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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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County, City Commissioners to consider text amendment to subdivision regulations for Lawrence and unincorporated areas of Douglas County

Recommended approval would provide growth management measures

LAWRENCE, KS – The Lawrence-Douglas County Planning Commission is recommending a proposed text amendment to the subdivision regulations for Lawrence and the unincorporated areas of Douglas County. The amendment is scheduled to go before the Douglas County and City of Lawrence commissions for consideration in August.

In areas close to the city limits (Tier 2), the amendment would restrict land division until the property is annexed into the City of Lawrence. Farther outside the city limits (Tier 3), the amendment would limit residential development to help preserve agricultural lands.

The amendment develops a land division process and standards that are aligned with, and will effectively implement, the goals and action steps provided in Plan 2040 for growth management. The vision in Plan 2040 is to maintain farm lands for future generations and to have a robust agricultural sector that is valued for its economic, environmental, health and cultural contributions, including the emerging local and regional food system.

The amendment would meet the community's desire to conserve the visual distinction between urban and rural areas throughout Douglas County, while ensuring efficient and adequate development is possible as Lawrence grows. It also would reduce development stress on rural infrastructure such as roads, bridges and culverts.

Planning Commissioners voted unanimously during their June 21 meeting to forward the text amendment (TA-21-00107) to the City and County Commissions with a recommendation for approval. The text amendment provides options for growth management measures in Tier 2 and Tier 3 of the Lawrence urban growth area:

- For Tier 2, the area of urban growth area closest to the City of Lawrence, the Planning Commission recommends prohibiting land divisions until the property is annexed into the City of Lawrence. This ensures an efficient and planned coordination of infrastructure to prepare the area for annexation and development.
- For Tier 3, the area of the urban growth area that is farther from the City of Lawrence and where annexation is not expected to occur within the time span of Plan 2040, the Planning Commission recommends prohibiting any new cluster developments

(subdivisions). Certain land divisions, such as agricultural subdivision boundary surveys and homestead exemption surveys, would still be possible as they are exempt from the subdivision regulations.

The amendment is intended to address the ongoing conversion of agricultural land for residential development. In 1992, 5% of the land use in unincorporated Douglas County was residential. In 2019, it was 36%. Planning Commissioner Gregory Shanklin described the 31% change in residential use as remarkable. He said there is great need to address both encouraging density in the City of Lawrence and preserving agricultural land in the county.

Planning Commissioner Karen Willey said the tools provided by the amendment are needed as development issues continue to arise in Tier 2 and Tier 3. "We need to be mindful of development now to ensure that later development and annexations into the city limits is at a higher density to meet the needs for future housing," she said.

As Douglas County continues to grow, the pressure to divide, and build on the remaining agricultural ground only increases, said Douglas County Zoning Director Tonya Voigt. "The effects development has on floodplain, soil health, farmland, wildlife, water quality, air quality and the future food system is difficult to quantify. In order to support and be accountable to the goals laid out by the leaders and citizens of Douglas County in Plan 2040, thoughtful, long-range planning and collaboration countywide is essential."

Jeff Crick, Director of Planning and Development for the City of Lawrence, said, "It is in the best interest of both the city and county to work together to ensure we align plans to accommodate change to meet the community's vision as outlined in Plan 2040."

County Commissioners are scheduled to consider the text amendment during their Aug. 11 business meeting, followed by City Commissioners at their Aug. 17 meeting.

For more information, visit: <http://dgcoks.org/zoningandcodes>.

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