RENEWTON 2030
THE MAGAZINE
By now, many of you have heard of The ReNewton Project. This magazine includes highlights of The ReNewton 2030 Comprehensive Plan, approved by the cities of Newton and North Newton in early 2011. This plan outlines a vision for our region’s growth, and provides insights into the actions recommended in its 150-plus pages.

Because of the plan’s length, the steering committee wanted to give the public a “Reader’s Digest” version. The ReNewton 2030 magazine shares the vision behind the plan, and the community values that guided its development.

The plan is not law. It is a document that will guide City leaders over the next 20 years so that as decisions are made, we are working toward this common vision. It provides us with guidelines, not mandates. It is also a changeable document; the City Commission can decide to update the plan at any time. It will be reviewed annually.

I want to thank everyone who served on the steering committee. These 18 people gave up their personal time to attend meetings and review drafts of the plan. Their input was invaluable.

I’d also like to thank the more than 1,600 residents of our community who contributed to this process. Our vision comes from their feedback and ideas. This is not City Hall’s plan; this is YOUR plan for OUR community. Citizens can bring it to life or change it as they see fit.

So please, take a few moments and review this magazine. If you have feedback or if it sparks ideas, please don’t hesitate to contact me or any of the City Commissioners.

Best wishes for the future of Newton!

Willis Heck, Mayor of Newton
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TWO CITIES. ONE COMMUNITY.
ReNewton 2030 magazine looks at the cities of Newton and North Newton and plans for their mutual growth as a community.
When it came time to do a new comprehensive plan for the future of Newton and North Newton, City officials wanted to approach the process with a fresh perspective.

With a growing population, new City projects breaking ground, and all the goals of the last comprehensive plan accomplished, it was the perfect time to create a new vision for the community’s future, while hopefully renewing (pun intended) people’s interest in being involved in the community.

“We’ve accomplished everything we set forth in the previous plan in 1998,” said Assistant City Manager Tim Johnson. “Times have changed, people have changed, and opportunities have presented themselves that were not present here 12 years ago.”

“The hard work it will take to make the plan’s vision come true will require everyone to be involved.” — Tom Phillips, project consultant

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Traditionally, a comprehensive plan outlines a framework for future town growth, as well as the redevelopment or enrichment of already-established areas. According to Tom Phillips of Phillips and Associates — a planning firm based in Manhattan, Kan., hired to lead the process — comprehensive plans are, as their name indicates, comprehensive in their scope and outlook. They cover a broad range of big-picture issues that impact a community’s growth, such as roads, water, and sewer utilities.

But members of The ReNewton Project wanted to look beyond such traditional planning areas to also include quality-of-life issues, and ways the community can grow and compete for new businesses and residents in the future.
The comprehensive plan, adopted by both Newton and North Newton, serves as a guide for community decision makers — both those who are in office today, as well as those who will become involved over the next two decades. Phillips said it is a living document that offers a clear set of goals, policies, and strategies to help Newton retain its local heritage and identity, while managing its growth and strengthening its sense of community in the future.

“The plan provides preferred methods, principles, and standards for community leaders to help them manage change in ways that move the city toward a common goal,” Phillips said.

City Manager Randy Riggs pointed out that a comprehensive plan — or comp plan, as it’s referred to by those in the biz — keeps City leaders from making isolated decisions that move the city away from its long-term goals.

“If we don’t have those plans and values in front of us, then any whim will do, and that creates problems for communities if they don’t stay focused on where they want to be,” Riggs said.

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

Ultimately, Phillips noted, a comprehensive plan will only be effective if the citizenry understands its goals and works alongside government officials to make it come to life.

“Implementing this plan will require more than a stamp of approval at City Hall,” Phillips said. “The hard work it will take to make the plan’s vision come true will require everyone to be involved. The hopes, aspirations, and desires for the entire region rest within the people of Newton, and the leaders they elect now and in the future.”

The full plan is available at www.renewtonkansas.com.

The RENEWTON Process

More than 1,600 people participated in The ReNewton Project during 2010.

February 2010 —
18-member steering committee established; renewtonkansas.com launched.

March 2010 —
Consultants interviewed small groups of more than 40 leaders in 10 different subject areas about local concerns in their areas of expertise.

April 2010 —
The public was invited to two community retreats to discuss a wide spectrum of issues, ranging from economic development to Newton’s image.

May 2010 —
Nearly 600 people completed questionnaires evaluating City services and helping to prioritize future projects.

June 2010 —
Steering committee approved ReNewton vision and values statement.

September 2010 —
Approximately 400 residents completed written questionnaire in water bill, providing feedback on the project’s vision and values statement.

November 2010 —
Complete draft made public for citizen input; Facebook discussion launched; community open house held.

February 2011 —
Plan adopted by Newton and North Newton.
Throughout The ReNewton Project, people repeatedly asked, “So what will Newton look like in 2030?”

“We are planning the future, not predicting it. There is a difference,” said Tom Phillips of Phillips and Associates, the planning firm hired to guide the City through the comprehensive planning process. “This process is about collectively deciding today what you’d like Newton to be in 2030, while recognizing that some things will happen along the way that will change that vision. But if we don’t know where Newton wants to go, we can’t develop the best path to get there.”

To help determine where the community is headed, The ReNewton Project steering committee created a vision statement. This statement is intended to guide the community toward a prosperous future, while maintaining all the things that make Newton great today.

Vision Statement:
Between 2010 and 2030, Newton will 1. expand its tax base and 2. enhance community amenities, while 3. preserving its richness of character, heritage, and way of life.
Many Kansas towns are experiencing negative population growth — shrinking, if you will. To remain an independent, thriving community, the greater Newton area must plan its growth.

“If a community isn’t growing, it’s dying. And planning for that growth is essential,” said Carl Harris, steering committee member and former City Commissioner. “Dreams without a plan are just dreams. Dreams with a plan become a vision.”

SPREADING COSTS

“Expanding the tax base” isn’t a fancy way of saying “increasing taxes.” On the contrary, expanding the tax base is about creating more assets on the tax rolls (e.g., new or improved business properties, homes, and rental properties) to spread the cost of operations across more entities. This will result in more money to enhance government-funded community features that add to Newton’s quality of life — everything from libraries to roads.

“Expanding the tax base is critical for the funds needed for a community to grow,” said Bill Hake, steering committee member. “I’ve been in the community for nearly 30 years; when I first came, my complaint was that the community was too conservative, that we were risk-averse. And that has changed since we’ve done some of the projects that we’ve done, including Sand Creek Station Golf Course.”

DIVERSIFYING INVESTMENTS

Assistant City Manager Tim Johnson pointed out that it is important for the City not to put all of its eggs in one basket. The tax base must be expanded across the board, through new businesses and jobs, expansion and maintenance of existing businesses, and new and maintained housing.

“So, whether it is the Tindall Corporation that will be coming to Newton in 2011, or whether it’s a new family start-up business on Main Street, they’re equally important, and they’re equally valuable to our local economy.”

“The plan encourages the community to:

• Nurture and support homegrown businesses to create new jobs, which will increase tax revenues.

• Recruit new, larger employers to the community, focusing on those that have values in sync with the community’s vision — and bring with them well-paying jobs and new residents.

• Strategically market the town to new residents, especially targeting retirees, middle- and high-income families, and young professionals.

• Instill in the community the philosophy that shopping and conducting business locally gives Newton the resources it needs to maintain and improve its quality of life.

What Would You Like to See Regarding Newton’s Population?*

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<td>1.6%</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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*2010 Newton Resident Survey

continued on next page
When the steering committee included enhancing community amenities in the vision statement, it did so knowing this is a chicken-or-egg concept. Attractive community amenities — features such as parks, new shopping districts, recreation centers, and libraries — are key to recruiting new businesses and residents to a community. However, these items are expensive, so expanding the tax base first makes the cost of such amenities more affordable to taxpayers.

Which comes first: a larger tax base, or more community amenities?

PRIORITIZING

Since there are no right or wrong answers to this question, the City must continue to work both sides of the equation. Johnson said that it will be important to routinely check in with the community to see what projects residents most want to invest their tax dollars in.

“We need scientifically valid data to draw from to know what the priorities are. Such information is invaluable when the commission is trying to make decisions,” Johnson said. “It keeps us on track and working toward the community’s overall goals.”

As part of The ReNewton Project, the City commissioned a survey to identify residents’ satisfaction with community services, and their priorities for future initiatives. More than 1,600 surveys were sent out to a random sampling of residents, of which 573 were returned, giving the City a response rate of 36 percent and a 95 percent confidence level in the results. (Survey results are available as an appendix to the comprehensive plan, at renewtonkansas.com.)

One question asked respondents to rank five quality-of-life projects by order of importance. The results found that the redevelopment of downtown had the highest ranking, with park improvements, recreation center, development of south side, and expansion of the library following in that order.

A DIALOGUE

Mayor Willis Heck said that survey results are very helpful to decision makers, but so is having an ongoing dialogue in the community about priorities. Both will help the commission choose which amenities to prioritize.

“The community needs to communicate their priorities to us through various and sundry ways,” Heck said. “It might be through a survey, or it could just be what people say to us as we meet with them casually — whether they think the project is important — to help us decide which projects to pursue.”

THE PLAN

To enhance community amenities (library, recreation, parks, trails), the plan suggests that the community should:

• Strengthen economic, social, and cultural connections with the surrounding communities in south-central Kansas.
• Prioritize initiatives that promote education and health/wellness.
• Strengthen its relationship with Bethel College, and its students, alumni, and faculty to fully assimilate the college and its cultural assets.
Preserving Newton’s Richness of Character, Heritage, and Way of Life

One issue often debated during the public forums for The ReNewton Project was whether residents want the community’s population to grow, stay the same, or decline. Many people argued that they choose to live in Newton because they like its historic feel and the level of safety and security of a smaller community.

In fact, in the City’s survey, while nearly 55 percent of people want the community to grow, nearly 39 percent want the population to stay the same.

FINDING BALANCE
To find the happy medium, the steering committee felt it was important to include in the project’s vision statement the community’s intent to seek growth, while also preserving and maintaining its unique historical and cultural assets. These assets can include historic architecture, public art, community events, social service organizations, neighborhoods — and even the community’s spirit of generosity, compassion, and family values.

PAST AND FUTURE
For steering committee member Barth Hague, preserving heritage is about using the city’s history to guide its path into the future.

“I’m a firm believer that our history helps us invent ourselves over and over again. I think it defines who we are as a community, and it serves as a foundation to build on,” Hague said.

School Board Member Carol Sue Stayrook Hobbs believes that preserving the community’s heritage is about embracing its diverse ethnic and cultural history.

“There are so many different types of people who make up Newton, and they each bring something unique to this community that has given it a great flavor,” Stayrook Hobbs said.

A GREENER NEWTON
Part of the community’s character is its commitment to the environment. For a city of its size, Newton is a leader in green initiatives, such as mandatory recycling. But the steering committee and many community members believe the City can do even more in the future to increase its sustainability.

Just ask Chuck Regier, curator of exhibits for Kauffman Museum.

“There are a lot of other steps we can take to make Newton a greener city. Even things like our exceptional recycling program, we can take farther. There are more things we could be recycling, composting, making it mandatory for businesses and industry, so some of the things we’re doing can certainly be improved.”

THE PLAN
To continue to preserve and maintain the city’s unique character, heritage, and way of life, the plan recommends the City:

• Foster new housing options at all economic levels, and focus on renovating existing housing stock and preserving older neighborhoods.

• Seek energy efficiencies, water conservation, recycling, green architecture, and environmentally friendly transportation methods whenever feasible.

• Explore methods to increase community pride and create within residents a better understanding of the significance of Newton’s history, ethnicity, and heritage.
Through the public meeting process, community members identified key values they want Newton to maintain as it grows over the next 20 years. This section summarizes these major values — and clarifies how they guided the steering committee in drafting the vision statement (see page 6).

Each of these values works together with the vision statement to define, maintain, and enhance the community.

- Vibrant Economy
- Housing for All
- Revitalized Downtown
- Sustainability
- Livability
- Preserving Our Town Character
- Healthy Living
- Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion
- Commitment to Education
- Community Development
- Innovations in Transportation
- Visionary Leadership
Vibrant Economy

On the surface, Newton might appear to be a typical Midwest town. But below the surface there’s a great deal to be excited about.

THE KANSAS LOGISTICS PARK

Just ask City Engineer Suzanne Loomis, who has spent much of the past year working on the infrastructure development for the Kansas Logistics Park, a 400-acre site ideal for businesses that serve the wind industry.

“The Kansas Logistics Park will put us on the map. Companies are looking at us and looking at locating here from all around the world. That brings in revenue and it brings in new jobs for our region,” Loomis said.

Newton’s key location at the intersection of Class I railroads, shortline railroads, and highways makes it a central spot for shipping nationwide.

RECRUITING GREEN INDUSTRY

The addition of Tindall Corporation will bring a $66 million capital investment to the Kansas Logistics Park. Within three years, Tindall predicts it will create 400 new jobs, housed in a facility that is expected to be between 150,000 and 200,000 square feet.

The ReNewton Project recommends the City seek out additional manufacturers who are devoted to wind energy or other green industries. Tindall, which will produce bases for wind turbines, is a great example of this type of large manufacturer.

“Our intent is to grow our local economy, but in doing so, we strive to bring industries and businesses that are compatible with our community vision, values, and long-term goals,” the ReNewton 2030 plan states.

HELPING LOCAL BUSINESSES

While the announcement of this new, large manufacturer is getting all the headlines, The ReNewton Project expresses the community’s desire to nurture small businesses and homegrown industries as well.

“It is important for Newton to have a strong mix of large and small employers,” said Newton Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jim Schwarzenberger. “For Newton to thrive, it must have a diversity of industry types as well. This contributes to long-term economic vitality. Having just one large employer puts us at too much risk. With multiple and varied employers, we can grow our talent pool and be better prepared to withstand economic ups and downs.

“Economy Snapshot

We are committed to creating and maintaining a diverse economy with a growing tax base. We will:

- Encourage the development of small businesses and homegrown industry.
- Support efforts to recruit large, national companies.
- Foster and support local retailers, restaurants, and entrepreneurs.
- Accept that population growth may attract national chains and franchises.
- Acknowledge the role Wichita will play in our growth.
- Take advantage of our proximity to Wichita, yet maintain our unique cultural and economic identity.

“It also is essential that local businesses feel the City is supporting their needs. For the plan to be supported on all levels, the local business community needs to feel it has their best interests in mind.”

www.renewtonkansas.com
Revitalizing downtown is key to the city achieving the project’s vision. A revitalized downtown will:

• Increase the local tax base.
• Enhance and expand a vital town amenity.
• Preserve the community’s historic heritage, character, and way of life.

“Participants told us repeatedly that they want downtown to remain at the heart of the local economy and community culture 20 years from now,” Tom Phillips, project consultant, said.

“To do so, Newton must extend beyond the traditional focus of retail goods and services to include places for relaxation, entertainment, and housing. Then the downtown will maintain what makes it special today, but be infused with new life.”

PLANNED ENHANCEMENTS

The ReNewton Project reinforces the vision of the 2009 Master Plan for Newton Downtown Redevelopment District. This vision preserves core historic buildings, allowing for strategic new development of mixed uses and housing. It also strengthens the area’s visual character with improvements in walkability, streetscapes, parking, and green spaces.

“For the plan to come to life, it will depend on a mix of private and public investments,” Assistant City Manager Tim Johnson said.

Ideas in the 2009 plan for enhancing downtown include capitalizing on the Historic Fox Theatre, adding a downtown farmers market, creating housing on upper floors of commercial properties, and incorporating more green spaces and parking.

GOING WIRELESS

One feature the steering committee added to The ReNewton Plan was free wireless Internet throughout the downtown area.

“What we’re trying to bring to downtown is people,” said Planning Commission Chairman Lester Limon. “Having wireless Internet as a staple of
infrastructure helps not only the consumers and their entertainment value, but helps business owners who choose to locate business downtown become players in the global marketplace, and not just the local marketplace.”

**LAUNCHING LOCAL BUSINESS**

The committee also introduced the idea of creating a business incubator district downtown to help launch homegrown businesses — retail, dining, entertainment, IT, small manufacturing, and professional services.

“The business incubator program would provide space for young, local businesses to get off the ground, while receiving short-term assistance through subsidized rent, marketing, human resources, financial management, product development, and so forth. Ideas for funding include possible partnerships with Bethel College, City Hall, the Community Development Corporation, and the private sector.

“Having prime downtown space available to new businesses would be a great boon to the City’s economic development efforts,” said Jim Schwarzenberger, executive director of the Newton Area Chamber of Commerce. “It would help us attract novice talent to the area that could pay off big in the future.”

**THE GO-TO DISTRICT**

Ultimately, the new downtown district would become THE place for people to congregate in Newton — similar to Oldtown in Wichita, Mass Street in Lawrence, Boot Hill in Dodge City, or Aggieville in Manhattan.

“With a vibrant downtown, your community grows,” said Newton Convention and Visitors Bureau Director Jennifer Mueller. “It is your blueprint. It is who you are. It IS your community.”

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**Downtown Snapshot**

We want to see downtown become an award-winning, revitalized area that will:

- Preserve and restore historic architecture and visual character.
- Attract retail, restaurants, and cultural facilities.
- Adapt historic buildings to support new businesses.
- Transform upper levels into residential apartments.
- Establish civic spaces that are pedestrian-friendly and inviting.
- Create spaces where people of all ages and groups can socialize.
Livability

The ReNewton Plan includes many ideas for creating a community that people of all ages will want to call home. It focuses on several projects to improve overall quality of life for current residents, and make the city more attractive for college students, young professionals, young families, higher-income households, and retirees.

Among the recommended actions are for the community to:

• Determine a course of action to achieve a new recreation center in the next five years.
• Decide on a plan to build a new library.
• Forge partnerships with private entities to increase childcare options.
• Create ways to support independent seniors.

According to the plan, “all of the community facilities, roads, streets, parks, bike lanes, and sidewalks that create and contribute to livability require the investment of public tax dollars as well as public-private partnerships….Quality of life is ultimately about people and building a place where everyone enjoys a productive, healthy, and safe life.”
AN EYE ON TAXES

Of course, the challenge is figuring out how much the community can afford to pay without significant tax increases — which is why the plan’s vision calls for expanding the tax base.

Steering committee member Carl Harris, who formerly served Newton as a City Commissioner, said that financing large quality-of-life projects is always a challenge for public officials, but one that’s necessary for growth.

“It’s really a tough balancing act between what is too much tax burden, and what is not enough investment in infrastructure,” Harris said.

TWO MAJOR PROJECTS

The plan includes two big community projects:

Recreation Facilities

The ReNewton public forums found that recreation facilities are a top priority. Many participants felt that not having more up-to-date recreation facilities diminishes Newton’s draw to potential new residents.

A New Library

The Newton Public Library is facing many infrastructure needs that the City will have to address in the near future for the library to remain operational. Those improvements have been estimated to be as expensive as building a new structure.

Livability Snapshot

We want our community leaders to be visionary and make investments that make Newton an even better place to live. We will seek projects that:

- Improve and expand quality of life, while helping us attract new residents.
- Are funded through a mix of public and private financing to keep taxes affordable.
Participants in The ReNewton Project retreats made it clear they want the City to play a role in promoting individual health and wellness.

“I think the City has some responsibility to provide a way for individual health and wellness to happen through recreation — and by ‘recreation,’ I mean something bigger than ball teams and competitions,” said Mayor Willis Heck.

FORMING A COUNCIL

The comp plan suggests the creation of a community health planning council to bring together a cross section of individuals working in this area. Those experts could coordinate programs, ensure a comprehensive approach to planning and delivery, and share information and resources.

“The ever-increasing demand for healthcare services, an aging population, and fewer public financial resources require the sharing of resources, collaborative planning, and innovative solutions at the local level,” the plan states. “Community health and wellness extend into how the community collectively views itself — Are we the kind of city that citizens want to live in and local leaders want to create?”

OTHER HEALTHY STEPS

Other ideas include creating a one-stop center to allow people — especially seniors and the disabled — to learn about all available resources, as well as creating more community gardens to allow people to grow their own vegetables.

As far as parks and recreation go, the plan recommends continued funding to implement and update the Newton pathway system and Sand Creek Trail, supporting people’s desires for safe walking and biking trails.

Likewise, it recommends the community move forward with a new indoor recreation center.

Healthy Living Snapshot

We want the city design to promote healthy lifestyles and community well-being.

- As we plan new neighborhoods, we should integrate mixed land uses — retail, office, residential, parks, schools — to allow people to walk or bike for basic needs.
- In established neighborhoods, we should seek ways to integrate bicycling, walking, and physical activity into daily life.
- Planning roads to accommodate more pedestrians and bikes will be essential.
Planning for the education of Newton’s children and workforce doesn’t quite fall under the City government’s jurisdiction. Still, participants in The ReNewton Project wanted to ensure the city will remain supportive of efforts to educate all Newtonians — from preschool through adult.

QUALITY AND RECRuITMENT
A quality school system is a primary selling point for any community. And as efforts continue to recruit new residents and employers to the area, having a strong school system is a key component of any economic development efforts.

“We must meet the needs of a changing workforce in a global marketplace,” the plan says. “We want our community to be recognized statewide for the high-quality education we provide across the spectrum of students and lifetime learners.”

The plan encourages the City to work collectively with the USD 373 school board to:

• Retain the neighborhood school concept.
• Creatively re-use vacant structures.
• Plan for parks adjacent to any future school sites.
• Continue to provide for expanding early childhood education and day care needs.

BONDING WITH BETHEL
The plan also recommends the community strengthen its relationship with Bethel College.

“We are looking for opportunities to connect our students to entrepreneurs, to businesspeople, to artists,” said Bethel College President Perry White. “And we’ve taken advantage of a few of those opportunities, but if we really explore the experiential learning component I would like to see a part of our curriculum, we are going to need more of those opportunities, which allows for growth.”

A stronger “town-and-gown” relationship may also result in more students choosing to make the region their home after graduation.

“I think the best thing Newton can do to retain students in the community after they graduate is to give them the experiences while they are here,” White said.

The plan also recommends a similar partnership with Hutchinson Community College to provide adequate workforce training. Newton must keep up with workforce needs in order to attract new industries to the region.

Education Snapshot
We want our community to be recognized for the high quality of education we provide to all learners, pre-K though higher education.

We will make efforts to build strong community partnerships with Bethel College and Hutchinson Community College to bolster our connection to the arts, music, culture, and adult learning opportunities, as well as vocational education and workforce training.
Because of its prime location at the juncture of highways and railroads, transportation has always played a large role in Newton’s history. It seems transportation will be an important part of the city’s future as well, playing a key function in economic development efforts, and healthy lifestyle and sustainability initiatives.

“Newton was founded at the crossroads of the Santa Fe Railway and the Chisholm Trail,” Carl Harris, steering committee member, said. “The railroad needed to cross Kansas. They needed a reliable water source for their steam engines. Cattle ranchers needed the quickest route to get cattle to market. Newton’s location provided for both industries.

“The same thing occurs today. If there is not a means to transport goods and services, the place will die. Transportation infrastructure is essential to the growth of a community.”

Newton continues to be successful in economic development efforts in large part because of access to multiple modes of transportation. This was a major factor in Tindall Corporation’s decision to build its new facility here, giving City leaders evidence that investing in transportation infrastructure is good for the region’s economy.

**COMPLETE STREETS**

But in addition to continuing to improve Newton’s highways, rail lines, and local roads, The ReNewton Project explored several new transportation programs that could benefit its residents. Among those initiatives is the incorporation of a “complete streets” approach to the City’s codes, regulations, and construction standards.

“Complete streets” is a framework for cities to use when planning and designing streets so that new streets accommodate not only automobiles, but also
walkers and bikers,” said Tom Phillips, the consultant leading The ReNewton Project. “Using a complete streets approach also confirms the City’s commitment to children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.”

The plan encourages the City to look for ways to preserve and restore existing brick streets, explore funding to pave dirt streets, and adopt a formal policy on shared driveways and frontage roads.

**TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES**

Encouraging alternative forms of transportation was a common theme in ReNewton public forums, whether people were trying to protect the environment or improve public health.

Kauffman Museum Curator of Exhibits Chuck Regier sees improved planning for bike safety as the first step. But Regier said he believes attitudes will need to shift to make it socially acceptable for people to bike rather than drive.

“When somebody with a $3,000 bike and $300 worth of biking gear is out riding, that’s cool. But when some working-class person is going down the street on a bike, it might mean that they either can’t afford a car, or they’ve had a DUI or some other reason why they can’t have a driver’s license. And I know from my experience with some lower-income or immigrant families, there’s a real stigma against wanting to ride a bike. It looks like you haven’t made it. And I think that’s something that we can change,” Regier said.

**COMMUTER TRAIN**

One visionary idea to come out of the public forums is to create a commuter train connecting Newton to Wichita as a way to combat rising energy prices. The train would connect people to Wichita public transit to travel to their jobs or recreational, cultural, or entertainment offerings in the metro.

“I think you could definitely find individuals interested in a daily commuter train,” City Engineer Suzanne Loomis said. “They wouldn’t have to have a vehicle that was reliable all the time to drive back and forth. I think it’s definitely something we should pursue.”

**Transportation Snapshot**

Newton has the opportunity to benefit from both innovative and low-cost, healthy modes of transportation. We will:

- Continue to leverage Newton’s position at the crossroads of highways and rail lines as an asset, especially in conjunction with the new Kansas Logistics Park.
- Build roadways and a citywide trail system integrated with bicycle pathways and pedestrian walkways.
Having adequate housing at all income levels is a significant concern of those who participated in The ReNewton Project. Nearly 87 percent of respondents to a 2010 City survey report the City needs to address housing issues.

EMBRACING OLDER NEIGHBORHOODS

The comprehensive plan encourages the improvement and maintenance of older housing stock. Approximately 55 percent of North Newton and 83 percent of Newton housing stock (based on the 2000 census) is over 40 years old.

“We need affordable housing in Newton,” said steering committee member Barth Hague. “Rehabilitating older neighborhoods offers a dose of affordable housing that otherwise would not be available.”

Hague said older neighborhoods also offer a quality of life not found in outlying areas of town.

“Our older neighborhoods tend to be closer to downtown. They’re walkable. They’re green, if you will. That’s why I enjoy living in an older neighborhood here in Newton, simply because my wife and I are able to walk places,” Hague said. “So I would say one of the key reasons for preserving our older neighborhoods is to provide that kind of lifestyle option in our community.”

The comp plan recommends the City participate in state programs for first-time homebuyers and homeowner rehabilitation, as well as support nonprofit and faith-based organizations involved with housing repair. It also encourages the City to provide capital improvement funds for sidewalks, streetlights, curbs, and gutters, in addition to stormwater improvements and water line maintenance and upgrades for older neighborhoods.

The plan also says the City should remove extreme cases of visual blight and substandard housing.

PLANNING NEW HOUSING

When planning new housing districts, the plan encourages the City to design mixed-use developments, not just subdivision plats. This includes creating neighborhoods with a variety of housing — ranging from single-family residences to townhomes and apartments — as well as planning for parks and civic spaces, schools, fire stations, and neighborhood retail centers. Such neighborhoods should plan for pedestrian movement (sidewalks, linear trails, and bikeways), shade trees, and distinctive entry signage.
Foster the rehabilitation of older housing to keep these neighborhoods safe, attractive, and affordable.

Support efforts to help older citizens age in place.

Encourage linkage of older and newer parts of town through wellness trails.

ADDRESSING RENTALS

Nearly 40 percent of respondents to the City survey reported the community has a problem with rental housing, and 80 percent of respondents believe the City needs to deal with housing issues. Many young professionals and families who participated in the survey reported problems finding adequate rental housing to meet their wants and needs.

Thus, the comp plan encourages the City to create a task force to design a rental inspection or registration program, and to adopt the 2009 International Property Maintenance Code, to ensure rental properties meet certain basic standards.

MAXIMIZING SENIOR HOUSING

Although helping seniors age in place is not a traditional city government function, the Baby Boomer generation is aging along with much of the area’s housing stock. Therefore, the plan proposes that City leadership play a role in convening stakeholders from the fields of health care, public health, public transportation, social services, and welfare to encourage collaboration and coordination.

The plan also suggests zoning laws be adjusted to allow for multi-generational families to be housed together. Senior citizens can provide day care and general stability to neighborhoods, while young people can be of assistance to seniors. One option is to allow accessory dwelling units (private and complete housing units in or adjacent to single-family homes) and senior-friendly housing in neighborhoods zoned for single-family housing.

Lastly, for those seniors not able (or not wanting) to live on their own, the plan recommends that City leadership and the Chamber of Commerce work with Newton’s excellent retirement communities to market and promote retirement living options within the community. This also doubles as a form of economic development.

“There are a lot of amenities in Newton that are attractive to retirees,” said Cindy Vanover, executive director of Kidron Bethel Retirement Services, and ReNewton steering committee member. “First of all, you have the small-town environment. You have a wonderful medical community, you have easy parking, you have no freeways…it’s a wonderful environment for retirees.”

Housing Snapshot
Our vision ensures a broad choice of housing options for individuals at all economic levels and stages of life. We want to:

- Foster the rehabilitation of older housing to keep these neighborhoods safe, attractive, and affordable.
- Support efforts to help older citizens age in place.
- Encourage linkage of older and newer parts of town through wellness trails.
As we plan for the Newton of 2030, The ReNewton Project participants encouraged the City to be ahead of the curve, and adopt green practices sooner rather than later.

“Sustainability means focusing on enhanced energy and water efficiency, promoting clean and renewable energy initiatives, accommodating transportation modes less dependent on automobiles, reconsidering how we build, and even where we get our food,” said Tom Phillips, the consultant leading The ReNewton Project.

**MAKING CHANGES**

Among the plan’s goals are ways to conserve resources and protect the environment:

- Community development patterns that enable people to walk and bike *(discussed on page 16)*
- Green building projects
- Energy efficiencies
- Water conservation
- Recycling
- Transportation alternatives
- Urban agriculture (growing and distributing food in or near a city)
- Infrastructure efficiencies

The plan proposes that sustainability efforts be seen as a collaboration between the public and private sectors. Steering committee member Vern Miller pointed out that small investments can have a significant impact on the environment and the bottom line — for both the City and the taxpayers.

“If you lower the speed of a motor by 10 percent, you reduce your electrical consumption by an even greater percentage,” Miller said. “Something as simple as that can make a big difference.”

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**Sustainability Snapshot**

As we grow, we must seek out ways to integrate into all projects energy efficiencies, water conservation, recycling, and green architecture. Our vision emphasizes sustainable planning practices such as:

- Walkable neighborhoods.
- A variety of transportation and housing choices.
- Compact town growth.
- The promotion of environmentally friendly materials and technologies.

Farmers market makes locally grown produce accessible
Preserving Our Town Character

Through the public forums, citizens stressed that as the city grows, they don’t want Newton to lose its community character, sense of place, and emphasis on friendliness. Instead, people want to capitalize on Newton’s character in marketing the community.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

One frustration for many who spoke at the public forums is that local citizens don’t appreciate all that Newton has going for it. A common theme was that community members must do a better job of communicating internally all that’s going on — and going right — in Newton. Citizens need to be proud of where they live and advocate Newton’s strengths to outsiders.

Improving information-sharing is one goal of the plan. This includes improving communication between City Hall and the community, as well as establishing a collaborative leadership council to improve coordination and communication between groups working with transportation, social service delivery, health care, education, and housing.

The plan also calls for the preservation and development of community gathering places such as City parks, neighborhood schools, and playgrounds.

SHARING COMMUNITY PRIDE

Continuing to promote community pride is also discussed in the plan. Through organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and other nonprofits, the plan encourages the community to continue organizing events, encouraging volunteerism, and promoting interest in the city’s history.

Establishing and promoting historic neighborhood associations also will help people see the value of maintaining and revitalizing older neighborhoods, which give downtown Newton much of its charm.

“Newton has a rich character; we have an authentic heritage, and we owe it to our community to preserve that,” said Barb Burns, the City’s coordinator of community advancement. “Our architecture from the 1880s and beyond, our church architecture, our stained glass windows, our public art — all of those are part of our heritage, and while we’re looking at the future, those define our past, and it’s important to us to embrace that.”

Town Character Snapshot

We must balance our desire for growth with our equal desire to preserve our historical identity and character. We want to maintain our core values of family, faith, self-reliance, friendliness, security, and sense of community.
Newton is a community of many cultures and has great respect for cultural diversity and social cohesion. Still, factions exist, said participants in The ReNewton Project forums, and a lack of communication among groups is holding back true cohesion in the community. By the year 2014, it is predicted that nearly 20 percent of the Newton-North Newton community will be Hispanic or Latino.

“As the community becomes more diverse, it becomes even more important that all people feel welcome and part of the social fabric,” said Tom Phillips, the consultant leading The ReNewton Project. “This strengthens the community in cultural richness.”

COLLABORATING AND CELEBRATING

To further efforts to create a sense of belonging, the plan encourages the City to establish a collaborative leadership council to work on issues of communication, awareness, and inclusiveness among groups.

The community should also continue to celebrate its rich and varied history and heritage through events that recognize various cultures and faiths, and how the community was founded through contributions of many different ethnic and religious groups.

Through such steps, the community is illustrating its acceptance of all people to those considering making Newton home in the future, said Dan Heinze of Heinze Insurance.

“Being diverse and offering a progressive attitude is very beneficial, I think, to those who are seeking another place to locate,” Heinze said.

Diversity Snapshot

Our city is composed of people of various races, ethnic groups, religious faiths, social classes, and physical and mental abilities. We strive to be a community that respects diversity, values social cohesion, and encourages interaction between groups.

Newton High School’s Azteca Dance Troupe performs at an NHS reunion
In order to achieve many of its goals, The ReNewton Plan calls for a multiyear strategic marketing effort through the City, the Chamber of Commerce, and other local businesses and organizations.

“If we want to boost Newton’s image and be successful at sharing the vision within the community and the outside world, everyone will need to work together to craft a common message for communications,” said Kristin Brighton, a communications and marketing specialist from New Boston Creative Group, who served as a consultant for The ReNewton Project.

“This is about image building, not a short-term promotion. Everyone will need to be willing to commit to marketing the community over the long haul.”

COMMUNITY PRIDE
The plan’s first marketing goal is to increase civic pride among the citizens of Newton so they can become ambassadors for the community.

“We’ve heard over and over again through this process that it is common for Newton’s own residents to speak negatively about the community,” Brighton said. “That has to change. If the citizens are engaged and working for the good of the region, that will reinforce and authenticate the marketing.”

LOCAL SHOPPING
Marketing efforts will also aim to increase local shopping both by outsiders and locals. If residents do more of their shopping locally, then increases in sales tax revenue can help enhance community amenities and meet other goals of the plan.

“We aren’t asking people never to shop online or drive into Wichita,” said Barb Burns, community advancement coordinator. “We’re just encouraging people to patronize local stores when they can.”

MAIN STREET
Another goal is to market Newton’s Main Street as an attraction (see page 12). Once downtown is revamped into an inviting shopping and entertainment district, not only will locals be more apt to spend time and money there, but it will draw in outsiders from Wichita and beyond.

“Downtown has the potential to be an attraction in and of itself,” Burns said. “It is a win-win, providing funds for both economic development efforts and new amenities to the region.”
So now we have a 150-page comprehensive plan, complete with a suggested timetable and a string of recommendations. Where do we start? How do we bring this blueprint to life?

Tom Phillips, ReNewton consultant, says the power is within the community. “We can go through this entire process, get hundreds of people involved, write the best plan in the world,” Phillips said. “But ultimately, it is up to the citizens to make it come true — by electing leaders who share and promote the vision, sharing your opinions with commissioners, and actively working to make parts of the plan a reality.”

“We need ownership and support from our broad community,” said Community Advancement Coordinator Barb Burns. “A wonderful group of very dedicated people created the vision, pulled the words together. Now it’s time to get a broad spectrum of residents plugged into what it means to take Newton to the next level.”

SHARING THE VISION

Communicating the vision is the first step. That is why the City invested in creating this magazine and its companion website, www.renewtonkansas.com. “We’ve had a lot of people involved in this process and making sure that we have a really
great plan,” said Erin McDaniel, Newton’s public information officer. “But it’s really important for us to get that story out to people, as well as having our elected and appointed officials really embrace it and make sure they are using it as they are making decisions about the city’s development and growth.”

MAKING IT FUN
Participants also suggested presenting the vision in a way that will inspire people to become involved.
“I think it has to be fun. People have lots of other things to do, and if you do something out of guilt or a sense of drudgery or responsibility, it’s often not as good as when it’s fun,” said Chuck Regier, curator of exhibits for Kauffman Museum. “I think when the community comes together, and starts doing things together — you know, maybe it’s a community-wide bike ride to raise awareness about bicycling. Or a garden on the front courthouse lawn to show that we could be gardening. Some of these kinds of high-visibility projects that let people know that change is coming and can get people involved.”
“You really need to create a sense of excitement throughout the entire community about the possibilities for Newton,” said Cindy Vanover, executive director at Kidron Bethel Retirement Services. “There needs to be a sense of optimism and energy around what Newton really is now, and pride in what it is now, and what it can be in the next 20 years.”

GETTING RESULTS
Committee members also said that results will be important in getting residents involved.
“We’ve got to get the plan in front of people’s eyes,” Vern Miller, steering committee member, said. “And for people to do anything, they have to see it and they have to believe in it.”
Assistant City Manager Tim Johnson agreed that seeing results of the project will be critical to bringing it to life. He said the City will use ReNewton Project-branded signage to designate projects in future years that are an outcome of the plan.
“It could be a small project, a mill and overlay on a local street. It could be a large project, such as a new business or new manufacturing facility at the Kansas Logistics Park. It could be a quality-of-life project, such as an enhancement to one of the community’s parks, or it could be a small-business support project,” Johnson said. “Each and every one of these is an example of bringing The ReNewton Project to life.”

RECRUITING CHAMPIONS
Once people know about the plan, the next step will be getting them to take ownership of it.
“We need engaged members of the community to step up and champion projects they are passionate about,” Burns said. “Without strong leadership, it will never come to life.”
“We inherited a wonderful community,” Johnson said. “It is our job as community leaders to seek ways to make it better and more beautiful than we inherited it. That is our challenge, and I think Newton is up to it.”

Leadership Snapshot
Our vision requires a consistent and long-term commitment from local leaders and members of the community to keep these values in mind when making decisions. We all must acknowledge that changing conditions will require changes to specific details of the plan.
Help Spread the Word!
When you are finished reading ReNewton 2030 magazine, please pass it along to others who care about our community.

renewtonkansas.com

HEAR YOUR NEIGHBORS DISCUSS THE PLAN AT: