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COMMUNITY FACILITIES & CHARACTER

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of quality of life provides a different perspective on how to plan for the future of Elkhart. Rather than focusing on the physical growth and development of the community as this plan has in many other elements, it considers the city from the perspective of how it impacts the lives of individual people and households.

The City of Elkhart cannot address all issues related to quality of life. Responsibility for these issues is broad, and the policy direction in this element will demonstrate that. While this plan only guides City direction specifically, it does identify important partnerships with other jurisdictions and organizations that are key in providing essential services in Elkhart.



Community Goals, Objectives & Strategies

This chapter encompasses the social environment which can be defined as human interaction and engagement in the community. It includes public services and facilities, education, public health, community connections, equity, and arts and culture. The community goals below work to provide the City of Elkhart with direction to preserve the community's small town feel while enhancing existing amenities.



COMMUNITY GOAL 1: Maintain and/or improve existing properties, public infrastructure, buildings, equipment and open spaces to meet current and future community needs while ensuring the safety and livability of the community.



COMMUNITY GOAL 2: Support a strong, connected, inclusive vision that provides opportunities for everyone to participate in public events and processes.



COMMUNITY GOAL 3: Support a vision for the community that provides adequate resources to support healthy, active lives.



COMMUNITY GOAL 4: Recognize, promote, and preserve elements that are significant to the City's history, culture, and arts.



COMMUNITY GOAL 5: Prioritize the reuse of the former sanitary sewer aeration lagoons.



COMMUNITY GOAL 6: Establish a community wayfinding program.

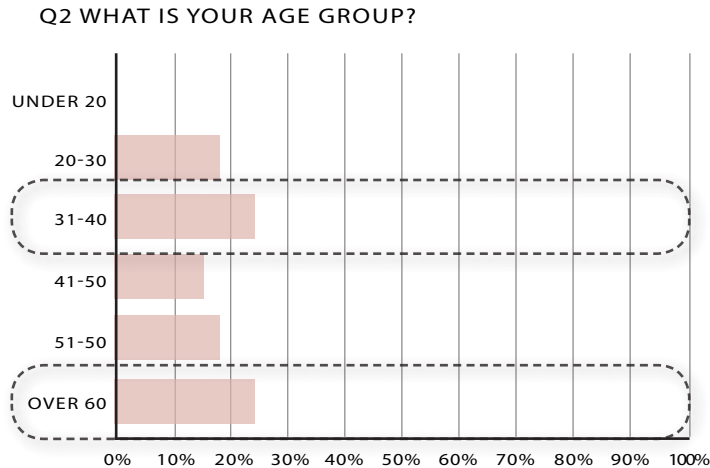


COMMUNITY GOAL 7: Create an identifiable Main Street district through street and public improvements/enhancements.



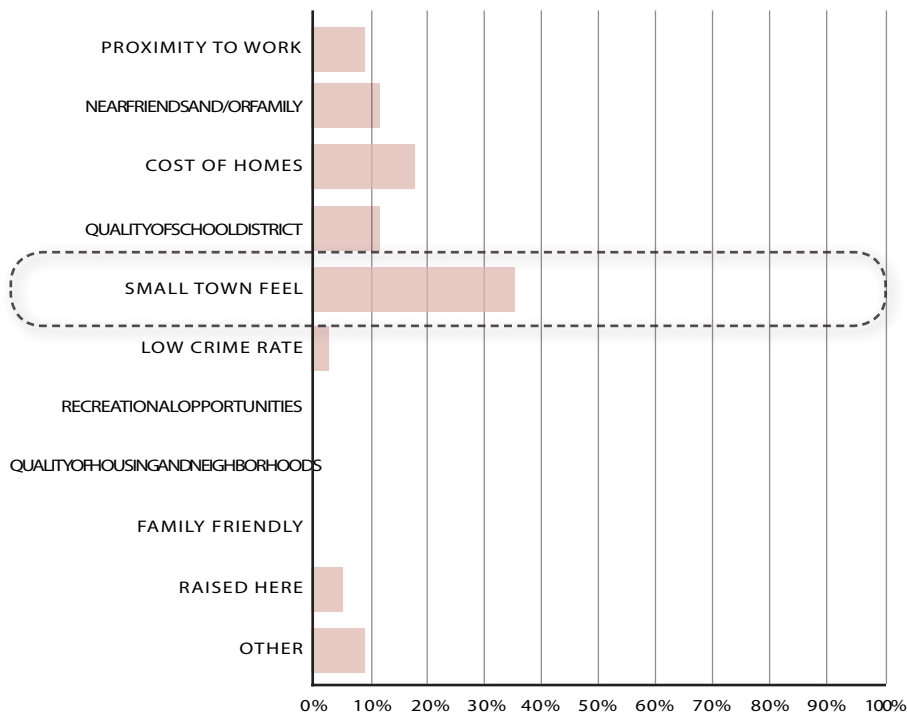
Community Facilities & Character

In analyzing the community input survey results it became evident that community character is critical to Elkhart's identity. Key findings and trends that emerged are highlighted below. In general, there was a mix of individuals from age 20-60+ that chose to complete the survey, with the highest number of respondents being between the ages of 31-40 and over 60.



One question that stood out in particular was asking respondents why they chose to live in Elkhart. As can be seen below, the number one reason was the small town feel of Elkhart. As Elkhart continues to grow it will be imperative to ensure that the community maintains its small town character. This can be achieved a number of ways, such as by preserving landmarks and icons that are unique to the community. Also important to note is the cost of homes and quality of the school district. These should work to be maintained.

Q5WHATISTHEMOSTIMPORTANTREASONYOUORYOURFAMILYCHOSETO LIVEINELKHART?

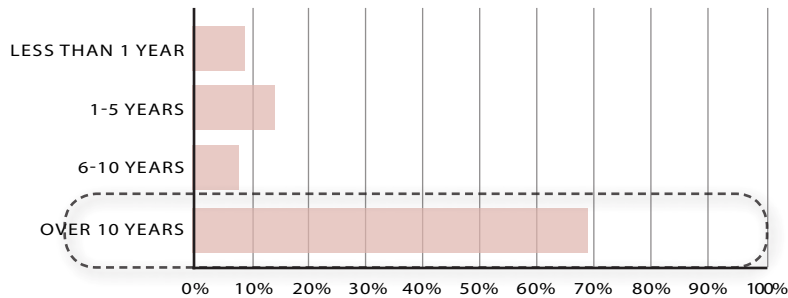




Community Facilities & Character

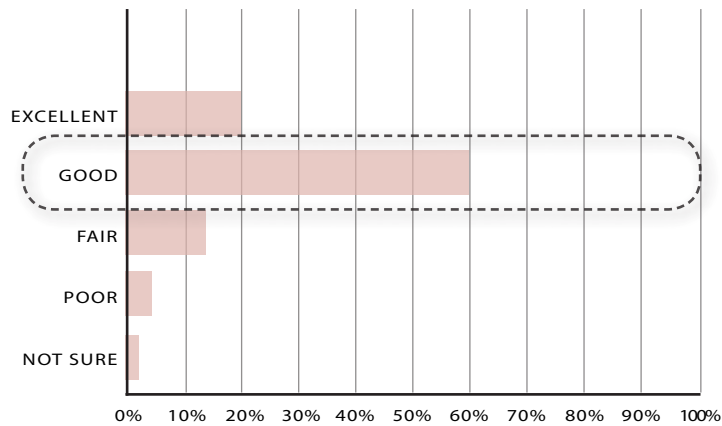
Of the individuals to participate in the community input survey, the vast majority had lived in the area for 10 or more years. This indicates that residents are generally proud to live in the community that they do, and have a desire to continue living in the area. As a part of this plan it will be important to not only maintain the existing housing stock and residents, but also provide for future residents in a well-planned manner.

Q4 IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO QUESTION 3, HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN POLK COUNTY?



When asked about the quality of life in Elkhart, the results were primarily positive. The vast majority rated the overall quality of life as good (61.54%), if not excellent (18.46%). Only 3.08% felt that the quality of life was poor and as few as one person selected “not sure”. Furthermore, a subsequent question asked respondents how they expect the quality of life in Elkhart to change over the next five years. In response to that question, almost 65% indicated that they felt the quality of life would improve, while the next highest response was that they felt it would stay the same as opposed to worsening.

Q6 HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE IN ELKHART?





Community Facilities & Character

This chapter is intended to focus on the unique character of the City, and to identify goals, policies and objectives to preserve this character. These aim to encourage an appreciation for the City's history and culture, maintain the character and identity of the community, and contribute to the City's economic vitality.

COMMUNITY/SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

The level of social connectedness in a community can play a large role in overall quality of life. Creating and promoting opportunities for public events and activities allows community members to come together and connect with one another. These efforts promote community pride, help establish a sense of ownership within the community, and enhance people's lives.

CULTURE & IDENTITY

Along with other unique community aspects, it is important to recognize and preserve Elkhart's history. This can be achieved in a number of ways, such as preserving historic architecture, memorializing historic events or contributions, and highlighting artistic and cultural elements within Elkhart. Public spaces can be prime locations to recognize and celebrate the community and its distinct identity.

ARTS & CREATIVE ECONOMY

Art can benefit an area in many ways through helping to define a place, enhance unique aspects of the community, and interpret history and culture. Aspects of public art often allow members of the community to become more involved, interact with one another, and promote economic gain.

COMMUNITY BRANDING & WAYFINDING

Wayfinding and community branding efforts help to establish community identity, help visitors find their way, promote a pedestrian-friendly environment, link uses, destinations, and districts, and enhance community pride. A community's downtown is often its most identifiable trait or asset. Create enhancements to the public environment along Main Street.



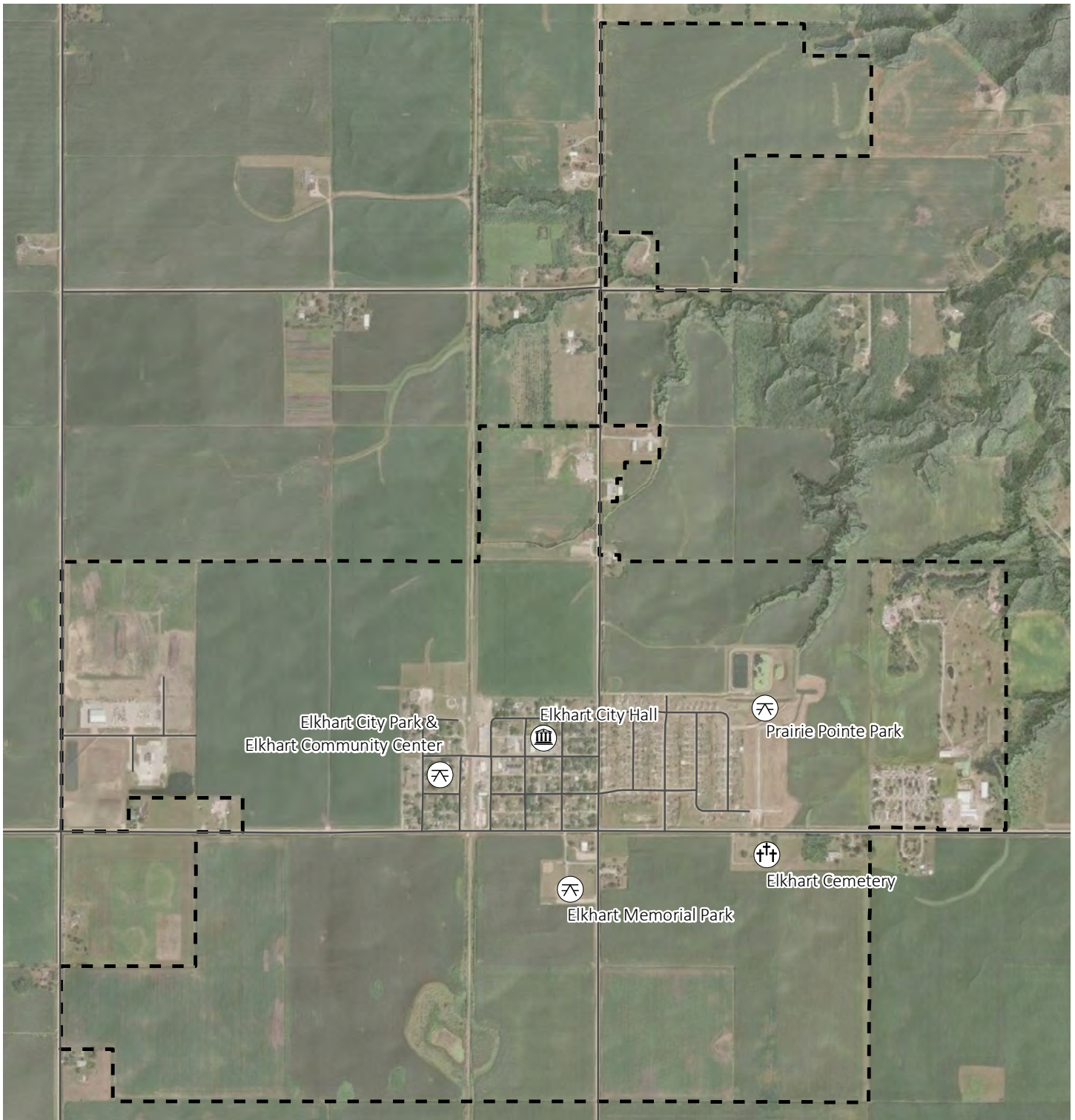
COMMUNITY LANDMARKS

One question on the community input survey was "What landmarks or physical elements do you consider to be unique to Elkhart?".

Although the top response was the water tower, another community feature that was noted numerous times was the old pop machine chained to a tree in the image to the left.

Identifying and highlighting elements with history and a story behind them such as this can help strengthen community character and pride.

Points of Interest Map



Source: Polk County, ESRI Basemap

Key points of interest are indicated in the map above. This includes City Hall, Elkhart City Park and Community Center, Elkhart Cemetery, Elkhart Memorial Park, and Prairie Pointe Park.

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