



**Johnson County Board of County Commissioners  
Strategic Priorities Report**

**February 2014**

# Executive Summary

To set the stage for the next two years, the Johnson County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), with the support of the County's Executive Leadership Team, dedicated considerable time in late 2013 and early 2014 to come together around a set of strategic priorities.

At the heart of the process was the work done by the Citizens' Visioning Committee in 2011. That group's report recommended a vision statement for the entire County and a series of goals and objectives organized according to "six themes of equal importance." The CVC report had been the reference point for the BOCC's development of strategic priorities in early 2013 and also gave guidance to the staff to carry out the work of the County.

To provide additional insight for the BOCC regarding strategic priorities, this most recent process began with considerable participation from the E-team. The team gathered to identify the "big ideas" that could put the County on the path to achieve its vision. They narrowed those to a few focused priorities and recommended them to the BOCC. Taking the E-team's suggestions into consideration, the BOCC ultimately reaffirmed the vision statement developed for the County by the CVC as well as the organizing guidelines the BOCC had established for itself in early 2013. Further, it agreed to six strategic priorities to guide the work of the County organization for the next one to two years.

The vision statement, organizing principles and strategic priorities are included in this executive summary. However, additional detail related to the strategic priorities can be found beginning on page 5.

## Vision Statement

Johnson County will be a community of choice  
—an inclusive, culturally and economically diverse community—  
nationally recognized for its quality of life,  
innovation and exceptional leadership.

# Organizing Guidelines

## Leadership and Collaboration

- The BOCC should convene, facilitate, and lead discussions and initiatives to respond to issues that impact the entire County and the region.
- The role of Johnson County government is to provide core services and to work with organizations in the community to solve countywide problems.
- Johnson County should initiate and facilitate discussions with cities and other governmental jurisdictions in the county regarding issues of common interest and countywide importance, including transportation policy, growth policy, and state legislation.
- The County should strengthen relationships with governmental jurisdictions and community partners within the County to achieve mutual goals.

## Service

- The County should protect its investments in capital by making the maintenance of existing infrastructure a priority.
- The County should support reinvestment in long-established portions of Johnson County.
- The BOCC should consider the benefits and impacts of its decisions on all population groups within the county.
- The primary goal of Johnson County government should be to offer quality services in the most efficient and cost effective way.

## Innovation

- The County should be a leader in use of technology and innovation in the delivery of services.
- Johnson County government should analyze and assume responsible risk in implementing new and innovative ideas or ways of doing things

## Engagement

- The public should be engaged in establishing priorities within the community and should understand how that information is used.
- The public perception should be that Johnson County government is fair; decision making is transparent and public input is valued.

# Strategic Priorities

## Strategic Priority No. 1

Support strategic approaches to improving the lives of vulnerable populations by addressing emerging poverty and crime and through job creation. / Develop and implement a data-driven decision-making process and systems, in particular for public safety and health & human services.

According to the United Community Services of Johnson County (UCS), in 2009, 38,000 Johnson County residents had income below the federal poverty level, which is about \$18,000 for a family of three. This number was second only to Jackson County in the six-county Kansas City area of people living below the poverty threshold. Further, Johnson County's youngest residents are its poorest. Half of Johnson County's poor are under age 25. Children and youth under age 18 had a poverty rate of 10.1% in 2009, double the 2008 rate. 13,750 children, or 1 in 10, lived in poverty. Young adults ages 18-24 had a 13.0% poverty rate.

It is further recognized that poverty, along with aging infrastructure and housing stock, can be accompanied by higher crime rates. It is important to continue in current efforts to address crime based on data driven policies and proven best practices that include employment along with efforts to assist in strengthening families and restoring communities.

Understanding that the long-term prosperity of Johnson County is dependent on reversing this trend and to enhance the lives of children, those with disabilities and senior citizens, the E-team suggested this should be the top priority for the County. The BOCC concurred, emphasizing the need to foster job creation, provide quality education, and work with other jurisdictions and organizations to build strong neighborhoods and communities. It cautioned, however, that addressing such significant, complicated issues would not be a goal that could be achieved over 12 or 18 months. Rather, it would be something achieved through concerted, coordinated efforts over the long term.

While Johnson County's poverty rate, 7.1%, was lower than many neighboring counties, its 150% increase in number of poor between 2000 and 2009 far exceeded the other five counties in the Kansas City area.

## Strategic Priority No. 2

Evaluate the sewer financing structure to determine if the cost to provide services in certain locations exceeds the revenue generated by associated growth. Explore other service delivery models or financing strategies to balance return on investment.

The Johnson County Planning Department website says, “The Johnson County Rural Comprehensive Plan establishes goals, policies, and recommendations for development in the rural, unincorporated area of the county.” It goes on to say that providing public services such as sewer and water to sparsely populated areas is costly to taxpayers, and allowing development to occur in rural areas where utilities are unavailable can pose potential health and environmental risks.

The BOCC has reviewed its policies and practices associated with the extension of sewers within unincorporated Johnson County but has not altered them. To date, the BOCC has directed that when a development application is received necessitating the extension of utilities, staff provide an analysis of the direct costs to the County associated with the development.

The BOCC expressed a need to identify a comprehensive approach to this issue, considering annexation, watershed planning, the way in which the County processes its waste and the direct and indirect financial impacts.

# Strategic Priorities cont.

## Strategic Priority No. 3

Continue developing a high performing organization.

About two years ago, the Johnson County organization renewed its journey to high performance. The goal of these efforts is to re-instill a sense of common purpose; foster constant improvement throughout the organization; and tap into employee talent and innovation, recognizing there are leaders at all levels.

Since that time, all senior executives have attended the University of Virginia Senior Leadership Institute or its companion program LEAD. The E-team is meeting twice monthly and has developed an organizational leadership philosophy and a vision. At the same time, the organization has developed its own version of the UVA programs, with more than 400 employees having completed the one-week training.

These efforts have resulted in:

- Better communication among departments
- A stronger sense of common purpose
- New-found energy with employees
- An ability to better address issues related to the recession such as budget and personnel reductions
- Improved employee engagement survey and citizen survey results

The BOCC's intent is that these internal efforts will continue, recognizing the significant positive effect they will have on quality service delivery.

### Athenian Oath:

"We will strive unceasingly to quicken the public's sense of civic duty. Thus, in all these ways, we will transmit this City not only, not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us."

## Strategic Priority No. 4

Finalize improvement strategies for the Johnson County Courthouse.

In 2013, to alleviate crowding in the Johnson County Courthouse, the Tenth Judicial District's Offices of Court Trustee and Court Services along with administration personnel and the Civil Division of the Johnson County Sheriff's Office moved to a renovated facility at 588 E. Santa Fe Street. This was part of a Courthouse Interim Project, which renovated the fourth floor and first floor space being vacated by the District Court Trustee's Office and Sheriff's Office for use by the District Attorney's Office, District Courts, and other departments. The project also included renovation of the sixth floor for additional courtrooms.

The Courthouse currently has nine floors and 234,931 square feet of space. It was built in four phases, starting in 1951 when the court system had three judges and ending in 1972 when the courts had expanded to eight judges.

Studies of the Courthouse space have concluded that the facility is "inadequate and fails to meet even the current space requirements of the Johnson County Courts." However, there are numerous options to be considered in addressing the needs of the Courthouse and, to date, there has not been consensus around a preferred option. The BOCC determined that a subcommittee comprising Chairman Ed Eilert, Commissioner Michael Ashcraft and Commissioner Steve Klika should consider the available strategies and recommend a course of action to be considered by the entire Commission.

# Strategic Priorities cont.

## Strategic Priority No. 5

Provide and support planning for and construction that supports multi-modal transportation to provide alternatives for transporting people.

The Kansas City metropolitan area has more lane miles per capita than most other areas of similar size. A multitude of jurisdictions is responsible for the maintenance and improvements to the system. Johnson County is responsible for the roadways in unincorporated areas of the County, but it also operates a transit system and provides bike and pedestrian trails.

Johnson County Transit (JCT) has been providing public transportation services to much of Johnson County, downtown Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas since 1982.

- The JO operates weekday commuter services with most routes running during peak morning and afternoon times.
- The JO - Special Edition provides curb-to-curb service for disabled, elderly and low income residents of Johnson County.
- SWIFT - “Sheltered Workshop Industrial Fixed Transportation” service provides home to work-site commute trips for Johnson County Developmental Supports clients.

At the same time, Johnson County and its cities have benefited from a more than \$10 million federal grant for transit improvements along Shawnee Mission Parkway and Metcalf Avenue.

In addition, the Johnson County Parks and Recreation District provides a system of bike and pedestrian paths as do other cities in the Kansas City metropolitan area, with a hope to eventually connect the entire system.

Understanding that a strong multi-modal transportation system is critical to a vibrant community and economy, the BOCC wants to work in partnership with area jurisdictions to foster improvements to the system.

# Strategic Priorities cont.

## Strategic Priority No. 6

Continue Core 4 and initiate discussion and coordination with urban counties.

Over the last year or so, Johnson County senior leadership has joined with their colleagues from Jackson County, Missouri, the City of Kansas City, Missouri, and the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas. The purpose of these conversations is to identify areas of common interest in which increased efficiencies, effective and coordination can be found in service delivery. While such efforts might ultimately be obvious to the public, it is also possible that the efforts will initially focus on internal operations, such as back-office functions or cloud computing. Such efforts will ultimately result in efficiencies that enhance service delivery, but might not be transparent to the public.

At the same time, it is recognized that Johnson County shares common interests with other urban counties in Kansas: Douglas, Shawnee, Sedgwick counties and the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas. Their delivery of social services and the increasing demand for them as well as changes in the way those services are financed and provided form a common interest in working together on behalf of these constituencies.

Recognizing that county and city jurisdictions must work together to achieve common goals, the BOCC supports organizational efforts to coordinate efforts within the Kansas City metropolitan area as well as within the State of Kansas.

## Other Possible Priorities

The commission also acknowledged that public education, library and park systems are vital to the continued prosperity of Johnson County. However, because school district funding is an issue currently being considered by the Kansas Legislature and the library and park systems are undergoing their own strategic planning initiatives, the BOCC directed that staff keep it up-to-date regarding those efforts. The BOCC will revisit the issues at the conclusion of each process.