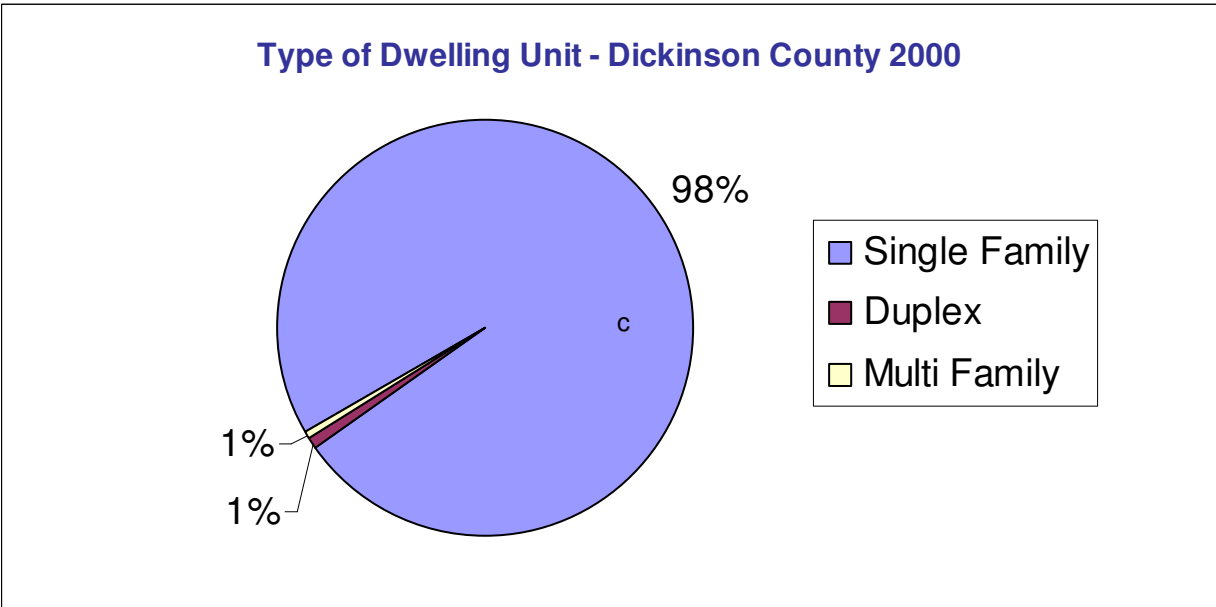
Graph 5.1



Type of Dwelling Unit

The housing survey shows that most Dickinson County is comprised of single-family units. **Graph 5.2** below shows that almost 99 percent of the housing in the county belongs to that category. (Note: the statistics exclude Abilene because this particular element was not observed by the housing survey.) The results of this observation suggest that residential density is relatively low.

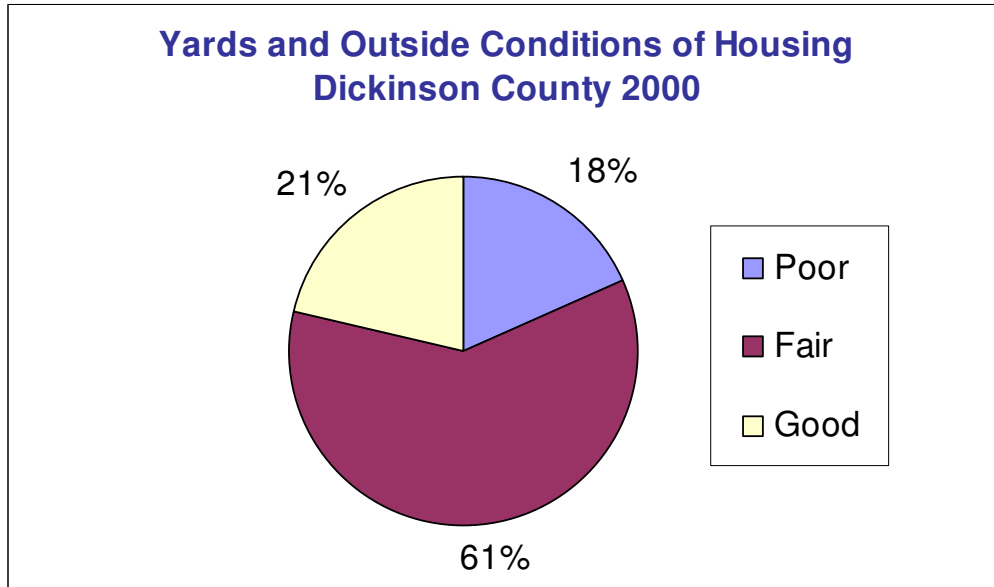
Graph 5.2



Yards and Outside Conditions

Sixty-one percent of lots in Dickinson County fall under the “fair” category for yard and outside conditions. This is a good statistic to report, as the outside condition (lawn care, general maintenance of the exterior of a property) can make a community and its housing stock more attractive. The pie chart below shows how the outside environment appears in Dickinson County.

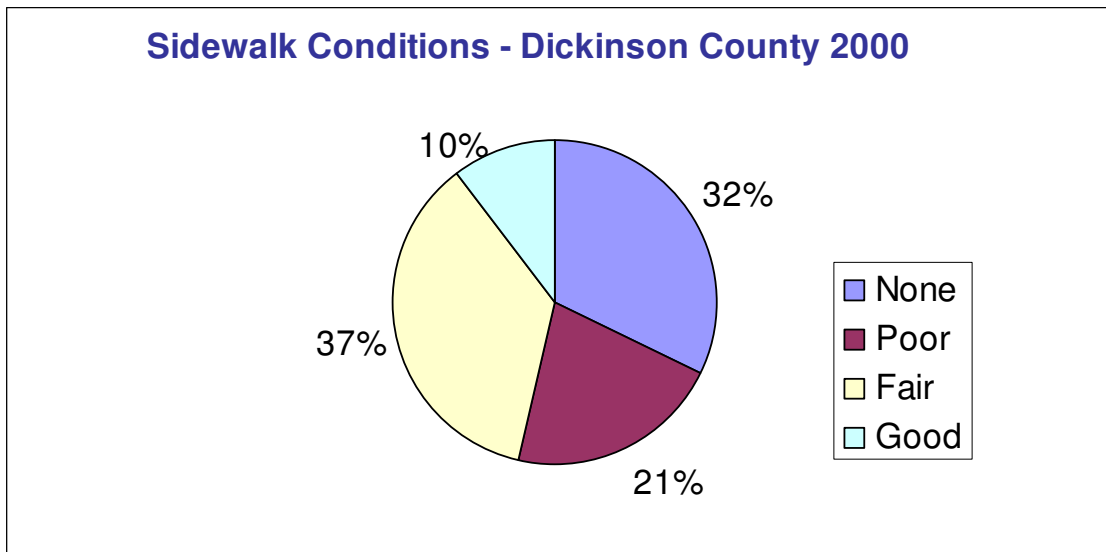
Graph 5.3



Sidewalks

As previously mentioned, sidewalks in any community create essential pedestrian links. Here is how Dickinson County’s sidewalks rate.

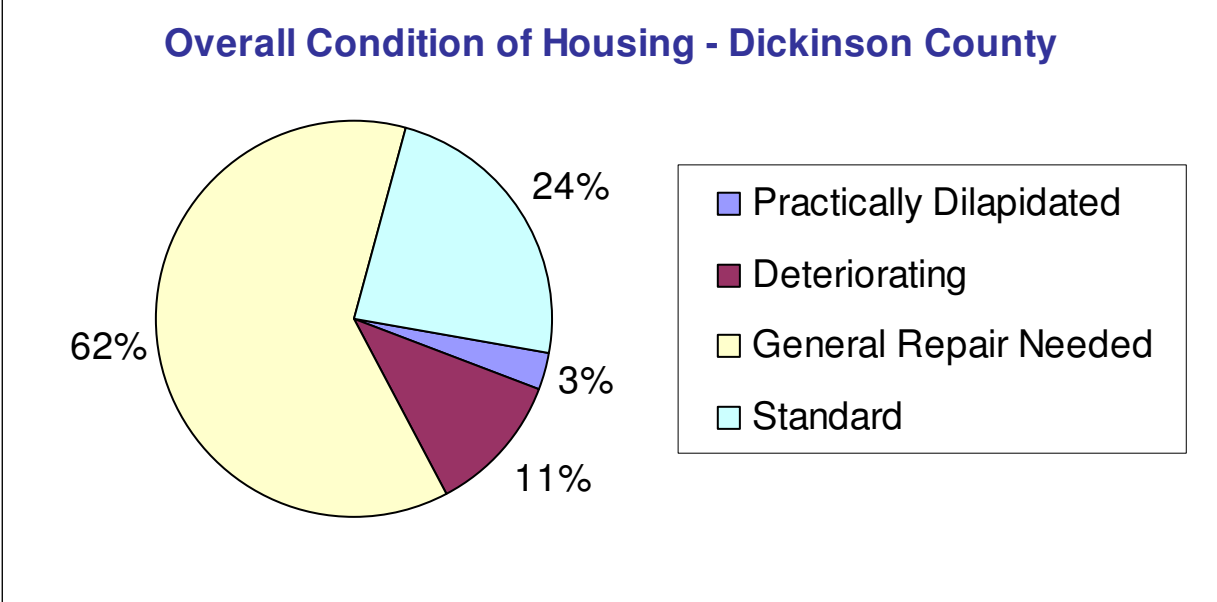
Graph 5.4



Overall Condition

Dickinson County’s housing stock is generally in good condition, with 62 percent of the houses needing general repairs and 24 percent considered to be standard. Totaling those satisfactory homes (86 percent of the total), only 14 percent of the housing in Dickinson County may be considered below average or in need of major repairs. Even though the housing is aged, the upkeep of most of the lots is being maintained and only 3.2 percent of the overall stock should be condemned. **Graph 5.5** illustrates the overall condition of the housing stock in Dickinson County (all five towns and Abilene included).

Graph 5.5



Quick Facts and Statistics

Overall, Dickinson County’s housing situation is not a problem. However, the following information intends to show some quick statistics and potential indications for the county when planning for the future.

For example, in the year 2000, the average household size in Dickinson County was 2.4 persons, and the number of rooms in any given housing unit was 5.7 rooms (U. S. Census 2000). Out of the 8,686 total housing units in the county, 2,081 of them have 5 rooms. This means that there is too much large housing in the county. Please refer to the **Table 5.2** below for 2000 statistics on number of rooms in Dickinson County.

Table 5.2

NUMBER OF ROOMS IN HOUSING DICKINSON COUNTY, KANSAS 2000	
Total	8686
1 room	43
2 rooms	128
3 rooms	611
4 rooms	1173
5 rooms	2081
6 rooms	1666
7 rooms	1205
8 rooms	817
9 or more rooms	962

Another interesting fact is that, within the county, 9 percent of the 8,686 housing units are vacant (2000 Census). With 783 housing units standing vacant, the county should have the ability to absorb more population without having to construct more housing. The amount of owner-occupied housing stands at 5,908 homes, or 75 percent.

Housing values within Dickinson County are quite varied, with the median value for an owner-occupied home in 2000 being \$65,400. Most of the owner-occupied homes in the county are valued below \$100,000, which means that housing may be very affordable and attractive to new population. The table below illustrates the range of home values in the county according to the 2000 Census.

Table 5.3

Value of Owner-Occupied Homes Dickinson County Kansas 2000 # of homes in value category	
\$0 to \$99,999	3805
\$100,000 to \$199,999	649
\$200,000 or more	94

Conclusion and Recommendations

There are many conclusions that are drawn from the housing survey and the 2000 Census data gathered for Dickinson County. Some areas of concern include the availability of different types of housing for varied populations, elderly housing and the need for new construction to accommodate the expected regional increase in population. The fact that almost half of the houses built in Dickinson County were constructed before 1950 indicates that the housing market for construction in the county is relatively weak. Sidewalks are another policy concern for the county, as where they do exist, much of it is poor and needs repair.

While the county is in relatively good shape considering housing, future needs deem it necessary to develop new policy goals and to update previous recommendations. Goals and policies for improving and updating Dickinson County's housing stock are listed below:

Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Take advantage of the opportunity to serve expected population influx as a result of the Fort Riley expansion.

- Encourage developers to build varied types of housing with an emphasis on affordable and sustainable construction.
- Provide incentives to developers to rehabilitate older housing and convert large homes into smaller, multi-family units.
- Assess vacant housing in the county and turn the empty units into attractive rental opportunities.

Goal 2: Improve the sidewalk system in the county.

- Establish a standard for sidewalk conditions in the county, assess the conditions once per year (and upon complaint) and charge a penalty to property owners for failure to comply.
- Offer assistance to elderly, disabled, and low-income residents who may have difficulty complying with sidewalk standards.

Goal 3: Improve the outside environment of housing in the county.

- Establish a standard for yard and outside conditions in the county, assess the conditions once per year (and upon complaint) and charge a penalty to property owners for failure to comply.
- Offer assistance to elderly, disabled, and low-income residents who may have difficulty complying with the standards.

Goal 4: Improve the quality of the existing housing stock in the county.

- Research federal, state and other funding opportunities to aid property owners in repairing, refurbishing or rehabilitating their properties. Make the public aware of the opportunities through advertising in the paper, public service announcements, and mailing pamphlets with city or county billings.
- Demolish homes that may be considered severely distressed or uninhabitable.
- Encourage developers to build within vacant lots and use infill development.

- Establish zones of development within the county and offer incentives to developers who build where adequate public facilities already exist instead of building where new facilities would be necessary.

Goal 5: Implement design guidelines for all development (new or infill) efforts.

- Establish neighborhood overlay districts in the county which would prohibit negligent design and keep traditional neighborhood elements intact.
- Develop minimum standards for elements such as sidewalk width, number of curb cuts for driveways, lot setback and landscaping.
- Offer incentives to developers who aim to use sustainable development, design and construction methods.