

Chapter Two: Community Character

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter, documenting elements of the community's demographics, social institutions, and events - its "character" - begins the connection from Concordia's past to its future. What is "character"? An Ohio city's comprehensive plan defined community character as "the sum of all the attributes and assets that make a community unique, and that establish a sense of place for its residents." Residents of Concordia have much to be proud of from their past and their present. The following narrative helps identify the context for which subsequent chapters will build upon to create vision for the future of Concordia.

2.2 ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY CHARACTER - PEOPLE & EVENTS

Concordia is a rural-character community that has remained stable for a number of years. It is a community where people know each other, know each other's families and feel safe. Citizens enjoy the benefits of a community with a rich cultural history, agricultural roots, historical buildings and new commercial development. With a strong downtown, good retail services, good educational institutions and a local full-service hospital, people in Concordia have good reason to be proud of the community. Many people in the U.S. would like to have such an atmosphere, and at the same time have Concordia's access to metropolitan areas via four-lane highways.

Special events celebrated community-wide in Concordia, often in the downtown, are important aspects of the community's character. One very special event in the



community is Fall Fest held the fourth Saturday in September. With a parade, special entertainment, retail and craft displays downtown, it is a great family event that lasts all day. Former residents often return to Concordia for this community “homecoming”.

Like many communities in Kansas, holidays and other community celebrations become common experience for citizens, connecting them to each other across different backgrounds, ages and interests. Among the annual events and observances in the community are the following: In January the Chamber of Commerce holds its annual dinner, followed by a Bridal Fair in February. An egg hunt in City Park occurs each Easter, put on by a local church. May has Memorial Day which is celebrated with "Avenue of Flags" in Pleasant Hill Cemetery, put on by the American Legion and VFW. The 4th of July brings a fireworks display and the Concordia Music Fest brings music outdoors to the City Park each August. The Cloud County Fair brings people from around the area to the fairgrounds to see livestock, arts and crafts displays, and races. The calendar ends with the Christmas Craft Bazaar each December. The event is a fundraiser for holiday street lighting in the downtown area and along US-81 Highway. That lighting is possible through the efforts of a volunteer group, the Lighting Committee. In addition to these annual events there are appreciation dinners, health fairs, the farmers' market and other gatherings which collectively help make up the character of Concordia.

2.3 VISION

Concordia envisions a growing, vibrant community, with its institutions supporting the community members and enhancing their lives in all aspects: mentally, physically, spiritually and socially.

2.4 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Government

The City of Concordia governing body is elected at-large and is comprised of five commissioners, one of whom is appointed mayor annually. Concordia has adopted the city manager form of government and has 56 total employees. City Hall, located at 7th & Washington, houses various City offices, commission chambers and Municipal Court, and a community room.



City Services

Water and sewer provision are among the services provided by the city. The city's Utility Department takes care of water distribution, the sanitary sewer system, with billing done by the Finance Department. The Utility Department is

also responsible for monitoring of the wells that feed the water system. Goals of this department include replacing aging infrastructure, particularly where repeated water line breaks indicate the life of the line is exhausted. Two examples of such are the E. Sixth Street area, between Spruce & Matthew Streets, as well as additional replacement of aging water infrastructure downtown. With regards to sanitary sewers, an ongoing department goal is being cognizant of changing state and federal regulations to ensure compliance. Replacement of portions of the sanitary sewer system is also needed.

The Public Works Department provides street and alley maintenance, constructs sidewalks, removes snow, etc. This department is also responsible for maintenance of community parks, recreation complex and the cemetery. In recent years, this department has completed the replacement of sidewalk at intersections, removing stand-up curbing and replacing it with accessible ramps. Another recent project was the replacement of all lighting in traffic signals to reduce energy consumption. On-going goals include continuing a slurry seal program of fifty blocks annually. In 2007 a paving machine was acquired allowing the department to overlay streets every year resulting in excellent maintenance. There is additional information about the Public Works Department in Chapter 6 of this Plan.

Community Development services include planning, zoning, building and nuisance code enforcement. Concordia has adopted and enforced national construction standards for remodeling and new construction projects. Currently the adopted codes are the 2006 International Codes, Building Code, Plumbing Code, Mechanical/Fuel Code, Residential Code, Life Safety Code and the 2008 National Electric Code. A current goal in this department is having additional staffing for more nuisance code enforcement.

The Concordia Police Department supervises law enforcement, animal control and city/county dispatch activities. The Concordia police station is located on West 6th Street, at the west end of downtown. There are presently 11 certified law enforcement officers and seven other staff for animal control, dispatch and support. In 2010, the police department underwent some restructuring to ensure appropriate administration and supervision existed throughout the department. New animal control systems were also put into place and adoptions increased by 150%. Upcoming items include implementing community policy objectives, enabling new grant opportunities, particularly for equipment and personnel in the future. The department will continue to seek non-lethal equipment, additional equipment upgrades in vehicles, and replacement of vehicles beginning in 2012. In the long term, new facilities may be considered in order to house more public safety operations at a single location.

Concordia's Fire Department is responsible for fire prevention, fire suppression, and provides ambulance services as well. The station is adjacent to City Hall and is served by eight full-time and twelve volunteer personnel, five of whom are

shift qualified. The department is well equipped with nearly all of the large fire apparatus purchased over the last ten years, primarily with local funds, although CDBG funds were used for the most recent pumper truck purchase. In the future, a new ambulance will need to be purchased. Grants have also enabled a variety of other equipment to be purchased. Assistance of Firefighter grants, in 2008, 2009, and 2010, enabled purchase of bunker gear, new hoses and nozzles, and new SCBA gear, bringing the equipment up to good standards. One piece of equipment identified as a future goal is an air filtration system. Another goal is to increase the number of shift qualified volunteers, creating better flexibility and reducing concerns about shortages of firefighters. The current ISO rating in Concordia is 5.

Education Providers

USD 333

There are four public schools serving students in Concordia: Concordia Elementary School, Middle School, Junior High and High School. The USD 333 Board of Education is currently conducting a strategic planning process, and several goals have already emerged from that process. The first is to have FEMA-approved shelters in all of the buildings, particularly the elementary school as it does not have any underground shelter. In addition, there is a need to modernize the Junior/Senior High buildings, which are the oldest in the district.



USD 333 Academic Success

Students at Concordia schools performed well in 2010 state assessments with 90.2% scoring proficient in reading and 89.1% scoring proficient in math. Concordia High School has a graduation rate of 94.2%. Ten-year accreditation was achieved in early 2011. USD 333 has an overall attendance rate of 95.4%. CHS has had 32 students named as National Merit Scholars, with the first named in 1967 and the most recent in 2010. Forty-five CHS students have been designated as Commended National Merit Scholars, first in 1966 and the most recent in 2011. CHS has had two students named Jack Kent Cooke Scholars. The district has made a commitment to technology access and tools for all staff and students. Each student in grades 9-12 and all certified staff members have laptop computers. Mobile carts and additional computers are available for students in grades K-6, as well as SmartBoard technology. All USD 333 facilities are wireless.



School Buildings & Programs

Concordia Senior High School – Concordia High School opened in 1930, with additions or major renovations in

1956, 1968, 1969 and 1972. School year 2010-11 enrollment is 342 students, grades 9-12, with approximately 50 certified teachers and 25 non-certified staff members. Concordia High School is very proud to have been recognized for its 100 years of continuous accreditation from the North Central Accreditation organization. The Concordia Junior/Senior High School offers a wide variety of college prep courses and career and technical education courses. Concordia High School competes at the 4A level in KSHSAA sponsored extra-curricular activities. More than 35 extra-curricular sports, clubs and activities are available for students.

Concordia Junior High School – CJHS is co-located with the High School, sharing the gymnasiums, but having separate classroom areas. The 2010-11 enrollment for grades 7-8 is 143, with 15 teachers and staff. The Junior High also shares staff with the high school.

Concordia Middle School – The building housing the Middle School was purchased by USD 333 in 1971 and offers diverse and separate learning opportunities for fifth and sixth grade students. This building was acquired from the local Catholic Church and was formerly a private school. It allows pods for the grades in the middle school and was built in 1963. There are 173 students enrolled in these two grades in the 2010-11 school year. In addition to the core classes, students are assigned to classes that include technology, library, art, vocal music, band and physical education. The



staff consists of 25 members, with additional staff being shared by the other schools in the district.

Concordia Elementary School –Opened in 1996, Concordia Elementary School is the newest building in USD 333. This school houses grades Kindergarten through fourth grade with 418 students enrolled for 2010-11. Currently, there are 23 self-contained classrooms and several resource rooms to serve students with special educational needs. CES has approximately 63 certified and non-certified staff members.

Preschool Education

Head Start –Head Start is a program designed to give 3- to 4-year-old children from families who meet certain income guidelines an opportunity to learn social and self-help skills as well as educational foundations such as colors, numbers and language.

Other local programs for preschool education include CCDC, a special education preschool and an At-Risk Preschool for four year olds.

Special Education

Area school districts have formed a cooperative for preschool children with disabilities. The **Learning Cooperative of North Central Kansas** is located in Concordia. The cooperative provides screening tests for preschool children, age birth to five years, and provides services for disabled and exceptional children at the former elementary school building leased by USD 333. Staff members of the cooperative include school psychologists, occupational therapists, speech clinicians, social workers, instructional media specialists and special education teachers.

Concordia Alternative High School

Adults who previously dropped out of high school have the opportunity to complete their graduation requirements and receive a Concordia High School diploma. The program also serves high school age students who, for a variety of reasons, opt to earn their high school diploma in an alternative, computer based program. More than 100 students have graduated from Concordia High School using the alternative program.

Cloud County Community College

The CCCC was established as a junior college in 1965 and first held classes in Concordia High School. The present campus commons was built in 1967-8 with other buildings later built for student housing. The Conference Center in Concordia is a classroom building built in 1990 with a new addition in 2001. This facility holds offices, classrooms, laboratories, cafeteria, student services, bookstore, and the gymnasium. There are other buildings including fifteen on-campus apartment buildings, Technical Education Building, greenhouse, and outdoor recreational space. In 2008, the College leased space on Lincoln Street for the Wind Energy Technology program, a new endeavor to support the wind energy field. CCCC also serves the Junction City area with a separate facility offering a full-range of academic and student support services.

Cloud County Community College provides courses for college credit on fall, spring and summer semester schedules and during three intersession periods. Classes also can be designed to relate to the needs of local businesses. In addition, classes have been offered online for many years. Class subjects range from science, mathematics and history and communication to business, psychology, computer science and art. A student may earn an associate's degree through classes at both the Concordia and Junction City locations.

The mission of CCCC is to be responsive to the educational, social, economic and cultural needs of all the people of north central Kansas by providing lifelong educational and learning opportunities, whose quality is established by rigorous and ongoing assessment.

2.5 HEALTH SERVICES

The ***Cloud County Health Center*** is a stand-alone 25-bed hospital serving the Concordia area, providing primary and emergency medical care services. Also located in the hospital is the local physicians group, the Family Care Center. Beginning as a private hospital owned and operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph, established in 1903, the hospital has had an interesting history.



The current facility, a five-story brick structure with 97,000 square feet of floor space, was built as a 150-bed hospital and opened in 1951. An ICU unit was added in 1970. A skilled nursing unit was opened in 1990 and in 1995 ownership of the hospital was transferred to Salina Regional Health Center and renamed Cloud County Health Center. In 2001, the third floor was remodeled for the Family Care Center. In 2002 the Health Center became a Critical Access Hospital and in 2003 it became a stand-alone not-for-profit with no outside ownership. Most recently the ICU was remodeled and moved to the second floor. Services at the hospital include: inpatient and outpatient surgery, diagnostic imaging, acute care, laboratory, rehabilitation therapy and cardiopulmonary services, anesthesiology, family practice, and a variety of clinical services and educational offerings.

A ballot question for a countywide property tax for construction of a new hospital failed in 2009. Since then there have been ongoing efforts to identify the means whereby a new hospital could be built.

Mental Health

Concordia receives its mental health services through Pawnee Mental Health, a private, not-for-profit community mental health center providing comprehensive mental health and substance abuse services to people in a ten-county area of North Central Kansas. Pawnee offers crisis services and outpatient services, services for children, teens and adults. Services include a 24-hour hotline, short term counseling, and long term support for those with mental health concerns. Clinics, workshops, drug and alcohol recovery services, and employment assistance are programs offered to the community employers and members.

Developmental Disabilities

OCCK, Inc., a not-for-profit Kansas corporation, is dedicated to helping people with physical or mental disabilities gain employment, independent living, and achieve full participation in their communities. The organization has been in operation since 1970 and serves people with disabilities residing in a number of Kansas communities, including Concordia.

Services to individuals include: self-advocacy; information and referral; independent living skills training; peer counseling; and services to those who have suffered a brain injury. Services to the community include: community system and advocacy including helping organizations serve those with disabilities; accessibility information; and community education. In addition, there is a learning facility in Concordia serving babies and young children, birth to 3-years old.

2.6 OTHER SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Frank Carlson Library

Concordia's first public library opened in 1897. The current library is located in a brick building built in 1976, at Broadway and West Seventh. The library has one room dedicated to Senator Frank Carlson, a local celebrity and the only Kansan in state history, prior to 2010, to have served in the U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and as governor of Kansas. The library has items on display of historical significance.

The Library holds over 40,000 books and materials, including video and audio recordings, available to cardholders. In addition, the library is part of a larger network of collections that can be explored through the Library website. For those interested in genealogy, the Cloud County Genealogical Society has a large collection of reference material stored at the Library as well. There are also active book clubs, a writers club, and summer reading groups supported by the Library. Computers and wireless access are also provided for community use in the Library, and these are used frequently. Annually there is programming around themes and special events that are offered to the community as well, promoted through its website and library Facebook page.

Religious Institutions

Religious institutions, and the events they create, have played an important role in the community's history and culture. There are 15 churches in Concordia reflecting the variety of faith beliefs and traditions among residents. The churches include: Assembly of God, American Baptist, Faith Baptist, Catholic, Christian, Episcopal, Four Square Gospel, Lutheran, Methodist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Presbyterian, and Wesleyan. In addition, there is an active non-denominational group, Teens for Christ.

Civic Clubs

Many communities find that civic clubs are a great way to build community service into residents' daily lives while enjoying social activities as well. Concordia has three very active civic groups: Lions, Rotary and Optimists. All provide charitable service to the youth and families of Concordia and Cloud County.

Other Clubs and Activities

There are many more clubs and activities found in Concordia, making this community rich in resources and interests. For example, there are Girl and Boy Scout groups, 4-H, and youth activities through churches and schools. The Concordia Improvement Club, established in 1913, remains active in the community. The Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion and Disabled American Veterans are three organizations which serve current and former military personnel and the community. There are also organizations which are specific to interests such as reading and genealogy, as well as an auto club, saddle club, concert group, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of North Central Kansas, and many, many more. Families and community members keep very busy with the activities and interests they share together.

[The material in this Chapter is drawn from websites, brochures, and conversations with local officials. Photos taken by consultants or provided by the Chamber of Commerce.]