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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Douglas County releases draft Open Space Plan

Project team to host community meeting Feb. 19 at Zoning and Codes building

LAWRENCE, Kan. – Building on countywide input and Plan 2040, the draft “*Douglas County Open Space Plan: Preserving Douglas County’s Future Together,*” is now available for the public to review. The plan is a local effort intended to identify voluntary land conservation options and partnerships, and foster appreciation and access to nature for future generations.

The County will host a public meeting at 6 p.m. Monday, Feb. 19, in the Douglas County Zoning and Codes Building, 3755 E. 25th St. It will also be available by Zoom. The meeting will begin with a presentation to review highlights of the draft plan. Attendees can then ask questions in an open house format.

The Open Space Plan will also be the topic of a work session with the Board of County Commissioners at 4 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 14, at the County Courthouse, 1100 Massachusetts St. The meeting is open to the public and will be available by Zoom.

Comments are being accepted through Feb. 25. To provide comment, find meeting information, and view the plan, visit: <http://dgcoks.org/openspace>.

The plan provides community-supported vision and values for open space conservation in Douglas County, criteria for the consideration of open space protection, phased program recommendations, County priority projects for short-term progress, and tools for long-term implementation.

The plan features photos from community members who participated in the Open Space Photo Challenge. On the cover is an aerial view of the Kansas River just east of Lawrence in 2019. The photo was captured by Lisa Grossman, who was the grand winner of the challenge.

The plan elevates eight characteristics of land that are priorities for conservation:

- Native plant communities
- Riparian corridors
- Floodplain and floodways
- Historic and cultural sites

- Working agriculture lands and high-quality soils
- Potential for restoration and stewardship
- Public access or connection to recreational, educational or cultural opportunities
- Proximity to existing protected and wildlife corridors

The plan also recommends that proactive conservation decision-making considers resilience to changing climate, equity in access, agency collaboration, matching resources, scenic significance, public safety and multiplied co-benefits.

The opportunity for an Open Space Plan was identified in “Plan 2040: A Comprehensive Plan for Unincorporated Douglas County and the City of Lawrence,” which was adopted in 2019. That same year, Douglas County committed to the development of an Open Space Plan by a charter.

The Open Space project team includes Douglas County staff from Sustainability, Zoning and Codes, Heritage Conservation and Communications, environmental planning and design consulting firm Logan Simpson and communications strategists Coneflower Consulting.

Community input has shaped the vision and recommendations of the plan. A deliberate and sustained effort was made to fully understand community interests across Douglas County. Outreach included community meetings, open houses, focus groups, interviews, site visits, more than 1,000 surveys submitted by mail and online, a photo contest, and Commission meeting presentations. The project team has worked closely with an advisory committee of stakeholders since early 2023.

“We hope this plan captures the diverse community perspectives shared with us and provides direction on how the County can best support the conservation of our valuable and vital natural and cultural spaces into the future,” Sustainability Manager Kim Criner Ritchie said.

The project team plans to seek adoption of the plan by the Board of County Commissioners this spring. For information about the Open Space Plan, visit: <http://dgcoks.org/openspace>.

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