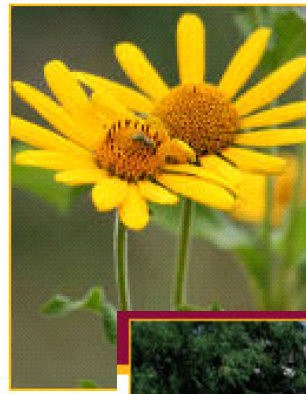


The
ECO² PLAN:
**The Exponential Benefits of Economic
Development and Ecological Preservation**



The Development of a long-term plan for the advancement of industrial/business parks and open space preservation is a tribute to the people of Douglas County who sought consensus on the importance of economic development and open space and who found strength in divergent views. It is testimony to what is possible when we forge a common vision grounded in shared caring and enriched by respect and understanding of differences.

Executive Summary

**ECO² Plan
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2007**

I. Introduction

The completion of a long-term plan for the industrial/business park development and open space preservation essential to Douglas County's sustainable economic vitality and quality of life is the culmination of a pioneering effort initiated in 2000. The Lawrence Chamber of Commerce convened a committee to develop consensus on future economic development and open space land requirements in Douglas County. The name ECO² was selected by the committee to represent the exponential benefits to the community of investing in both economic development and preservation. The membership included diverse citizens representing business development interests, open space advocacy and local governmental concerns. Many considered the achievement of consensus between the groups challenging.

In December 2002, however, the ECO² Committee unanimously recommended that the Douglas County Commission establish an official ECO² Commission to develop more detailed plans for proceeding concurrently with industrial/business park development and open space development and create the public support necessary for their realization. The ECO² Committee expressed its desire that the spirit of cooperation and understanding achieved between economic development and open space proponents carry forward. Shortly thereafter, in February 2003, the Douglas County and City of Lawrence Commissions officially established an eight-member ECO² Commission for the "dual purpose of advancing economic development and ecological stewardship opportunities in the form of preservation and management of, and access to, open space in Douglas County."

The joint resolution establishing the ECO² Commission outlined the scope of the Commission's responsibilities and authority, as well as the guiding principles for the discharge of its duties. This joint resolution directed the ECO² Commission to report to and advise the County and City Commissions on matters relating to its "dual goals of preservation, access and management of open space; and, acquisition of land, facilities, and other supports to expand economic development of Douglas County, including developing incentives and financing of both purposes." The ECO² Commission was established to be advisory only, its actions subject to the approval of the County and City Commissions. The joint resolution instructed the ECO² Commission to advise the County and City in developing general policies and priorities regarding economic development and ecological stewardship opportunities while developing its own rules and policies for procedures consistent with its established powers.

The joint resolution directed the ECO² Commission to be guided by the following:

- The dual goals of open space preservation and economic development are inextricably linked and would be pursued concurrently without favoring one over the other.

- Landowner participation in the industrial/business park development and open space preservation program would be voluntary. The Commission would not recommend the involuntary taking of private property and no funds generated through ECO² would be used for condemnation of property.
- Partnerships with developers, land trusts, and other parties positioned to advance the dual goals of open space preservation and economic development would be emphasized to maximally leverage available funds.

The ECO² Commission has focused primarily on:

- The completion of a long-term plan for the identification, evaluation, and selection of land for the development of industrial/business parks and open space preservation
- A process for implementing the plan
- The consensus building necessary for its success

The completed plan reflects hundreds of hours of volunteer assistance from numerous citizens with diverse expertise and interests, and the continuation of a collaborative process between open space and economic development proponents initiated six years ago.

The ECO² Commission convened work groups to complete the components of the plan. The work groups included diverse representation from the citizens of Douglas County and were pivotal in the consensus building required to complete the plan. ECO² Commissioners provided leadership for the work groups and presented each work group's draft of a plan component to the ECO² Commission for final approval and incorporation into the completed plan.

The completed plan includes:

- A process for identifying and evaluating land for prospective industrial/business parks
- A process for identifying and evaluating land for open space preservation
- A process for the implementation of these programs
- A process for informing the Douglas County public
- A review of options to consider for funding the long-term plan
- Proposed bylaws for the internal organization and operation of the ECO² Commission

This plan summary highlights the components of the plan and the activities of the ECO² Commission. Details are available in the complete plan text and appendices.

II. ECO² Industrial/Business Park Program

The industrial/business work group was charged with establishing a process for the identification and evaluation of land for the development of industrial/business parks essential to the continued economic vitality of Douglas County. After reviewing extensive data, including an inventory of currently available sites and the specifications for sites sought by prospective industries over the past two years, the work group agreed on a three-step process for identifying and evaluating land for prospective industrial/business parks.

First, a prospective industrial/business park site must meet four required selection factors to be considered.

1. The landowner must have a voluntary interest in participation.
2. A site must have transportation access to an interstate, U.S. or state highway, or railway.
3. A site must be outside the 100-year floodplain and include more than 100 acres.
4. A site must have an average slope of usable acres less than 8 percent as determined, in preferred order, by a physical survey or topographic maps.

Second, a prospective industrial/business site meeting the required factors will be evaluated on six additional preferred factors, each of which is rated from 1 to 5 with 5 being highest.

1. **Transportation** via state, U.S. or interstate highways, or railway, which is essential for the movement of products to and from an industrial/business park, is preferably within three miles of a proposed site to promote efficient movement of employees and goods, protect public safety, and create less congestion on local roads and streets. Point values are assigned according to proximity and type of transportation access desired based on current supply-and-demand conditions.
2. **Total acreage** of 100 acres or more allows for clustering business facilities and cost-sharing for infrastructure and off-site improvements. Larger acreage is preferred.
3. **Topographic slope** that maximizes site usability and minimizes preparation costs is ideally between 3-4 percent. The assigned points are based on the average slope of the entire site.
4. **Extraordinary costs**, those well over the normal costs for providing municipal services or other infrastructure, would be evaluated as well as whether other parties will be assuming part of the infrastructure costs. A site's ranking would be decreased to reflect increased costs.
5. **Existing local or regional land use plans**--including Horizon 2020, the Comprehensive Plan, current and projected Urban Growth Areas Plans, area or nodal plans, and future infrastructure, transportation and area development plans--often include land set aside for business use by county and/or city planning departments. These sites are preferred and are given point values according to the time frame in which development is projected to occur in current or future plans.
6. **The number of owners** of parcels for a proposed site affects the ease or difficulty in acquiring the number of parcels necessary to form an area large enough to meet the 100-300 acre size required for a industrial/business site. Sites involving fewer land owners would be preferred.

The point values assigned to the preferred factors would be reviewed periodically and adjusted appropriately to address changes in transportation planning, infrastructure development, topography, and other considerations important to the appropriate placement and successful marketing of industrial/business parks.

Third, since some factors, such as transportation access, are far more essential to appropriately evaluating a prospective industrial/business park site, the point values for each of the preferred factors are weighted to reflect the relative importance of that factor in making a final determination of qualifying sites. The relative importance for each preferred selection factor was established as follows:

1. Transportation proximity	25 percent
2. Total acreage	17 percent
3. Average slope	17 percent
4. Extraordinary costs	17 percent
5. Existing plans	17 percent
6. Number of owners	7 percent

The industrial/business work group tested the effectiveness of the model in selecting and evaluating several hypothetical business/industrial park developments proposals in Douglas County. The model was successful in prioritizing sites. The model was used only to test its ability to discriminate between sites.

The ECO² Commission will periodically review the required and preferred factors and their weightings to evaluate their effectiveness in identifying evaluating and prioritizing prospective sites for the appropriate development of industrial/business park development.

III. ECO² Open Space Preservation Program

The open space work group was charged with establishing a process for identification, evaluation, and preservation of open space lands essential to enhancing quality of life, maintaining a sense of place, history, and community, and supporting the health and economic well-being of all Douglas County residents. The work group reviewed extensive data, including maps, and established working definitions for open space, open lands, and categories of open lands eligible for inclusion in the Open Space Preservation Program prior to establishing a four-step process for identifying and evaluating a site's preservation value.

The work group defined "open space" as those undeveloped parts of Douglas County. The work group defined "open lands" as open space desirable for preservation in its natural state for ecological, historical, or recreational purposes, or in its cultivated state to preserve agricultural or green-belt areas near development.

The work group identified six categories of open lands as eligible for inclusion in the Open Space Preservation Program.

1. **Trails**, lands that are suited for recreational hiking, biking, and walking trails (forms of passive recreation) and are along naturally occurring river and forested

corridors; contiguous to existing or planned trails, connectors, or otherwise desirable for passive recreation, use will be eligible.

2. **Natural resources areas** are lands that have ecological significance.

a. **Native prairie sites**, unplowed remnants of the native landscape that historically occupied about 93 percent of Douglas County, are historically and biologically significant. Parcels of at least five acres, with particular consideration given to sites with documented populations of Mead's Milkweed or the Western Prairie Fringed Orchid, would be eligible.

b. **Mature forests** are historically and biologically significant and would be eligible in parcels of at least ten acres in order that they are of sufficient size to support animal species.

c. **Wetlands**, defined by special soils and usual occurrence in flood plains or other low features in the landscape, would be eligible in parcels of at least one acre because even small areas can provide important habitat for a variety of waterfowl and shorebirds.

d. **Riparian areas**, lands adjacent to streams, rivers, and lakes of at least 100 feet in width, will be eligible in parcels of at least one acre because even very small areas can provide important habitat for a variety of wildlife.

e. **Habitat for protected species**, lands which are habitat for any listed species on a state or federal protection list, or where such species may occur, will be eligible in any size parcels because even small parcels may play an important role in the success of the species in question.

3. **Agricultural lands**, which have an important role in Douglas County's cultural history and economy, defined as prime agricultural lands by the United States Department of Agriculture, or lands in the flood plain, are eligible in parcels of at least ten acres.

4. **Scenic lands** are those providing beautiful views of the natural landscape and are eligible in parcels of at least ten acres.

5. **Historic sites** listed on local, state, or national registers of historic places or unlisted with significant attributes, in parcels of at least one acre will be considered because even small sites may offer important historic features.

6. **Lands promoting integration** between significant parcels, such as trails, will be considered eligible in any size.

A parcel of land will be evaluated in a three-step process for inclusion in the Open space Preservation Program provided the level of compensation requested by the landowner is reasonable.

First, the preservation proposal will be assessed for consistency with the ECO² vision and with relevant comprehensive and park plans of Douglas County communities.

Second, a proposed site must meet four required selection factors:

1. The landowner must have a voluntary interest in participation and a strong commitment to conservation.
2. The land can be acquired through purchase or a conservation easement with reasonable effort and cost relative to its value.
3. The land must be eligible under at least one of the open-lands categories.
4. The proposed conservation site must promote the overall goals and objectives of the Open Space Preservation Program.

Third, a site meeting the required selection factors will be evaluated on ten additional preferred selection factors to rank the relative priority of the proposal. Each preferred selection factor is rated 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest rating.

1. Water quality protection
2. Multiple conservation values
3. Flood plain
4. Proximate to intact natural areas and protected lands
5. High risk of urban development
6. High risk of rural development
7. Accessibility to public
8. Proposal includes matching funds, partner funding, bargain sale, or donation
9. Size of tract
10. High quality natural area

The point values of preferred selection factors are weighted equally, reflecting the relative importance of each factor in establishing the conservation value of a particular site. The point values assigned to preferred selection factors will be reviewed periodically by the ECO² Commission and adjusted appropriately to address changing circumstances and priorities relevant to preservation.

The open space work group tested the model's effectiveness in evaluating and prioritizing several hypothetical open space conservation proposals that might be presented for consideration. The model was tested to determine its efficacy in distinguishing and prioritizing sites based on the preferred factors and the formula of assigning weights to those factors regarded as appropriate to current circumstances. The work group concluded the model was effective in its ability to establish priorities for open lands proposed for preservation.

The ECO² Commission will periodically review the required and preferred factors and their weightings to evaluate their effectiveness in identifying, evaluating and prioritizing prospective sites for appropriate preservation of open space.

IV. ECO² Implementation Process

The implementation work group developed a uniform process for implementing a proposal for advancement of a industrial/business park or open space preservation. The work group developed a process based on the assumption that the proposals originated with the ECO² Commission, or a similar entity, with the assumption that a similar process with appropriate adjustments could be used for privately initiated projects.

The work group designed a multi-step implementation process, portrayed in graphic form in the ECO² Plan. A voluntary landowner is pivotal to the implementation process. The implementation process also considers the appropriate roles of the ECO² Commission, the Douglas County Commission, City of Lawrence Commissions, the governing bodies of other participating municipalities, and the citizens of Douglas County in the decision making procedures.

The process provides for the initiation of proposals through open space and industrial/business park committees comprised of a broad representation of stakeholders who identify projects for consideration. Provisions are made for the early identification of the compatibility of business and open space proposals.

The final authority over proposals will be decided by the Douglas County Commission and other appropriate governing bodies after substantial opportunity for public input.

The concept of net equity in the investment of public funds was adopted as a funding strategy that adheres to the directive that the ECO² Commission pursues the dual goals of industrial/business park advancement and open space preservation equally without favoring one over the other. Net equity assures that the net investment of public funds is equal for industrial/business parks and open space preservation. An industrial/business park requires a substantial up-front investment, an estimated 75 percent of which is recovered over time as the park is inhabited. The net equity concept provides that for every net public dollar invested in industrial/business park development, an equal investment of public funds would be made in open space preservation. This is fundamental to assuring equity in funding and the fulfillment of the dual goals of advancing industrial/ business park development and open space preservation.

V. ECO² Public Education and Outreach Program

The public education and outreach work group was charged with the development of a process for insuring that the Douglas County public is informed about the ECO² plan and the benefits of the plan for the future success of the people and communities of Douglas County. After reviewing other public education and outreach models and plans, the work group established a multimedia and multiphase process for continuing the outreach and education efforts in place since the inception of the original ECO² Committee in 2000.

During the first phase, a web page, public formation meetings, a brochure, and a speaker's bureau were used to acquaint the public with the draft of the ECO² plan. During phase two, there will be attention to outreach to all of the municipalities of Douglas County and the extension of formal invitations for their official participation in the ECO² plan. Finally, the Douglas County Commission and the City of Lawrence will conduct public hearings in conjunction with their consideration of adoption of the plan. Other municipalities that chose to participate will do likewise.

Recognizing that the successful implementation of the ECO² plan relies on sustaining a strong base of public understanding and support of the benefits of the dual goals of economic development and ecological stewardship, a yearly review of the plan will be conducted. An update of the plan will minimally be conducted at five-year intervals with opportunity for public input. Online availability of the plan with examples of successful ECO² projects will be ongoing.

VI. Funding Options

The funding work group identified funding options that could be employed to fund economic development and open space preservation ECO² projects that met with the approval of the appropriate governing bodies. The work group identified a list of options after consultation with city and county staff and a review of funding strategies used nationwide for publicly funded open space projects.

1. General Obligation Bonds
2. Grants/Gifts
3. Hotel Tax
4. Industrial Revenue Bonds
5. Mortgage Registration Tax
6. Partnerships
7. Real Estate Property Tax
8. Sales Tax
9. Special Assessment Benefit Districts
10. Tax Increment Financing

The funding work group reviewed multiple options for funding approved ECO² projects based on the assumption that the multiple funding sources would be required to successfully meet the dual goals of the economic development and open space preservation program.

VII. ECO² Bylaws

The bylaws work group developed the rules for the internal organization and operation of the ECO² Commission as directed by the joint resolutions. The proposed bylaws are sensitive to the advisory role of the ECO² Commission as it fulfills its dual goals of preserving open space and expanding economic development in Douglas County. They are also sensitive to the ECO² Commission's responsibility for achieving its goals in collaboration with willing landowners. They emphasize partnerships with other parties positioned to advance the dual goals of economic development and open space preservation without favoring one goal over the other. Finally, the bylaws provide for a continuation of an eight-member commission appointed jointly by county and other participating municipalities for four-year terms for a maximum of two terms. The commissioners shall include three members representing economic development interests, three members representing open space interests, and two members representing agricultural interests.

VIII. Conclusion

The completion of a long-term plan for the advancement of industrial/business parks and open space preservation is a tribute to the people of Douglas County who sought consensus on the equal importance of economic development and ecological stewardship and who found strength in divergent views. It is testimony to what is possible when we forge a common vision grounded in shared caring and enriched by respect and understanding of differences.

The ECO² Commission is pleased to present this Long Term Plan for Economic Development and Ecological Stewardship to the people of Douglas County. We look forward to working together to make it a reality with our existent and expanding partnerships.