



Flint Hills
Regional Growth Plan

Executive Summary

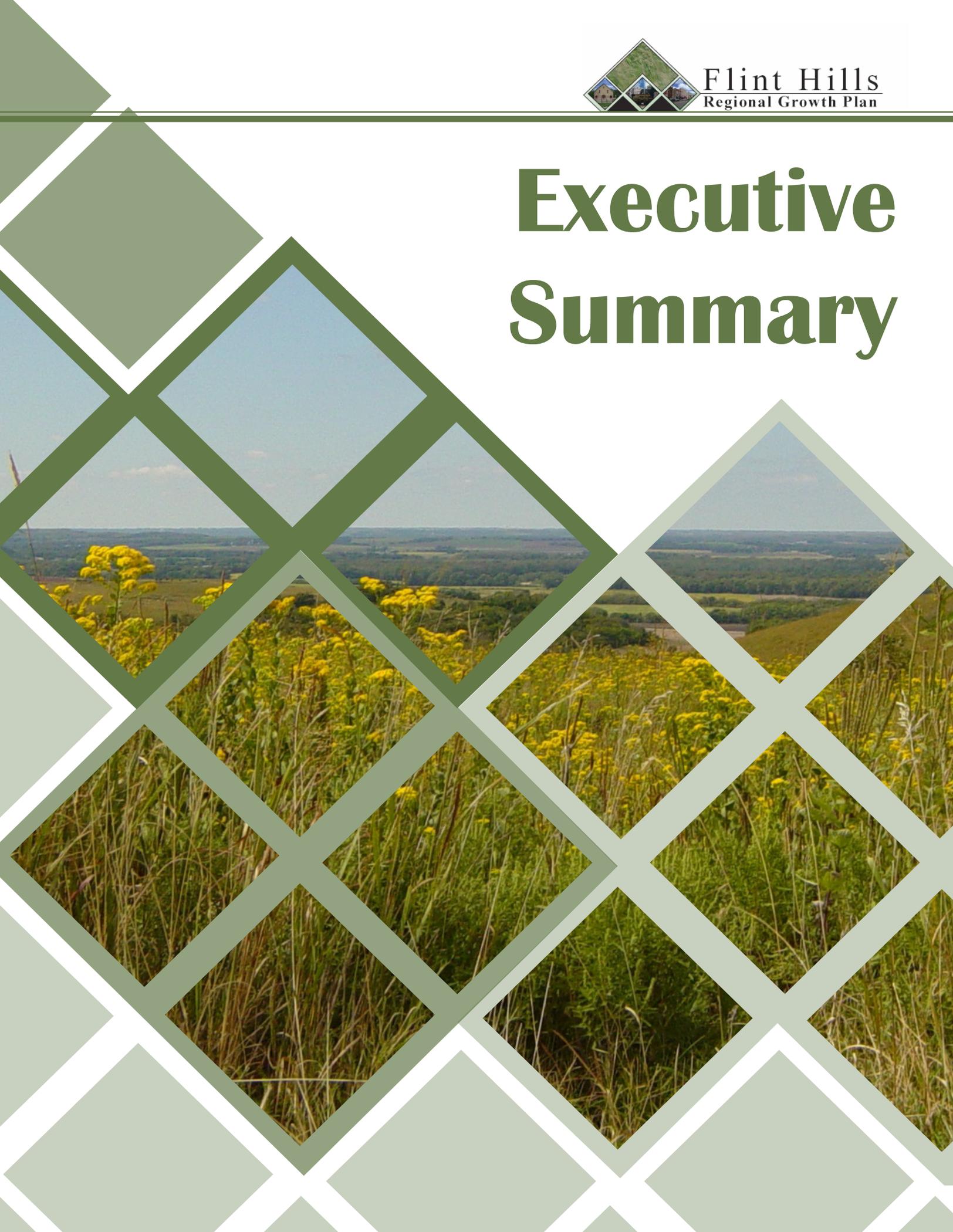




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Introduction

The Flint Hills region is a rare and beautiful landscape, home to the nation's last expanse of tallgrass prairie and blessed with distinct communities, rich history, productive farming and grazing lands, abundant natural resources, strong educational institutions, and one of America's premier military installations in Fort Riley. Typical of areas with a dominant economic engine, the Flint Hills has long expanded and contracted in relation to activity on the post. Over the previous decade, the region more closely paralleled the modest growth trends of America's rural areas.

The convergence of several Department of Defense initiatives has accelerated the region's historic rate of growth. Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), Army Modular Force, the Global War on Terrorism, and Global Defense Posture Realignment are rapidly transforming the military missions of installations around the country, increasing the end strength of the U.S. Army and building more nimble units of action in the form of brigades. As a result of these activities, Fort Riley will gain approximately 9,700 active military personnel and nearly 2,000 new civilian employees by 2012.

Preparation for this growth on the installation and in the surrounding areas has been an ongoing process beginning in December of 2005 with a Tri-County Congress retreat involving Geary, Riley, and Pottawatomie Counties. Emphasizing a regional approach, stakeholders then formed the Flint Hills Regional Task Force. The Task Force successfully applied for grants from the Department of Labor and the Department of Defense to conduct advanced



planning for the affected local communities around Fort Riley.

The first of these studies funded by the Department of Labor sought to quantify the range of mission-related growth in both primary (Geary, Riley, and Pottawatomie Counties) and secondary (Clay, Morris, Wabaunsee, Dickinson Counties) study areas. The October 2006 report entitled Strategic Action Plan and Growth Impact Assessment for the Flint Hills Region identified an "Expected Growth Scenario" with a direct population increase of 11,700 people (military personnel and civilian workers) and an indirect gain (i.e. military spouses and economic migrants) of 17,000 residents by 2012. Modeling conducted as part of the Strategic Action Plan estimated that spin-off economic activity would create an additional 6,940 jobs, increasing the total regional employment base by 18,640 jobs. The study also assessed community growth impacts in such key sectors as education, housing, social services, infrastructure, and public safety. Concurrent with these efforts, various stakeholders meet regularly to coordinate growth strategies for the region's schools and child care programs.



To continue the momentum of the Strategic Action Plan, the Flint Hills region secured a Planning Assistance Management Grant from the Office of Economic Adjustment, Department of Defense to conduct the Flint Hills Regional Growth Plan (FHRGP).

Purpose of the Flint Hills Regional Growth Plan

The purpose of the FHRGP is to enable local communities and service providers to coordinate the foundational steps necessary to absorb significant population and economic growth over the next five years. To inform decision-making, the plan assesses current conditions, determines the future needs of an increased population, identifies short term and long term priorities, and establishes a clear set of action steps for regional stakeholders. The plan delves more fully into those areas identified by the Strategic Action Plan as having the most severe service shortfalls, such as child care and health care, and revisits troop movements into the region to validate previous planning assumptions.

The FHRGP assumes that regional population and economic growth will occur as estimated in the Strategic Action Plan, but adds spatial and qualitative components to the analysis. The plan seeks to address such questions as:

1. *Where is the future growth going?*
2. *Do the communities like where future development is headed and do they have the tools to shape more desirable growth patterns?*
3. *What physical improvements or organizational actions are necessary to maintain desired levels of service?*
4. *What constitutes quality of life in the Flint Hills and how can growth be accommodated without diminishing community identity?*

The FHRGP focuses on growth in the Primary Study Area as defined in the Strategic Action Plan (Geary, Riley and Pottawatomie Counties), but also includes some analysis on growth related issues in Dickinson, Clay, Morris, and Wabaunsee Counties.

Planning Process

The planning team worked closely with three advisory bodies throughout the study process:

- The Policy Committee consisting of local elected officials and senior post leadership
- The Steering Committee consisting of senior administrative officials
- The Technical Management Team consisting of technical professionals and administrative staff
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Various members of the planning team met individually with local officials and service providers to assess needs and to determine priorities. Recognizing that adequate growth preparations require coordinated action across public, private, and non-profit sectors, the team held a series of work sessions with invited representatives from the resource areas examined. Two regional luncheons were held to gather additional input about plan recommendations and to discuss regional coordination activities.

The planning team conducted two rounds of public meetings to gather feedback from the communities and to refine recommendations. The first round of public meetings were held in three different locations (Manhattan, Junction City and Wamego) and included interactive exercises to prioritize actions. Public meeting summaries can be found in the appendices of this report. Websites, press releases and newsletter have also assisted in the public involvement process.

Findings from the dozens of meetings and work sessions with stakeholders from around the region form the basis of the analyses and recommendations in this report.

How to Use this Report

The FHRGP divides findings and recommendations into 12 separate sections representing major resource areas:

1. Land Use and Planning
2. Housing
3. Education
4. Health Care and Mental Health Care
5. Social Services and Child Care
6. Workforce
7. Transportation and Transit
8. Utilities and Infrastructure
9. Public Safety
10. Regional Collaboration
11. Quality of Life
12. Fiscal

Given the volume of findings generated for each section, the report organizes material into three tiers with increasing levels of detail:

Report Organization:

- *The Executive Summary features an overview of study results, including overall recommendations for all resource areas.*
- *The Section Summary at the beginning of each individual section contains more detail and information on the resource area examined, including community specific recommendations.*
- *The Section directly following each Section Summary provides the additional technical information used to develop recommendations, including supporting tables, graphics, and maps.*
- *The Supplemental Materials CD contains samples, model ordinances, and relevant plans.*
- *The Other Relevant Information section includes the list of acronyms used in the document, as well as the summary of the public survey.*
- *The Map Book contains all maps in 11" by 17" format.*

Executive Summary

Land Use

Findings

Overall, local communities lack the tools to shape desirable growth patterns throughout the region. The most significant risks to effective planning and the efficient use of land in the region are:

Lack of Specific Forecasting Data in Plans

Most of the region's community plans do not incorporate population and employment projections that reflect the latest military induced growth. It is critical that communities begin to track household growth on a small area basis.

Ongoing Risk of Military Encroachment

The communities participating in the 2005 Joint Land Use Study to promote land use compatibility around Fort Riley have not formally incorporated recommended encroachment reduction measures, such as real estate disclosure and specialized overlay districts, into community plans and zoning ordinances.

Corridors Vulnerable to Strip Development

As indicated in the results of the Land Use Section, much of the region's residential and commercial growth will continue to spread along its major arterial corridors, particularly US-24; K-99; K-177; K- 18; K-113; US-24/Marlatt Avenue; and US-77.

Need for Form Based and District Planning

Much of the planning in the region continues to address land use issues through generically defined zoning districts. To protect the distinct and localized identities of the region, communities should evolve toward form based planning and zoning that seeks to control the scale, appearance, and overall compatibility of new development.

Increase in Edge Residential Areas

The market will naturally seek out undeveloped land as more cost-effective development sites that can satisfy emerging housing demand. The inherent risk of such growth on the periphery of urban cores is that large concentrations of housing can strain existing infrastructure, increase the public cost of utility service delivery, and create unbalanced residential enclaves lacking convenient access to retail, community facilities, and other amenities.

Erosion of Rural Character and the Agricultural Base

Sprawling residential development, even at low densities, can disrupt the viewshed, fragment wildlife habitat, stress resource lands, and interfere with farming and ranching operations. This risk of diminished open space is particularly severe in the unincorporated portions of Riley and Pottawatomie Counties. Local governments currently do not have the latest tools in rural land stewardship, exclusive agricultural zoning, and conservation subdivision design to direct growth to more compact and less sensitive development footprints within the counties.

Inadequate Environmental Protection

The region's land use regulations contain some basic environmental protections, but generally lack more advanced best management practices for maintaining natural resource integrity. In particular, restrictions on development in flood prone areas remains weak.

Lack of Building Codes in Counties

Riley and Pottawatomie Counties currently do not require housing to conform to building codes. These codes are essential for establishing acceptable levels of quality and protecting the health, safety, property and general welfare of the community.

Short Term Recommendations

- Sharpen the distinction between urban and rural by preserving the rural landscape and directing development into urban cores
- Increase the use of regional and interlocal service planning to address impacts across jurisdictions
- Adopt land use compatibility measures around Fort Riley and incorporate the recommendations of the Joint Land Use Study with a particular emphasis on noise disclosure and reduced residential densities in high operational impact areas to the north and east of the post
- Continue the emphasis on downtown revitalization
- Adopt corridor based plans that include access management, physical design, utility and site planning to manage the risk of strip commercial growth

Long Term Recommendations

- Enhance plans, zoning, and subdivision regulations to include growth management and context sensitive design
- Adopt a rural land use process, agricultural zoning, and/or conservation-based subdivision codes for rural areas of the counties and in new neighborhoods on the urban fringe
- Greenprint the region by identifying critical open space resources, including productive farming and ranching lands, trails, parks, river corridors, and viewsheds

Housing

Findings

The real estate market within the Flint Hills region is currently experiencing a slowdown as permanent troop assignment to Fort Riley remains uncertain. While sales within the region have not declined, the number of finished products has increased at a higher rate, leaving unsold inventory on the market. The Geary County real estate market, specifically Junction City, has built the majority of its homes for military personnel, while the Riley and

Pottawatomie County markets have targeted units to a more diverse range of homebuyers.

Apartments and other rented properties currently have very low vacancy rates. Rents have remained relatively stable, and most communities recognize that military personnel drive the demand for rental units.

Thus, the market reflects a temporary slowdown, but is still poised to deliver a sufficient amount of affordable, for-sale product once the troops settle into the region.

All developers/builders have requested that more timely and consistent information be made available on troop movements.

Short Term Recommendations

- Develop a regional building permit tracking system
- Create a central location of vacancy and rental rates that is updated on a regular basis, giving local planning officials and builders the ability to gauge rental demand
- Conduct market research on Fort Riley homebuyers to better determine the appropriate mix (rental vs. owner) of housing needed

Long Term Recommendations

- Increase the communication between the building community and Fort Riley through a regional organization
- Conduct more regional planning studies to more closely identify long-term housing impacts

Utilities and Infrastructure

Findings

Based on this analysis, the region can adequately support projected growth and expansion generated by increases in troop levels at Fort Riley with regard to infrastructure. Private utility carriers have expressed no concerns when confronted with the projected population growth in the study area.

Monitoring demands on utility infrastructure systems as regional growth proceeds is a key to maintaining effective planning and resource allocation. Expansion of utility systems should not be a significant detriment to development especially if expansion is implemented with adequate advanced notice of growth requirements.

Of the major municipalities in the area, Junction City appears to have the potential for the highest percentage growth and pressures on its infrastructure systems. The City, through current planning studies, is taking the necessary steps to identify areas of improvements to its water and wastewater systems to support the growth occurring on its west side.

The advanced planning by the Cities of Manhattan and Junction City to upgrade and expand facilities is beneficial in preparing for the upcoming growth. These plans are based on population growth projections that are consistent with the anticipated growth generated by Fort Riley. Manhattan has a planned and disciplined approach to development, which promotes contiguous growth within its defined Urban Service Area Boundary. While Manhattan recognizes that there will be challenges in maintaining current levels and quality of service, staff is confident that the planned growth can be supported.

Areas along the U.S. Highway 24 Corridor face the most infrastructure challenges. Service providers of planned developments along the corridor may have to augment their services by connecting to City of Manhattan or other municipal systems. Improvements to Rural Water District infrastructure may also be required so the corridor can realize its growth potential.

Short Term Recommendations

- Promote contiguous growth and discourage “leapfrog” developments to increase service efficiency by establishing growth boundaries and increasing residential density near built-out areas

- Adhere strictly to growth guidelines and adopt reduced capacity “triggers” for the advanced planning of capital expansions

Long Term Recommendations

- Adopt proper stormwater conveyance design, permitting, and adhere to state guidelines regarding stormwater best management practices (BMPs)

Education

Findings

School districts within the Flint Hills region have anticipated the expansion of Fort Riley for several years. All school districts have experienced the effects of previous post expansions, realignments, and deployments. Most leaders within the local education community have taken adequate steps to prepare their school districts for the expected changes slated for Fort Riley.

The analysis identified six school districts as those most affected by the expansion of Fort Riley:

- Geary County School District (USD 475)
- Manhattan-Ogden School District (USD 383)
- Wamego Public Schools (USD 320)
- Abilene School Districts (USD 435)
- Rock Creek Schools (USD 323)
- Riley County Schools (USD 378)

With the exception of the Geary County School District (USD 475), most educational stakeholders have adopted a conservative approach toward the impacts of Fort Riley expansion, and have therefore avoided overbuilding or overstaffing. The Geary County School District has received the majority of new students from military families, albeit fewer than originally expected. USD 475, which has very close ties to Fort Riley, continues to be actively involved with military families and will likely continue to receive the majority of students from military households.

An estimated 830 new military dependents have been added to the schools within the study area as of the end of the 2006-2007 school year. The largest increases in new students have been seen in USD 475 and the Manhattan-Ogden School District (USD 383). USD 475, which planned for 800 new students, received approximately 400 fewer students than expected, for a total increase in 400 students. USD 383 received approximately 300 new students from military families, which is 100 more than originally anticipated. Riley County Schools (USD 378) received 15 additional military dependents in 2006-2007, although actual enrollment was down due to the graduation of an unusually large senior class. Abilene School District (USD 435) has seen an increase to just over 140 military dependents in 2006-2007, up from just under 100 in 2005-2006.

Three major factors are believed responsible for these enrollment figures, which are lower than expected for the entire region. First, troop deployment and reassignments have been set back by overseas combat operations, reducing the number of military personnel to the Flint Hills community. Second, troops that were assigned to Fort Riley tended to be younger (and therefore contribute fewer children to the local school districts) than originally expected as brigades are going through rebuilding efforts. Third, a slightly higher number of personnel with children have purchased homes with the boundaries of USD 383 than initially estimated.

These factors, however, are expected to be short-term changes to previous forecasts. All school districts are currently creating future enrollment projections and are examining future facility requirements. While all districts will see some long term growth in student populations, the majority of students are expected to be enrolled in USD 475 and USD 383. The new students will likely to be a mix of general population growth from indirect growth from the expansion of Fort Riley and an increase in military dependents.

Short Term Recommendations

- Request capital funding for an additional on-post school for USD 475
- Request operating funds for several education-related programs, such as after-school programs, and the hiring and training of special education and science and math teachers
- Pursue additional legislative efforts to provide short to medium term interim teacher licenses to attract military spouses and fill teaching positions

Long Term Recommendations

- Seek state and federal funding for additional education programs, such as teacher licensing at Kansas State University, Southwestern College, and Barton County Community College to increase the number of programs available to military spouses. Additional programs may include efforts to recruit retiring military personnel as well
- Seek funding for several staff and programs geared towards military children in USD 475, including before and after-school programs, child care programs, and military liaison positions
- Incorporate Fort Riley into all planning efforts by local school districts and maintain at least bi-annual coordination with military officials on troop assignments and deployments

Transportation and Transit

Findings

Growth relative to the military expansion at Fort Riley is straining transportation infrastructure. Residential development in both Junction City and Manhattan has created the need for intersection improvements along US-77 in Junction City, and Tuttle Creek Boulevard (US-24) and Scenic Drive in Manhattan. That will likely remain the theme for many years - improving existing intersections and enhancing intersections at the time new streets and/or driveways are connected. Several corridors are being studied or will soon start studies that should result in carefully planned access and

the identification of long-term configurations and near-term improvement needs.

The number of needed and desired improvements will remain significant. Fortunately, the region has basic highway configurations that can meet the challenges presented by the population surge; however many intersections will still need improvements to allow for safe and efficient flow along corridors. The need for corridor improvements will be better defined as ongoing studies are completed. In addition to the conversion of K-18 to a freeway between Ogden and Manhattan, US-77 and K-18 in Junction City may be slated for widening. Funding for the desired improvements will remain a challenge.

The Flint Hills area has 22 providers of various forms of public transit. Virtually all of the services are some form of “demand response” for target populations such as elderly and persons with disabilities who make transportation arrangements when travel is needed.

Typically, such providers have limited capacity for “general public” riders, just over half of these providers also serve the general public. A proposed transit concept for the Flint Hills region includes three basic services focused on Junction City, Manhattan and Wamego:

- Local bus
- Commuter express
- Rural demand response

Short Term Recommendations

- Improve intersections for safe and efficient access to the public street system and to optimize corridor traffic flow
- Continue corridor planning and implement access management policies and practices
- Implement traffic signal coordination and transportation demand management

Long Term Recommendations

- Explore transit concept that includes local bus, commuter bus and rural demand response

Public Safety

Findings

From the public safety perspective, the most intensive impacts are in those areas directly adjacent to the post, specifically the unincorporated areas of Geary County, Junction City, and the City of Grandview Plaza. These impacts extend concentrically into Riley County, the City of Manhattan, and areas of Pottawatomie County adjacent to Manhattan. This growth will continue to have substantial impacts on the ability of the counties and municipalities to deliver and sustain public safety services.

In most cases, the community expects public safety service levels to remain high despite growth. These needs can be met through effective mitigation funding approaches.

Short Term Recommendations

- Maintain current levels of service in relation to growth and develop triggers for staffing increases and capital expansion
- Equitably address an impending funding crisis in public safety service delivery by linking mitigation levels to measurable impacts

Long Term Recommendations

- Explore increased state funding for the expansion of comprehensive community corrections programs with direct supervision and electronic monitoring
- Explore a Regional Communications Center and datasharing initiative to optimize service delivery

Health Care and Mental Health Care

Findings

Currently the health care infrastructure of the region satisfies existing needs, yet continued growth will strain current

health care infrastructure, services, and personnel over the next five to six years.

While the Army seeks to meet the health care needs of their soldiers through inpatient units and outpatient centers, the private sector must continue to provide care to military personnel; however, the historical volume information and service patterns required to quantify this demand remain classified by military leaders.

The overall utilization rate for care in the Flint Hills will decrease as the population becomes younger. Nonetheless, the analysis projects a total deficit of physicians, which can restrict the community's access to care. Forecasts indicate that the most severe shortages will occur in those highly specialized service lines that are the most difficult positions for hospitals to fill (e.g. obstetrics, cardiology, and pediatrics). There will be a regional need to recruit physicians to the Flint Hills that will require leaders to rethink their current strategies and work to improve coordination through a regional health organization.

Short Term Recommendations

- Establish an active and functional regional health entity that would be comprised of health care leaders from all of the major health organizations in the study area that would serve as a data clearinghouse, coordinate recruitment strategies and conduct policy advocacy
- Consider the addition of inpatient psychiatric units
- Increase outreach efforts to educate young adults about sexually transmitted diseases
- Examine range of covered services and their payment rates by TRI-CARE military insurance to determine how it affects access to services
- Increase recruiting efforts to address the future physician gap of 50 doctors with a focus on obstetricians, cardiologists and pediatricians
- Increase recruiting and offer financial compensation packages to attract nurses educated in other areas of Kansas, to address the current estimated nursing shortage of 11 percent

- Continue with Mercy Regional Health Center's current plans to add inpatient capacity
- Explore ways to finance the additional construction of inpatient beds at Geary Community Hospital
- Monitor wait times for outpatient non-emergency care
- Begin identifying facility growth opportunities that would allow for expanded services at Pawnee Mental Health

Long Term Recommendations

- Explore other educational programs to train health professionals, including dentists and dental assistants, radiology technicians, physician assistants, health information technicians, and/or medical assistants
- Explore the opportunity to offer physician assistant and nurse care through area retailers as they establish in-store clinics
- Continue to build a regional health information network

Social Services and Child Care

Findings

The Flint Hills region is very likely to experience significant increases in the demand for social services, including housing assistance, youth intervention programs, mental health/substance abuse, support for victims of domestic violence, and legal assistance. The younger, transient population associated with military personnel and their dependents tends to display higher participation rates in social service programs.

Some of the communities of the Flint Hills also face many of the demographic challenges common to rural areas, including an aging population, the uneven geographic distribution of economic opportunities and services, and limited transportation options.

Stakeholders noted a chronic lack of adequate funding issues for nearly all social service agencies. Stakeholders identified the presence of additional factors that diminish the well-

being and increase the dependency of vulnerable residents, including:

- The escalating cost of living and housing in the region coupled with decreasing vacancies place greater pressure on people seeking living arrangements
- Lack of affordable child care
- The lack of transportation for many military families and low income residents and the absence of transit alternatives; the Riley ATA bus is experiencing more requests, particularly from workers seeking transportation to their jobs
- The increasing diversity of the population and a rise in immigrant populations that do not speak English as a first language

Child care is a vital need for the families of the Flint Hills. Research continues to uncover the link between quality child care, particularly in a child's early years and educational and social development. Well administered and overseen child care also improves the health outcomes for children. Population and economic growth associated with Fort Riley will increase demand for child care programs. Broader demographic trends including the rise of two-worker households and one-parent households further reinforces the need for quality, affordable child care services in the Flint Hills region.

Key findings in the assessment of child care include:

Funding Issues in Child Care are Critical

Lack of funding limits efforts to improve child care services for the families of the Flint Hills. The low profitability makes it difficult to attract new child care providers into the industry to fill increasing need. Lower levels of compensation also make it difficult to attract and retain highly qualified child care professionals. Limited funding also increases the cost of child care for low and middle income parents and in turn may dampen job participation that could improve their financial position. Financing also constrains the ability to expand and improve existing child care programs operating on tight margins.

Lack of a Responsible Entity

Unlike many important social services, no clear entity assumes responsibility for ensuring access to quality child care. As a result, each locality typically develops its own piecemeal approach, often leaving the community without a clear advocate for child care issues. In the past, families were solely responsible for securing adequate child care. Demographic shifts, such as an increase in two-working-parent families, as well as more one parent working families call for a coordinated and measured approach to early childhood care and development.

Coordination among Child Care Programs Insufficient

Outside of Head Start and Riley Smart Start, which serve only a fraction of children, most child care programs offer a less than comprehensive approach to child care needs. These programs are generally developed in response to the most pressing local needs and are limited by the currently available grants. The dedicated providers in the region deliver essential services in a challenging environment of growing need with scarce resources. Nonetheless, given limited funds and organizational capacity, many local programs remain temporary, partial in scope, and insufficiently coordinated. Clearer definitions of responsibility, more certain sources of funding, and better coordination could improve the efficiency and comprehensiveness of services provided.

Short Term Recommendations

- Encourage employers to adopt best practices for providing child care benefits
- Adopt less restrictive land use policies for child care facilities in zoning codes
- Pursue increased funding for child care
- Adopt local ordinances that require an annual inspection for all regulated family care facilities
- Assume a role in state activities
- Establish an information and advocacy clearinghouse
- Concentrate and share informational activities

- Concentrate training activities
- Increase military and community partnering, including a joint human services military day and special training sessions
- Conduct a comprehensive community needs assessment
- Jointly lobby state and federal governments for increased social services funding
- Develop a multiple county social services alliance

Long Term Recommendations

- Encourage the integration of child care facilities into housing development
- Improve quality and professional training options for the child care industry
- Promote community involvement and integrate child care in comprehensive planning
- Explore opportunities to subsidize child care workers wages through public-private partnerships and economic development funds
- Encourage financing child care facilities through grants, impact fees or public/private partnerships
- Co-locate social services in one-stop centers

Workforce

Findings

Geary, Pottawatomie, and Riley Counties will absorb the majority of job growth associated with mission expansion at Fort Riley. Employment forecasts suggest a shift in employment from retail trade, wholesale trade, and manufacturing to more service based industries, a trend consistent with the national economy. Key employment growth sectors include: Construction, Transportation Warehousing, Professional Tech Services, Health Care/Social Assistance, and Public Administration. 18,290 jobs are forecast by 2012 based on the expansion of Fort Riley; two thirds of these will be new direct jobs (military personnel and contractors), one third will be secondary jobs (support and service sector).

Growth forecasts clearly indicate robust job creation within the region. Interviewed stakeholders cited a variety of challenges to filling emerging job positions within the region. Specifically, employers have had difficulty in recruiting and retaining skilled workers in health care, construction, clerical, and heavy equipment due to a shallow labor pool. The recruitment of health care and mental health care professionals in particular has been intense, resulting in rising concern over predatory hiring practices among local institutions. Stakeholders in the education field have also cited difficulty in hiring teachers that meet existing state licensure requirements. Limited vehicular access and the lack of transit options also affect employment opportunities for many of the region's prospective employees.

The Kansas Department of Commerce (DOC) has initiated an extensive recruitment effort to attract workers to the Flint Hills Region. In addition DOC has created a wide variety of training and enhancement programs to improve the skills of existing residents.

It is projected that employment growth within the region will occur in two distinct phases. The first phase, 2000 to 2012, will primarily involve an increase in Riley, Geary, and Pottawatomie Counties for construction, retail services and government employment, especially teachers. After 2012 employment demand will increase for individuals in the professional services and information sectors. As a result the strategies to attract and train new workers will need to change over time. Due to this rapid change in demand additional information about workforce characteristics, including wage levels should be collected.

Short Term Recommendations

- Coordination in recruitment between the military and civilian sector to address likely labor shortages

Long Term Recommendations

- Devote resources to attracting and training workers to fill positions in health care, education, finance and related areas after 2012

- Conduct a specific wage survey that also includes an evaluation of training needs and attitudes about commuting within the Flint Hills Region workforce

Quality of Life

Findings

Flint Hills region currently enjoys a high quality of life. Manhattan was listed as the #9 community in the United States to retire young in the April 2007 edition of Money Magazine. Amenities such as parks and recreation, good schools, a healthy environment, affordable housing, low crime, and accessibility to cultural amenities further strengthen the region's appeal. As in other high quality of life areas around the United States, many of these elements are inter-connected and dependent upon each other for continued success.

Current measures indicate the following regional challenges and areas in need of improvement:

- The region's supply of physicians and health care workers
- Drinking water quality in rural systems
- The lack of any formal air quality monitoring stations
- An overall median family income that lags both state and national averages
- A deficit of child care capacity
- The inconsistent adoption of best practices for planning and growth management, such as rural stewardship, agricultural zoning, and conservation subdivision design
- The need to increase parklands and recreational facilities to maintain level of service as the population expands
- The need to inventory and promote the region's existing system of recreational trails and to continue planning for improved connectivity within the network of river corridors and protected open spaces

Short Term Recommendations

- Use the community planning process (surveys, workshops) to identify a series of indicators that reflect the key values of residents and the elements that define quality of life in the region. The preliminary recommended list of commonly used national indicators includes:

Child Care

- Number and percent of accredited child care facilities
- Registered Child Care Spaces, as a Percent of Estimated Need
- Percent of Child Care Facilities Contracting with Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services by Type
- Affordability of Child Care
- Number of Youth Programs and Facilities

Arts and Culture

- Accessibility to arts and entertainment events, cultural institutions and facilities, and arts and culture programming
- Funding and government expenditures supporting art and cultural opportunities
- Historic preservation and National Register of Historic Places designations

Economy

- Average Annual Unemployment Rate of the Working Age Population
- Median Family Income

Other/Future Indicators:

- Property Taxes
- Per Capita Personal Income Indicator

Education

- Per Pupil Spending
- Student-teacher ratios
- Attendance and graduation rates
- Proficiency levels
- Licensing levels

Environment

- PM2.5 and PM10 (air quality) levels
- Violations to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for public drinking water
- High priority Total Daily Maximum Load (TDML) or water quality violation occurrences

Other/Future Indicators:

- Local ground-level ozone, particle pollution, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide levels
- EPA Air Quality Index
- Per capita water consumption

Health Care and Mental Health

- Percent of Population with Health Insurance
- Quantity of Physicians
- Percentage of Births that are Low-Birth Weight (less than 2,500 grams)
- Suicide Rates

Housing

- New Starts
- Vacancy Trends
- Average sales price
- Sales volume
- Historic turnover
- Appraised value
- Forecasted housing supply

Parks and Recreation, Open Space, and Conservation

- Municipal Parkland: Acres of municipal parkland per 1,000 residents
- Acres of state, federal and private park, recreation, and conservation lands per 1,000 residents
- Acres of preserved tallgrass prairie
- Miles of recreational trails
- Number of hunting and fishing opportunities

Public Safety

- Crime rate (number of crimes violent and property per 1,000 people)
- Number of sworn police officers per 1,000 people
- Number of full time fire fighters per 1,000 people
- Average rescue call response time

Public Utilities

- Utility Access
- Utility Expansion
- Percent of median income paid for utilities (water, gas, electric, wastewater, solid waste, etc.)

Social Services

- Number and Percent of People in Poverty
- People per 1,000 served by Temporary Assistance

Transportation and Public Transit

- Total miles and Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled (DVMT) for rural and urban roads
- Number of Segments Operating at a failing and highly congested Level of Service (LOS) E. Primary roadways would include freeways, expressways, rural highways, and urban arterial streets.

Economy

- Average Annual Unemployment Rate of the Working Age Population
- Median Family Income

Education

- Per Pupil Spending
- Student-teacher ratios
- Attendance and graduation rates
- Proficiency levels
- Licensing levels

Other/Future Education Indicators:

- Public vs. private school attendance

- Total number of colleges, universities, junior colleges, and professional schools
- Percentage of adults with bachelors degree or higher

Environment

- PM2.5 and PM10 (air quality) levels - PM is particulate matter suspended in air in the form of fly ash, soot, dust, fog, fumes etc... PM2.5 are fine airborne particles largely formed from gases. PM10 are coarse relatively large airborne particles, such as dust, pollen, spores, and fly ash
- Violations to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for public drinking water
- High priority Total Daily Maximum Load (TDML) or water quality violation occurrences

Other/Future Indicators:

- Local ground-level ozone, particle pollution, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide levels
- EPA Air Quality Index
- Per capita water consumption

Health Care and Mental Health

- Percent of Population with Health Insurance
- Quantity of Physicians
- Percentage of Births that are Low-Birth Weight (less than 2,500 grams)
- Suicide Rates

Housing

- New Starts
- Vacancy Trends
- Average sales price
- Sales volume
- Historic turnover
- Appraised value
- Forecasted housing supply

Other/Future Indicators:

- Percentage of housing within 1 mile of commercial services
- Percentage of housing within ¼ mile of transit services

Parks and Recreation, Open Space, and Conservation

- Municipal Parkland: Acres of municipal parkland per 1,000 residents
- Acres of state, federal and private park, recreation, and conservation lands per 1,000 residents
- Acres of preserved tallgrass prairie
- Miles of recreational trails
- Number of hunting and fishing opportunities

Other/Future Indicators:

- Miles of recreational trails
- Number of recreation centers
- User satisfaction surveys
- Acreage of unprotected intact tallgrass prairie
- Distribution of public parks and open spaces

Public Safety

- Crime rate (number of crimes violent and property per 1,000 people)

Other/Future Indicators:

- Number of sworn police officers per 1,000 people
- Number of full time fire fighters per 1,000 people
- Average rescue call response time
- Drug related incidents per 1,000 people
- Traffic accident deaths per capita
- Number of Neighborhood Watch groups
- Juvenile crime rate

Public Utilities

- Utility Access
- Utility Expansion
- Percent of median income paid for utilities (water, gas, electric, wastewater, solid waste, etc.)

- Other/Future Indicators:
 - Level of regional groundwater aquifers
 - Percent of median income paid for utilities (water, gas, electric, wastewater, solid waste, etc.)

Social Services

- Number and Percent of People in Poverty
- People per 1,000 served by Temporary Assistance

Transportation and Public Transit

- Total miles and Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled (DVMT) for rural and urban roads
- Number of Segments Operating at a failing and highly congested Level of Service (LOS) E. Primary roadways would include freeways, expressways, rural highways, and urban arterial streets.

Other/Future Indicators:

- Vehicle Hours Per Capita
- Operating Expenditures Per Capita
- Continue to develop and assemble data that can be used to measure key indicators

Long Term Recommendations

- Establish a regional entity to assist communities in defining and monitoring selected indicators

Regional Coordination

Findings

As the Flint Hills become more populous, its communities seek better ways to attract economic growth and funding, sparking increased interest in regional efforts among cities, counties, employers, and service providers. Findings for this section are not only based on guidance from the FHGP Planning Team and Committees, but also from our community's leadership. In early September, the FHGP planning team distributed a survey gauging support for regional collaboration in the Flint Hills to elected officials and senior administrative staff of governments with populations around 1,000 and to school board members

serving in the region. Based on the survey responses, most believe that the timing is appropriate to explore forming a regional entity.

In other words, the time may be now. Local governments could begin the work of establishing a regional organization. Key steps are outlined below.

Develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) To Agree To Work Together To Create A Regional Organization

This MOU should be a voluntary agreement to work together to create a regional organization that meets the needs of its member communities.

Define the Regional Organization

The next steps would involve defining the scope of services and gathering additional information on how best to form a regional organization. There is no “one size fits all” organizational structure, nor is there a prescribed mission statement. However, the organization should have a formal structure that includes representation from key participants in the MOU and encourages involvement from major regional stakeholders such as Fort Riley and Kansas State University.

The potential functions of a regional entity in the Flint Hills include:

- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Eco-Tourism and Recreation
- Homeland Security and Disaster Relief
- Data Coordination
- Technical Assistance
- Social Services
- Military Relations
- Education and Workforce
- Housing
- Rural Development

At a minimum and as highlighted by the survey, this organization should focus on the communities highest ranked needs:

- Planning for quality growth
- Coordinating with the military (Fort Riley)
- Military impact planning
- Grant application assistance
- Providing regional growth forecasts

Short Term Recommendations

- Continue to explore the value of establishing a regional organization with local officials and stakeholders
- Develop Memorandum of Understanding to agree to work together to create a regional organization
- Pursue Office of Economic Adjustment funding to seed the start-up of a regional entity

Long Term Recommendations

- Define the regional organization, including mission, staffing, governance services and budget

Fiscal Impacts

Findings

The Growth Plan examines several specific areas that will be impacted by the expansion of Fort Riley. These areas were examined in terms of estimated fiscal implications.

Transportation/Utilities

- Health Care
- Public Safety
- Education
- Housing
- Other Social Services/Child Care
- Other Regional Cooperative Efforts

The fiscal section presents a summary of fiscal implications, the action and benefit from the recommendation, the proposed funding approach, a cost estimated, a listing of whether the recommendation will require capital funding or operational funding, and additional steps.

Few recommended investments will be paid for by a single source of funding or single entity. Rather, a mix of funding sources will probably be required, and may include federal, state, county, city, private, and other entities. This is due to the fact that the benefit of many of these recommended improvements/actions do not have a direct nexus to one group of users. In many cases, entities simply cannot provide the required level of funding without outside funding sources.

Other Relevant Information

This section includes the list of acronyms used in the document, as well as the summary of the public survey.