
CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter summarizes the findings of the comprehensive planning study conducted through a partnership between the city of Noble and the OU Planning Team during Fall 2006. The OU Planning Team is made up of students enrolled in the OU graduate programs in Regional and City Planning and Landscape Architecture. The complete findings and description of the study process are detailed in Chapters 2-5 and in the Appendices. The findings summarized below are the product of the OU Planning Team, who takes all responsibility for any errors or omissions.

These findings are the basis for the Vision and Action Statements found in Chapter 7. The contents of Chapter 7 that are dated January 2007 represent the OU Planning Team's recommendations as of the comprehensive planning study process to date. Some modifications to the Vision and Action Statements are likely to occur during the city planning commission's and the city council's discussion and, if and when appropriate, adoption of the plan.

Noble: From Past to Future

Noble's status as an 1889 land run city has bestowed it with a 160-acre original town plat in a grid of east-west and north-south streets and narrow residential lots. Thus, Noble has a small, but "traditional" downtown, and many of its key institutional buildings remain located in or near the original town plat. As a speculative city founded with high aims, it did not reach its goals. Floods of the Canadian River and fires in its downtown also stymied Noble's development in its early years. Noble remained a small village while Norman became the county seat and largest city in the county. At first, good railroad access and highway access tied Noble into the rest of the region. However, the Canadian River on the city's western border, first seen as an advantage, became a barrier to Noble's easy integration to the growing region when I-35 was built west of the Canadian River.

Despite its relative isolation from the interstate highway system, Noble began attracting significant population growth in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Its total area grew to 8,309 acres, according to the study's mapping of existing land uses. 3,790 acres are developed, with 3,160 acres in residential use. 4,519 are considered undeveloped. Population growth slowed in the 1990s. Although the city's population increased during this decade, calculations indicate the city actually experienced net out-migration. Permitting for new residential development since 2000 indicate that the slower growth of the 1990s may not be the future trend.

City of Families

The new population that Noble began attracting in the 1960s was, by and large, living in family households. Recently, the city's average household size is declining, but is still larger than the average household size for both Cleveland County and the state. Its proportions of family households and married-couple households are greater than these proportions for the county and the state. Greater too is its percentage of female householders, including female householders with children.

Population Projections

The 2005 population estimate is 5,782 people residing within the city of Noble. To get this estimate, the study used residential building permit data from 2000-2005 to update the population total from the 2000 Census. The study then used three different methods to project future population: the cohort survival method, the city/county ratio method, and the building permit method. They produced population projections ranging from 900 additional people to 1,900 additional people between 2005 and 2025. (See Chapter 2 for more details on population projections methods.)

Which of the three population projections are most likely? The first and second method described above, being dependent on the same set of fertility and survival rates and the 1990-2000 net migration rates at the city or county level, yield similar forecasts. The 1990s were not a "boom" time for the city, yielding modest growth projections. The building permit forecast method captures the recent upswing in residential development and in-migration, and assumes it will continue. If the residential building continues to be single-family houses, Noble could expect to continue to attract families with working age adults. The implications, on the other hand, of the age-cohort forecast method is that Noble's existing population will age and will therefore increase demand for the types of housing and services that support an aging population. If not supplied, an increase in out-migration might result. In addition, as the population ages, there will be an increasing supply of existing, aging and affordable housing for new families. It is possible, even likely, that Noble will experience the dynamics found in both forecast methods. New housing development will continue to attract new families, while at the same time the existing population will age. *The study assumes that Noble's population will grow and that the average age will increase.*

While these three projections are useful, they are based on past trends. They do not take into account external factors or circumstances that could influence the rate of population growth in the future. Growth can be strongly influenced by actual or perceived conditions relating to the local economy and business climate, social and cultural factors, the environment and a number of quality-of-life issues. Noble serves as a bedroom community on the outskirts of large metropolitan area and thus competes with other similarly located communities. For example, since Noble is

predominantly a city of families, the quality of schools compared to surrounding school districts will probably influence the choices families make when they decide whether to move to or to stay in Noble. By the same token, the quality of family-oriented recreational opportunities, such as parks and playgrounds, may affect future location decisions. Access to jobs throughout the metropolitan region, through convenient and affordable transportation, may affect future location decisions, especially with uncertain gasoline prices. Noble has attracted those who desire opportunities for entrepreneurship through small businesses. Noble’s business climate and capacity for job growth may influence location decisions for families and businesses. A range of issues, from water quality to crime levels, will bear on people’s location decisions.

2025 Future Growth Scenarios

For planning purposes, this study uses *three 2025 Future Growth Scenarios* and examines how each interacts with land development and infrastructure. The low scenario, 1000 additional people or 375 additional households, corresponds to the first two forecast methods. The medium scenario, 2000 additional people or 750 additional households, corresponds to the building permit forecast method. The high scenario, 4000 additional people or 1,500 additional households, assumes an increasing number of building permits issued annually. The high scenario serves to test the capacity of Noble’s available land and infrastructure.

Table 6.1 Summary of the 2025 Future Growth Scenarios and Their Implications for Housing, Infrastructure and Services

Implications of the Scenarios	2025 Future Growth Scenarios		
	Low	Medium	High
Additional Population	1,000	2,000	4,000
Additional Households	375	750	1,500
Additional Population 70 years or older	150	300	600
Units of Additional Single-Family Detached Houses, Assuming 2000 Housing Composition	295	592	1,185
Units of Additional Other Housing, Assuming 2000 Housing Composition	80	158	315
Need for Neighborhood Parks	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet
Need for Active Outdoor Recreation Space	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet
Capacity of Sewer Treatment	Met	Met	Met
Capacity of Water Supply	Met	Met	Unmet
Capacity of Schools	Unmet	Unmet	Unmet

Housing

Single-family, Detached Housing in Demand

Noble's housing stock is mostly made up of single-family, detached houses. They make up over 80% of occupied housing units and maintain a notably high occupancy rate, approaching 100% occupancy in 2000. Other types of housing – mobile homes, duplexes, and apartments – have much lower occupancy rates. This indicates a higher demand for single-family housing than for other housing types. It also might indicate unmet demand for single-family detached dwellings. Indeed, since 2000 Noble began to experience a spurt in new housing development, which has already, in fall 2006, outpaced the growth in housing units during the 1990s.

Vacancies in Multi-family Housing

The high number of vacant, for rent housing – significantly higher than Cleveland County or state vacancy rates – is a concern and may be representative of the declining condition of rental units. A visual survey of housing in Noble results in the conclusion that some apartment units have not been well maintained and that some have indeed fallen into disrepair. Absentee landlords can often be a factor in declining conditions due to lack of concern and/or inability to provide maintenance. About 15 percent of the housing structures sampled in the Noble Housing Quality Survey (see below) have owners with mailing addresses outside Noble.

Noble's Downtown Neighborhood

Additional analysis of Noble's downtown neighborhood, roughly the original town plat, in comparison to the entire city and other housing subdivisions showed less difference in this area than expected. Using 2000 data, the population in Noble's downtown neighborhood is older and more likely to live alone. They also have significantly lower household income, which is related, in part, to the residents' age and household status. There were also a higher percentage of renter households than compared to the entire city. The median value of owner-occupied housing was also much lower downtown, almost 28% lower, than when compared to the rest of the city. Still, the vacancy was actually slightly lower than the city's overall vacancy rate.

Housing of Average Condition and Quality

The Noble Housing Quality Survey, which looked at data collected by the Cleveland County Assessor's office, found that the overwhelming majority of housing in Noble has been rated in average *condition* and average *quality*. Condition is a relative measure, so "average" here means that its condition is typical of structures of similar type, construction or age. Noble's downtown neighborhood did have more housing rated in below average condition than in the sampled subdivisions (9% versus 3.4%). The housing quality ratings, which are a measure of housing materials and

construction methods, however, showed little difference between the downtown and Noble's other housing subdivisions.

The Challenge of an Aging Housing Stock

Although Noble's downtown neighborhood has some of the oldest housing in Noble, dating back to 1910, most of its housing was built in the 1960s meaning that, on average, the downtown housing is not that much older than the housing in Noble's other housing additions. A significant proportion of *all* of Noble's housing will be passing into its third and fourth decade over the next ten to fifteen years. Thus, much of Noble's housing stock has already reached or will soon reach the critical age when, without close attention to maintenance, significant deterioration may begin. Such maintenance may also cause additional cost burdens to lower income owners.

Noble's Relative Affordability

Noble's housing, for both buyers and renters, was more affordable than for the county and state overall and more affordable than most of the selected comparison communities in 2000. That Noble's median income is higher than many, though not all, of these comparison areas makes it even more of an affordable place in the region. However, the value of owner-occupied housing did not increase as fast during the 1990s as it did in some neighboring communities, perhaps putting current or prospective owners looking to increase the investment value of their housing at a relative disadvantage.

Housing Problems for Renters

Although Noble is a relatively affordable place to find housing, housing problems still exist. Over a quarter of renter households and over 15% of owner households experienced some housing problems in 2000. Cost was the biggest problem, but 30% of renters with housing problems experienced problems not associated with cost. They suffered from overcrowding or the lack of complete kitchen or plumbing facilities. This is another indication, along with the low occupancy rate in multi-family housing, that a significant percentage of Noble's rental housing may be becoming obsolete.

Households are considered cost burdened if they pay more than 30% of their income on housing. Nearly 20% of Noble's renter households and nearly 14% of owner households were cost burdened in 2000. The percent of owner households who were cost burdened fell as income increased. This typical pattern, however, did not hold for Noble's renter households. Most of the cost burdened renter households had income in the 30 to 50% Median Family Income (MFI) range, not the lowest range. All renter households made up of small families (two to four members) in the 30-50% MFI income range suffered from housing problems and 84% were cost

burdened. This indicates a weakness in the supply of rental housing affordable to these families.

The Need to Expand Housing Options for an Aging Population

Noble's current housing facilities for its elderly population are operating at capacity. Populations projections show a growing number of residents 70 years and older in the coming decades. The low, medium, and high 2025 Future Growth Scenarios call for additional housing for 150, 300, or 600 additional Noble residents age 70 years or older. While many will prefer to live in single-family houses, some will look for housing options that require less maintenance and that provide other services. Although Noble's current multi-family housing options have a higher vacancy rate, these may not be in adequate supply or suitable condition to house an aging population.

Adequate Land for Future Housing Needs

Noble's 4,519 undeveloped acres means that reaching full build out of city land in the next twenty years is not a large concern. This is especially true if most housing is built in single-family neighborhoods of three to five houses per acre and served by municipal sewer and water. If Noble attracts a significant amount of rural-estate type housing developments (with lots in the one to ten acre range) full build out could be approached in the next twenty years.

See Chapter 3 for more information on Noble's housing.

Economy

Workers Absorbed into Regional Economy

Noble's population, by and large, does not work in Noble. In 2000, Noble's employed population numbered 2,615, while private sector employment in the Noble zip code numbered 1,051. Noble's population earns, in terms of median household income, more than the state figure, but less than the county figure. However, in the 1990s, Noble pulled even further ahead of the state median income and gained on the county median income. Noble's poverty rates also declined in the 1990s and the city posts the lowest poverty rates among its comparison communities, even given its percentage of female householders and female householders with children. While Noble's household income may be more modest than surrounding communities, its level of poverty is also less severe.

Noble's economy is inextricably linked to that of the larger region. The occupations and industries of most employed Noble residents appear, in the short run at least, to be in the stable or growth sectors of the Oklahoma City metropolitan area economy. Noble's strength in construction employment and establishments, in the short run, also appears to match well the region's economic sectors that are growing. Noble's

large percentage of small business establishments and relatively few large employers has advantages and disadvantages. Small businesses show an entrepreneurial spirit, but are also risky ventures. Large employers provide a community more stability, until something goes wrong, in which case the effects can be serious. The different vulnerabilities of both are somewhat mitigated by the fact that Noble's population, as a whole, is not dependent on these businesses for their jobs.

Additional Opportunities for Commercial Development

US 77/Main St is the obvious location for designating additional areas for commercial development in Noble. The corridor contains Noble's traditional downtown and a suburban-style commercial strip to the north of downtown. It is also Noble's most highly traveled street. One of the challenges of expanding commercial development in this area is finding sites of adequate size to host modern commercial development. The expansion of US 77 to four lanes south of Noble's downtown provides an opportunity for expanding the commercial strip to the south. The expansion may, however, put additional stress on the traditional "Main St."-type retail in Noble's downtown core, as there will be more through traffic and parking may be lost. Potential new areas of commercial development in the corridor may also compete with existing commercial development. Improving the appearance of commercial development in the entire corridor may also enhance commercial development.

Providing for neighborhood commercial uses at key intersections outside of the US 77/Main St. corridor may also provide additional opportunities for expanded commercial development.

Commercial Development Expands the Sales Tax Base

Currently, Noble residents spend their consumer dollars to a large extent outside of Noble. Noble city government gathers far less, per capita, on sales tax revenue that most of the surrounding communities. Providing for additional commercial development that keeps sales tax dollars in Noble will help the city to provide for municipal services desired by the existing population and to expand existing services to meet the needs of an expanding and aging population.

Types of Commercial Services Noble Community Members Desire

Noble community members want more shops and restaurants. It was the most frequent response to the Noble Community Survey's open-ended question asking community members about one thing they would like to change about Noble. Specifically, they would like to see more upscale restaurants, more fast food restaurants, more clothing stores and shops selling books, music, novelties, furniture and hardware. They see local banking, financial, and personal care services as

currently adequate and appear to prefer to acquire their legal, insurance and many of their medical services outside of Noble.

Keeping Industrial Development Compatible with Surrounding Land Uses

Noble's industrial land, according to input from the community, appears adequate to meet future needs. Community members expressed concern about the location of Noble's industrial land uses, as some are located near residences, school and park areas. Conflicts between these residentially focused land uses and the industrial land uses may increase as the park areas develop and attract more users. The city may have to consider additional regulatory measures to address these conflicts.

Incorporating Cultural Resources, including "Small Town Feel," into Noble's Economic Strategy

Developing cultural resources are a way to increase the quality of life for Noble's existing residents and to attract new visitors and residents to the Noble community. Noble's "small town feel" is a vital part of Noble's social culture and extremely important to Noble community members. Noble's status as a small city, and also Noble's Land Run history and its original town plat contribute to this "small town feel." Noble's Rose Rocks, the Rose Rock Museum and the Rose Rock Festival; Noble's historic buildings and the Noble Historical Society Museum; and Noble's parks, library and a future community center are also potential cultural resources for Noble.

See Chapters 2 and 4 for more information on Noble's economy and economic infrastructure.

Natural Infrastructure

Riparian Areas and Water Bodies are Assets and Areas of Concern

Cross Timbers define the various ecoregions to which the city of Noble belongs. Most of Noble's streams and creeks flow into the Canadian River, although a portion of Noble drains northeast into Lake Thunderbird. Both the Canadian River and Lake Thunderbird are considered "impaired" waters and excessive nutrients from run-off are the main culprit. The Canadian River and several of the creeks in Noble are prone to flooding at the 100-year level. The Canadian River is also a "Very High Priority Conservation Landscape" according to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife. To the extent that future population growth and its associated land development increase Noble's impervious surface area, increased water run-off may worsen surface water quality and flooding. Noble community members expressed support for maintaining the integrity of riparian areas during the second community meeting's land use mapping exercise.

Parks and Recreation

More Parks and Recreational Facilities Desired

Noble community members expressed strong interest, throughout the comprehensively planning study process, in bringing additional park and recreational opportunities to Noble. Community members identified three areas where improvements are desired: more parks, a community center, and more sidewalks.

Current thinking about park planning encourages small communities such as Noble to have neighborhood parks easily accessible to most residents and at least one community park. Riley Park currently serves Noble's community park needs and Kenneth King Park, when developed, could also meet community park needs. Dane Park, when developed, is more suitable as a neighborhood park, although if connected to Kenneth King Park, it could bolster this latter park as a community park. The significant natural features in both Riley Park and Kenneth King Park pose challenges to developing either one of them as a full-scale community park that provides for active (sports) recreation. Additional neighborhood parks that would serve existing housing in north-central and central Noble would increase Noble's park assets. The expanding population under the Future Growth Scenarios may also seek to be served by neighborhood parks.

Community Center

The Noble School Administration Building serves as an unofficial community center. While its central location and existing facilities support this unofficial designation, the strong interest Noble residents expressed for a community center, featuring indoor and outdoor recreation and meeting places, indicate that in the long run *a stand alone community center complex is desired.*

Transportation

Two Networks Define Noble's Street and Highway System

The analysis of Noble's transportation system showed that two different traffic patterns dominate Noble's streets and highway. The first is based on US 77/Main St as the backbone that connects Noble's neighborhoods to the regional highway system. As a major traffic route, it is also, not surprisingly, Noble's commercial corridor. The second traffic pattern is focused on Noble's schools. Because Noble's schools, even at the elementary level, are divided by grade-level, not neighborhood, each school serves the entire district. The traffic focused on the schools is not as dependent on US 77/Main St., but puts stress on the section line roads. The east-west section line roads, especially Etowah and Maguire, are crucial elements of both the "regional" and the "school" traffic pattern networks.

Community Members Concerned about Walking and Bicycling

Community members' significant concerns for sidewalks, especially as they would enhance safe access to the schools, indicate a desire for multiple ways – or transportation modes – to navigate around Noble. Additional facilities for walking and bicycling would also meet community members' desires for more recreational opportunities.

Future Expansion of US 77 a Significant Opportunity, But One with Challenges

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation's plans to widen US 77 south of Noble's downtown will be a significant change to Noble's transportation infrastructure, to Noble's connectivity to the region, and to Noble's downtown. Done with careful planning, the highway expansion can enhance Noble in many ways. This careful planning needs to include the effects of the expansion on Noble's traditional downtown area. See Appendix 4 and Appendix 5 for additional discussion of this important topic.

Noble Public Schools**Schools – Loved, Crowded and Expanding**

The Noble Public Schools are extremely important to community members' quality of life and second on the Top Ten List of one thing community members like about Noble. Enrollment in the school district is growing. The property tax base upon which the school district depends is also increasing. Still, the schools are crowded, requiring the use of modular buildings to meet overflow needs.

Water, Sewer and Municipal Services**Water and Sewer Capacity Adequate for Now, Some Challenges in Long Run**

The analysis of water and sewer capacity indicate that the sewer treatment facility has adequate capacity to meet the high 2025 Future Growth Scenario. Water supply appears adequate to meet the low and medium 2025 Future Growth Scenarios, but not the high scenario (4,000 additional people).

Community Members Concerned about Water Service

While community members expressed satisfaction with the city's sewer service, water service problems and consumer dissatisfaction surfaced in the Noble Community Survey and during the community meetings. Concerns varied, with taste, pressure and cost leading the list.

Residential Expansion – With and Without Municipal Water and Sewer Service

Currently, municipal water and sewer do not serve large areas of eastern Noble. The expense of providing municipal water and sewer to the lower density residential developments that typifies this area inhibits service expansion, although without

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such service, lower density residential development patterns (greater than one-acre lots) are required to safely support private wells and septic systems. Noble is in no danger of reaching full build out in the next twenty years unless it must depend on rural estate-type residential developments on private wells and septic systems (see Table 3.13). The coordinated planning of water and sewer extensions with higher density residential development (less than one-acre lots) can help Noble out of this conundrum.

Summary of Community Members Satisfaction with other Municipal Services

Community members expressed satisfaction with police, fire, garbage collection and health services. They requested additional opportunities to recycle household waste. A small number voiced specific complaints with internet service.

Service Delivery and Future Growth Scenarios

As Noble's population grows and ages, the city will either have to maintain and expand existing infrastructure and services or community members will be faced with service decline. Discussions regarding additional park and recreation space, including the desired community center, should take Noble's potential future demographic profile and residential development patterns into account. Police, fire, emergency and health services will also face increasing demands. The school district will be looking to update and expand its facilities too. Water and sewer service will need to be expanded, perhaps testing the available capacity of existing infrastructure. The roads will experience additional traffic and new demands for walking and bicycling.

See Chapter 5 for more information on Noble's natural, physical and social infrastructure.

Maps Prepared for Noble 2025 Analysis

The OU Planning team prepared seven maps as part of the analysis process. These maps are described below and presented immediately following this chapter. The plan maps are presented in Chapter 7.

Noble Land Cover Circa 1871: This map, prepared by the Oklahoma Biological Survey, shows Noble before the Land Run. Most of the area is in grassland with the creeks and rivers surrounded by forest woodland and riparian woodland. A cattle trail bisects the area.

Base Map: The base map shows Noble's streets, water bodies, parks and institutions as of October 2006.

Existing Land Use Map: This map, prepared by the OU Planning Team, describes Noble's land uses as of October 2006. It uses data gathered from the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, the city of Noble, and team observation.

Existing Zoning Map: This map shows the zoning classifications of Noble's zoning ordinance currently used to designate the permitted uses of city land. Noble's official zoning map is the source.

Waterline Map: This map details the extent of Noble's current municipal water service area with different pipe-widths shown in different colors. The OU Planning Team prepared this map using city of Noble data.

Sewerline Map: This map details the extent of Noble's current sewer service area with different pipe-widths shown in different colors. The OU Planning Team prepared this map using city of Noble data.

Transportation Hotspots Map: This map is a compilation of all the maps received during the first community meeting's "Transportation Hotspots" mapping exercise. Participants were asked to identify places where they experienced fear of accidents, had concerns about pedestrian safety and thought speeding was a problem.