



City of Atkinson, Nebraska
HOUSING STUDY
2016

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Data Sources.....	iii
Public Input Process.....	iv
Executive Summary.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Market Area.....	4
Demographics.....	5
Table 1.1: Comparable Population Changes.....	5
Table 1.2: Population History.....	6
Table 1.3: Population Projections.....	7
Economy.....	9
Table 1.4: Household Income.....	10
Housing Market Conditions.....	12
Table 1.5: Year Housing Unit Built.....	12
Table 1.6: Vacancy Status.....	13
Table 1.7: Exterior Analysis Percentage Ratings.....	14
Table 1.8: Persons per Household.....	19
Table 1.9: Gross Rent.....	20
Table 1.10: Housing Values, Owner-Occupied Units.....	21
Table 1.11: Housing Affordability Analysis, Owner-Occupied Units.....	22
Housing Market Needs & Opportunities.....	24
Table 1.12: Market Supply/Demand Analysis, -0.31% Annual Growth Rate.....	25
Table 1.13: Market Supply/Demand Analysis, 0.50% Annual Growth Rate.....	25
Homeownership vs. Rental Units.....	27
Residential Site Analysis.....	28
Future Land Use Map.....	29
Housing Objectives.....	30

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Data Sources

2010 Census (short form)

From decennial Census data, 2010 was the primary data set utilized throughout the Housing Study; however, the 2000 Census data was also referenced. This is the form that every household receives every ten years. It has basic gender, age, and race population but there is not enough data reported to elaborate on Atkinson's demographic, housing, or economic standings.

American Community Survey (ACS)

This survey is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in replacement of the Decennial Census Long Form. The ACS reports a variety of data such as household income, commute time to work, year of household, etc. The survey is spread over five years (2009-2013) and it uses a smaller sample population than the Decennial Census Long Form did. Every year a small portion of surveys are mailed to residents; the Census Bureau then makes estimates based on those numbers that were gathered over the five-year time span. The ACS reports the data as an estimate with a margin of error. The ACS states there is a 90 percent chance of accuracy within the margin of error reported on either side of the original estimate (i.e. If the ACS estimate is 25 ±5, there is a 90 percent chance the correct number falls within the margin of error, including all numbers between 20 and 30).

Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI)

ESRI reports data on Nebraska's Location One Information System (LOIS) website. ESRI reports data similar to the Census Bureau's data, and LOIS allows each community to enter additional information regarding commercial properties, including vacant lots and buildings, to market and promote economic development in each community and for the State of Nebraska. All ESRI data that was utilized were 2014 estimates prepared by ESRI.

Site Reconnaissance

A site reconnaissance/windshield survey was completed in the Fall of 2014 and Spring of 2015. Data was collected regarding the current housing stock's existing conditions. Only exterior elements were evaluated for the housing stock and approximately one-fourth of the City's housing stock was randomly evaluated.

Public Input Process

Throughout the planning process, resident and citizen stakeholder input was sought to better understand the local needs as well as the day-to-day happenings dealing with the housing market in Atkinson. The following steps were taken to encourage, promote, and receive public input from a variety of sources:

Community-wide Needs Assessment Survey

A Community Needs Assessment Survey was sent to every household in the community. Approximately 26 percent of all occupied households responded to the survey offering their input and opinions.

Employer/Employee Housing Surveys

Both employer and employee surveys were dropped off at some of the larger employers in the community. The two surveys were slightly different with the employer survey asking questions regarding the relationship of their business and the local housing market and how the housing market can affect their business. The employee survey asked questions regarding their current housing situation and what their future needs might be in order to gauge their housing concerns for Atkinson.

Phone Interviews

Phone interviews were conducted with Elkhorn Meadows, Prairie Winds Assisted Living Facility, Good Samaritan Society, and a local realtor to find out the current needs and uses of each facility as well as the supply and demand of the overall housing market.

Public Input Meetings

Several meetings were held with the public during the year-long planning process. Discussions were held and input was gathered regarding existing housing stock, current housing demand, and future housing development potential to assist with the completion of the Housing Study.

Executive Summary

Housing is a crucial piece to the prosperity of Atkinson. Whether it is identifying needs for new market-rate housing or ways to encourage development of affordable housing options, Atkinson must work to constantly assess and improve its housing market. In order to attract more people to the community, there has to be a supply of well-maintained, available, affordable, and safe housing. Projecting for future demand is an important, but sometimes difficult task when trying to promote growth in any community. Addressing the issues of aging housing stock that does not meet the needs of today's renters and buyers is also another challenge that City leaders face. Community growth and revitalization can be made possible through the identification of housing needs. When considered in conjunction with population data, housing analysis will enable Atkinson to identify residential developments that are most appropriate for its success.

The City of Atkinson has experienced a constant population between the two most recent decennial Census results. Residents have shared their thoughts on increases of recent in-migration of young families. It will be important for City officials to continue to monitor changes in the annual report of the American Community Survey data to determine if this in-migration trend is showing true through data reports.

Like most rural communities, a large majority of Atkinson's housing stock was constructed prior to 1940; however, the City has experienced an increase in residential construction with 19 building permits issued for new home construction between 2010 and May of 2015, and many more issued for home remodels and additions. Atkinson has been experiencing a healthy construction market. One building permit for new home construction has been issued, as of May 2015. The City will most likely continue to experience new home construction and should work to continually ensure the availability of suitable lots for new construction.

The overall condition of the housing stock was rated 'good' at 3.94 on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest. This rating was based on an exterior analysis of the City's existing housing stock. It is noted within the Housing Study that a recent hail storm, during the summer of 2014, affected many homes in Atkinson and resulted in several new roofs, siding, and some windows. Because two of the six ranking criteria include roofs and siding, the exterior analysis rankings were higher than what would be expected for the age of the housing stock in Atkinson. Updates to existing housing stock is important to maintain homes in the community and it is crucial for damaged homes to complete updates to mitigate the potential for blighted and substandard conditions.

Approximately 68 percent of all occupied homes are owner-occupied and 32 percent of all occupied homes are renter-occupied. Atkinson needs to continue future housing development to fit the same 68/32 ratio for potential homebuyers and renters.

Housing professionals shared that buyers are looking for move-in ready homes valued between \$100,000 and \$150,000. The median home value in Atkinson is \$84,000 (\pm \$5,008) based on 2009-2013 ACS data. This is close to Holt County's median home value of \$90,500 (\pm \$5,760); however, it is higher than what is typically seen in small rural communities in Nebraska.

The housing affordability analysis, which compares household income with housing values in Atkinson, shows there is a surplus of homes valued between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and a shortage of homes valued over \$100,000 as well as a small shortage of homes valued less than \$50,000. This analysis was only completed for owner-occupied units that are existing within the City.

The median rent for units in Atkinson is \$587 (\pm \$93) based on 2009-2013 ACS data. Maximum rent for a one-bedroom apartment at Elkhorn Meadows is \$445. According to residents and housing stakeholders there is a drastic shortage of suitable rental units; this determination is not represented in the 2010 Census data. The more recent, stakeholder input shows what is currently happening with the housing market in Atkinson; therefore, based on their input it is determined that there is a need to update and construct new rental units in order to meet the needs of Atkinson's residents and potential residents.

It is estimated that the City has approximately 48 existing structures that are deteriorated and not suitable for residence. These homes should be demolished to minimize blighted conditions, safety hazards, and eye sores. It is also assumed that approximately one percent of all housing structures will "fall off the market" each year due to aging structures and conditions, this equates to an additional 60 units falling off the market by 2015. The City must not only work on constructing new housing units but also demolishing and replacing the structures that "fall off the market".

After all of the data analysis was completed, it was determined that the City will need to construct 48 additional housing units (33 for purchase and 15 for rent) by the year 2025 in order to provide housing stock for existing and potential residents. That number was based on a 0.01 annual growth rate percentage matching the historic trend of population growth between 2000 and 2010. If the City grows at their desired target rate of one-half percent each year, then 92 housing units (63 for purchase and 29 for rent) by the year 2025 would need to be constructed.

By the year 2025, new homes will need to be constructed, regardless of population growth, in order to replace the number of vacant, dilapidated structures.

Increasing the number and variety of housing units as well as improving the current housing stock through encouraged rehabilitation is essential to the growth of Atkinson. Infill development should be encouraged, unless private development or population growth warrants the need for new residential or multi-use subdivisions.

The City should follow these outlined objectives to improve the housing market in Atkinson: clean-up vacant lots and uninhabitable properties; work with local businesses to determine housing needs for employees; promote infill development; continually encourage private development to assist with improvements to the housing market; create City-funded homeowner rehabilitation revolving loan fund program; encourage property upkeep through nuisance abatement and City-wide clean-up programs; and, locate areas for future residential or multi-use development.



The City of Atkinson, which is approximately 1.63 square miles, is situated in central Holt County on United States Highway 20 and Nebraska Highway 11. Other communities located in Holt County include O'Neill which is the County Seat, Chambers, Emmet, Ewing, Inman, Page, and Stuart. According to the 2010 Census, Atkinson's population was 1,245. Atkinson is a rural community with a several different industries, a wonderful school district, healthcare options, senior housing and services, and enjoyable recreational facilities. With many new additions in the community including new commercial businesses, residential construction, and several other notable projects completed in recent years, the City is searching for ways to capitalize on and continue encouragement of the recent progression in Atkinson and Holt County.

Market Area

The Effective Market Area for Atkinson, Nebraska is broken into three different sections and is the area most likely to influence the economic climate of Atkinson. The primary market area is defined as an area with a radius up to ten miles from Atkinson stretching from Stuart to Emmet. The secondary market area is defined as an area covering a radius of ten to fifteen miles from Atkinson and includes a majority of western Holt County as well as the eastern edge of Rock County. The tertiary market area is defined as an area covering a radius of fifteen to twenty miles from Atkinson. For Atkinson, the tertiary market encompasses the northwestern and central portions of Holt County as well as an eastern section of Rock County. The City of O'Neill and Village of Newport are both within Atkinson's tertiary market. The communities included in the Effective Market Area are most likely to directly impact the economic climate of Atkinson; it is therefore very important to examine said communities and population movement when planning future housing development in Atkinson.



Population movement in a geographic area occurs for multiple reasons. Residential mobility or short-distance residential changes, and the spatial and temporal movement patterns they represent fall within the Effective Market Area for Atkinson. Residential mobility and commuting patterns can explain the activities of the area population as they relate to housing. Data about area movement provides a relaxed perspective of geographical areas as opposed to rigid pre-imposed boundaries (i.e. City limits, county/state lines, natural barriers such as rivers, etc.).

Demographics

Housing is directly tied to the population of a community. The make-up of the City's population affects the housing demand in the community based on the type of housing desired, what is affordable, and the ability to fulfill the demands of new people moving to the area. The City of Atkinson experienced a nearly constant population between 2000 and 2010, with a one person increase. **Table 1.1** shows a comparison, using US Census data, of Atkinson's population changes between 2000 and 2010 with surrounding communities that have similar characteristics to Atkinson. Of the six communities, four experienced a decrease in population, while only Burwell increased in population size and Atkinson's population remained constant. These communities have many of the same challenges that Atkinson faces with growth, development, and trying to attract residents to their communities. Three of the communities, Stuart, Ainsworth, and Spencer, all experienced large decreases in population of more than five percent over the ten-year span. O'Neill's population was relatively constant with a 0.67 percent decrease. This data proves to City leaders that regardless of a community's size and location, it is still liable to population loss; therefore, Cities must continually work to retain the existing population and attract new residents. In fact, rural communities must work even harder than larger Cities to maintain a sustainable population base.

**Table 1.1 Comparable Population Changes,
Atkinson, 2000-2010**

Community	2000	2010	Difference	% of Change
Atkinson	1,244	1,245	1	constant
Stuart	625	590	-35	-5.60%
O'Neill	3,733	3,705	-25	-0.67%
Burwell	1,130	1,210	80	7.00%
Ainsworth	1,862	1,728	-134	-7.20%
Spencer	541	455	-86	-15.90%

Source: 2010 Census

A sustainable population is achieved not only through numbers of residents, but also by maintaining a balance of age groups in the community. The median age for all of Atkinson’s residents is 46.1. This is the same as the County’s median age of 46.1 and both numbers are higher than the State’s median age of 36.2. The decennial census data provides historical data to utilize; but the American Community Survey shows more recent data on an annual basis from 2009 to the present. Each year has an estimate with margin of error reported because the sample size is smaller for ACS data. Atkinson’s ACS reported median ages are 45.4 (±8.3) for 2009, 46.3 (±5.7) for 2010, 44.5 (±3.7) for 2011, 44.8 (±5.0) for 2012, and 39.9 (±6.8) for 2013.

The reported ACS data shows an overall decrease in median age for Atkinson’s residents since 2009, supporting the theory of Atkinson tapping into the ‘Legacy Migration’ phase that has been taking place in communities across the Great Plains region. ‘Legacy Migration’ is a phrase being used to describe an increased number of the younger generation heading back to their hometowns or their “legacy”. Atkinson’s residents believe the City has seen an influx of younger generation residents moving to or back to the community. The annual release of the ACS data supports this theory showing a decrease in median age from 2009 to 2013. Age and gender differences can affect housing, recreation, community services, and businesses that will be desired in Atkinson because of the differences in wants and expectations for amenities between men and women as well as between the differing ages. Therefore, it is important to monitor and understand the changes in the community and how the overall needs for the future of the City are altered by these changes.

Table 1.2 shows the history of Atkinson’s population which has fluctuated between each decennial census; overall, Atkinson has seen an increase in population when comparing the City’s 1930 population with the most recent Census data. This is not typical for many small, rural communities in Nebraska because many have experienced fluctuation between each decennial Census with an overall decline between 1930 and 2010. Between 1930 and 2010, Atkinson experienced almost a nine percent increase in total population, with the City’s largest population in 1980, totaling 1,521 residents. Since 1980, the overall population has declined, until 2000 to 2010, when the City experienced a constant population. Most rural communities in Nebraska are experiencing an overall decline in population, and the previous table shows many communities near Atkinson are experiencing large declines. Atkinson has fluctuated in total over the past eight decades, making projecting future populations more complicated when using a historical analysis method because of the variability. In order to maintain the population and enact ways to grow the community, City leaders will need to continually improve the housing market and overall quality of life.

Table 1.2 Population History, Atkinson, 1930-2010									
Year	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Population	1,144	1,350	1,372	1,324	1,406	1,521	1,380	1,244	1,245
Source: Nebraska Department of Economic Development, 2010 Census									

Atkinson is a progressive community with proactive City leaders and community stakeholders. The City has a lot to offer residents including a variety of job opportunities through a myriad of different industries. It is important for Atkinson to stay ahead of the curve as a progressive, proactive community in order to continually attract new people and families to town, and to continually take advantage of the Legacy Migration that is taking shape in the Great Plains Region.

The history and apparent trends in Atkinson’s history are important aspects to consider when making projections for the community’s future population. Projecting Atkinson’s population is key to understanding the future demographic character of the community. These projections help to determine the City’s future land use and community service needs and policies. **Table 1.3** shows the different population growth scenarios for Atkinson until 2025.

Table 1.3 Population Projections, Atkinson, 2010-2025				
Annual Growth Rate Percentages	2010	2015	2020	2025
Trend 1 (-1.0%)	1,245	1,184	1,126	1,071
Trend 2 (0.8%)	1,245	1,296	1,348	1,403
Trend 3 (.11%)	1,245	1,252	1,259	1,266
Trend 4 (0.50%)	1,245	1,276	1,309	1,342

Source: 2010 Census, M&A

The first three trends are annual growth rate percentages coming from trends depicted by historic decennial Census data. Trend 1 is the difference in population between 1990 and 2000, which was a ten percent decrease over the decade. This annual trend of a one percent decrease was projected for future populations at the years 2015, 2020, and 2025. Trend 2 is the historic trend difference between 1970 and 1980, an eight percent increase over the ten-year period, that was forecasted to the same three time periods of 2015, 2020, and 2025. This scenario shows a steady increase in population over the projected years to a total population of 1,403 residents in 2025. Trend 3 shows the increase of population Atkinson experienced over the past eight decades and what the City’s population would look like in 2015, 2020, and 2025 if it experienced the same growth that occurred from 1930 to 2010. Trend 4 is not based on historic trends; however, it could be considered relative to some historic trends that have occurred. This growth rate of an annual one-half percent was determined by community members during a public input session to be a goal for the City. This is a feasible growth rate for the City to work towards, and several initiatives outlined in this Comprehensive Plan will provide community stakeholders with strategies to attract people to Atkinson as well as retain the existing population base. Of course, populations do not change at a constant rate every year; however, these population projection figures provide an example of what the population could look like at the three different projected time intervals.

Other important factors to consider when planning for Atkinson's future growth are the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the community. Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI) created a Tapestry Segmentation system which divides U.S. residential areas into 65 distinctive segments based on socioeconomic and demographic characteristics to provide an accurate, detailed description of U.S. neighborhoods. Atkinson has a predominant Tapestry segmentation of Prairie Living including a LifeMode Summary Group of Factories and Farms and an Urbanization Summary Group of Rural II. Tapestry Segmentation can help people identify the best markets, find the most profitable consumer types, tailor marketing messages to fit the audience, and define product and service preferences for a community or service area. The following description summarizes the Prairie Living segmentation and is relatable to a majority of Atkinson's population. It is important to remember these are generalities made for all Prairie Living residential areas and do not necessarily depict the true story for the City of Atkinson and all of the City's residents. However, many of these generalities about the City of Atkinson can be considered accurate for most residents.



Prairie Living:

Demographic & Socioeconomic: Small, family-owned farms dominate this stable market. Two-thirds of the households are composed of married couples with or without children and residents are slightly older with little diversity within the community. More than 67 percent of the residents are in the labor force and unemployment is low. One in four residents who work are self-employed. The median household income is \$42,830 and approximately 40 percent of residents work in white-collar jobs.

Residential: These tend to be Midwestern neighborhoods where 79 percent of residents own their homes and the median home value is \$103,090. Most housing is single-family and approximately 36 percent of the housing was built before 1940. Multiple vehicles are necessary to cover these rural areas; approximately three-quarters of the households own two or more vehicles.

Preferences: Prairie Living residents' purchasing preferences include work boots and hunting clothes. They own tools to service their vehicles and make home repairs. They will tackle home improvement projects such as kitchen remodeling. They are pet owners. Many own satellite dishes because cable TV is not always available in rural communities. Prairie Living residents are loyal country music fans and tune in to the radio and television for their favorite music. They enjoy hunting, fishing, horseback riding, and target shooting. They tend to be political conservatives and prefer domestic vehicles, especially trucks. Civic-minded Prairie Living residents serve on church boards, speak at public meetings, volunteer for charitable organizations, and help with fund-raising.

Economy

The City of Atkinson is the second largest community in Holt County providing basic necessities to the City's residents as well as residents from the surrounding area. However, Atkinson is also situated 18 miles from O'Neill. Although O'Neill is not much larger than Atkinson it does have a larger economic pull factor and employs a larger number of citizens including several of Atkinson's residents who commute to O'Neill. There are pros and cons to Atkinson's distance and proximity to larger communities, it is challenging for rural communities to be sustainable places for retail, dining, and service businesses when in close proximity to a larger market yet it is beneficial to the workforce when there are more options for employment than can be afforded by a single community.

Proximity to employment opportunities is very important for residents and potential residents of any community. Labor force and housing are complementary forces that are essential to the self-sustainability of each community. Residents 16 and older are considered to be of working age; therefore, in order to study the workforce population we only consider residents 16 years of age or older. The 2009-2013 ACS reported 912 (± 111) of Atkinson's residents are 16 or older and 620 (± 99) persons are in the labor force. The other 292 (± 70) people are not considered to be a part of the labor force because they are neither employed nor officially classified as unemployed. This classification could be a variety of reasons such as full-time students, retired persons, volunteers, stay-at-home parents, persons unable to work due to a disability, etc.

As stated above, the ACS estimated 620 (± 99) of Atkinson's residents are in the labor force. The ACS also reported of that 620 people in the labor force, 617 (± 98) were employed while 3 (± 4) people were unemployed. Based on the ACS, only 0.3 (± 0.5) percent of Atkinson's residents were unemployed which is starkly different than the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) 2013 national unemployment rate of 7.3 percent.



There are several different job opportunities in the City of Atkinson including the medical and educational systems, retail and service sector businesses, manufacturing, and many different types of agricultural and warehousing businesses. Although there are many job opportunities in Atkinson for residents, some still commute to work in other communities. This is fairly typical in the smaller communities across the United States, including Atkinson. Commuting patterns for Atkinson's residents include a mean travel time to work of 10.0 (± 1.9) minutes. Approximately 448 (± 80) people drive to work alone while 36 (± 20) or 6.2 percent of Atkinson's residents carpool. Approximately 60 (± 34) residents work from home which comprises 10.4 (± 5.4) percent of the employment total in Atkinson. Based on the 2011 U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, 186 of Atkinson's residents commute to areas outside of the corporate limits for work. Based on the same 2011 data source, there are 928 total people employed in the City of Atkinson. Based on the 2011 U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, a majority of Atkinson's residents commute to the east and southeast and a smaller portion commutes northwest from Atkinson for work.

Table 1.4 shows the household income for Atkinson in 2010. Household income is defined by the Census Bureau as the following:

"Any sum of money income received in the calendar year by all household members 15 years old and over, including household members not related to the householder, people living alone, and other nonfamily household members. Included in the total are amounts reported separately for wage or salary income; net self-employment income; interest, dividends, or net rental or royalty income or income from estates and trusts; Social Security or Railroad Retirement income; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); public assistance or welfare payments; retirement, survivor, or disability pensions; and all other income."



Table 1.4 Household Income, Atkinson, 2013		
Household Income	Number of Households	
	ACS	ESRI
Less than \$15,000	66 (± 36)	70
\$15,000-\$24,999	88 (± 33)	67
\$25,000-\$34,999	38 (± 21)	57
\$35,000-\$49,999	102 (± 39)	99
\$50,000-\$74,999	103 (± 35)	121
\$75,000-\$99,999	50 (± 26)	79
\$100,000-\$149,999	34 (± 19)	46
\$150,000-\$199,999	30 (± 22)	6
\$200,000 or more	0 (± 9)	17
Median household income (dollars)	\$41,563 ($\pm 8,801$)	\$47,577
Source: ACS 2009-2013 Estimates, ESRI 2014 Estimates		

Household income data is displayed in ranges based on dollar amounts and the related number of households with an annual income that falls into the associated range. ACS reported Atkinson's median household income to be \$41,563 (\pm \$8,801). The ACS estimated Holt County's median household income to be \$44,427 (\pm \$4,609) which is slightly higher than the City of Atkinson's median household income. The ACS 2009-2013 estimates for the State of Nebraska's median household income are \$51,672 (\pm \$325) which is higher than Atkinson and Holt County's median household income. It is expected for the median household income to increase overtime due, if only, to inflation; however, based on comparisons between the increase in median household incomes for Atkinson, Holt County, and Nebraska from 2000 to 2013, Atkinson's median household income increased by 46 percent while Holt County and Nebraska's median household incomes increased by 44 and 95 percent, respectively. Atkinson and Holt County both experienced large increases in median household incomes but the State of Nebraska's median household increase was more than double what Atkinson and Holt County experienced.

Household income is important because it helps City leaders determine the types of housing residents can afford. The relationship between household income and monthly living expenses related to mortgage or rental costs, taxes, insurance, and utilities should not overstretch a resident's budget. Rule-of-thumb states that housing costs should not consume more than 30 percent of a family's income. Based on ACS data, over nine percent of persons who own their home spend more than 30 percent of their household income on monthly owner costs. Approximately 50 percent of residents spend less than 20 percent of their household income on monthly owner costs. Almost 40 percent of renters spend more than 30 percent of their household income on rental housing costs. Spending over 30 percent of a household income on housing costs is the definition of 'house poor'. House poor individuals are short of cash for discretionary items and tend to have trouble meeting other financial obligations like vehicle or other loan payments. People typically become house poor because they buy more house than they can afford or get stuck in a place that is too expensive due to a lack of options; therefore, it is crucial for communities to have a variety of suitable housing in order to be able to provide options for all income ranges.

Housing Market Conditions



Data taken from the American Community Survey is represented in **Table 1.5** and provides the overall age of owner-occupied units in Atkinson. A majority, 40.6 (± 7.9) percent, of Atkinson's homes were constructed before 1940. Over 88 percent of the City's housing structures were constructed prior to 1980. Many communities have an aging housing stock which creates challenges in the housing market because a majority of today's buyers are looking for specific items such as a two car attached garage, three-four bedrooms, and two bathrooms set on a large lot. Homes constructed 40+ years ago were typically constructed on 50-foot wide lots that were platted throughout the community. Today's buyers have different standards for homes including more space within the home and on the lot. Fifty-foot wide platted lots do not typically fit the mold for what buyers want in today's market. As previously mentioned, the largest percent of Atkinson's existing housing stock was constructed in 1939 or earlier, the City's second housing construction boom was a steady increase from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Table 1.5 Year Housing Unit Built, Atkinson, 2013	
Total housing units	604 (± 66)
2010 or Later	0 (± 9)
2000-2009	29 (± 15)
1990-1999	31 (± 17)
1980-1989	10 (± 7)
1970-1979	80 (± 29)
1960-1969	85 (± 35)
1950-1959	81 (± 35)
1940-1949	43 (± 20)
1939 or Earlier	245 (± 55)
Source: ACS 2009-2013 Estimates	

From the 2010 Census, Atkinson had 638 housing units including all single-family homes, duplexes, and apartment complexes. There was a 13.9 percent vacancy rate, or approximately 89 vacant housing units and 549 occupied housing units in Atkinson. As seen in **Table 1.6**, of the 89 vacant properties, there were 28 properties for rent and 5 were for sale. There were four homes that were sold but not occupied. There were two homes listed as housing units only used on occasion or for seasonal or recreational uses. There were 50 homes listed as “other vacant” which could include homes that are uninhabitable, stuck in litigation, being remodeled, or several other reasons a Census investigator may quantify. It is important to have a portion of homes that are “for sale” or “for rent,” because a percentage of housing units should always be on the market in order to attract new residents and also create an atmosphere for a healthy housing market. Adequate housing is essential in supporting economic growth. It is important to have available housing in order to attract new businesses because the community needs to be able to house new workers.

Table 1.6 Vacancy Status, Atkinson, 2010

Vacancy Rate	13.90%
Total	89
For rent	28
Rented, not occupied	0
For sale only	5
Sold, not occupied	4
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	2
Other vacant	50
Source: 2010 Census	

As mentioned above, Atkinson’s total vacancy rate was 13.9 percent in 2010. The City’s homeowner vacancy rate was 1.3 percent and the rental vacancy rate was 13.7 percent. A homeowner vacancy rate less than three percent and a rental vacancy rate less than five percent equates to a very tight housing market. Atkinson barely has over a one percent

vacancy rate for owner-occupied homes, meaning the market has no flexibility and extremely limited availability for people looking to purchase a home in the community. Atkinson’s rental market has changed since the 2010 Census data was collected, and it is clear that there is a lower vacancy percentage than what was reported in 2010. However, based on the 2010 rental vacancy rate of 13.7 percent, the community shows plentiful availability of rental units throughout the community. What must be considered is the condition of the existing rental units and whether those units are fitting the needs of residents in a community. The rental market is just as important to a community’s ability to attract new residents; rental units act as transitional housing for many people moving to the community, people who are not ready or unable to purchase a home, residents who may want assistance with exterior home maintenance, etc.

A tight housing market can drive-up housing prices making it challenging for people to purchase a home in the community. If no homes are available or are too expensive in Atkinson when a family is looking to move to the community then they will be forced to look in surrounding towns where homes are available. The main goal is to ensure that available homes also fit the needs and wants of the buyers. Atkinson’s respective homeowner and rental vacancy rates from the 2010 Census warrant some need for new housing, especially for homes to purchase. With the increase in the rental market demand in the past few years, it is apparent that there is a need for additional suitable rental units as well as housing units for purchase. Economic changes as well as the increased efforts made by City to retain existing and attract new residents impacts the need for housing in the community; therefore, it is necessary to determine housing needs and opportunities for the future.

When analyzing vacant housing units in the community it is important to determine whether the units are still habitable. Uninhabitable structures should be removed to provide vacant lots for new construction and infill development, as well as to rid the neighborhoods of fire and safety hazards.

A physical reconnaissance or windshield survey was conducted in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015, on a random sampling of homes in Atkinson. Approximately one-fourth of all of Atkinson’s homes were visually surveyed from the exterior. Based on criteria that would be used for a Blight and Substandard Study, these homes were analyzed. Homes were rated as excellent, good, average, poor, or deteriorated. Excellent ratings mean there were no apparent problems when the exterior survey was completed. A good rating means the structure seemed to meet all codes and has had careful maintenance of both structure and grounds, but the house showed minimal signs of age. An average rating was given to homes that showed minor deficiencies including normal wear and tear. Homes that received a poor rating had major deficiencies showing significant surface wear including slight structural concerns. Deteriorated structures are homes that need to be demolished because they are beyond rehabilitation and have become safety concerns. The following housing structural categories were identified and rated during the windshield survey: foundation, roof, siding, doors/windows, yard, chimney, and garage. **Table 1.7** shows the results of the exterior analysis from the windshield survey. The numbers show the total percentage ratings for each category. The overall structural rating for homes in Atkinson based on the exterior analysis is 3.94, or ‘good’. An overall good rating means that there are many homes at, or slightly above average condition, while there are still several homes in need of repair or improvement; however, the overall soundness of Atkinson’s housing infrastructure is good and the majority of homes are in better than average condition. There are several homes that need major repairs; however, the majority of homes are in good condition especially in comparison to the age of the housing stock. One point to make, during the windshield survey it was very clear that many homes had new roofs and/or siding. This was due to hail damage during a storm in the summer of 2014 that affected many of the homes in the community. Two of the areas that are evaluated, roofs and siding, received higher marks than what is typically expected because most homes had brand new roofs and siding.

Table 1.7 - Exterior Analysis Percentage Ratings, Atkinson, 2015

	Excellent (5)	Good (4)	Average (3)	Poor (2)	Deteriorated (1)
Foundation	21%	42%	31%	4%	1%
Roof	67%	17%	11%	4%	1%
Siding	40%	23%	26%	9%	1%
Doors/Windows	30%	28%	38%	2%	1%
Yard	22%	30%	41%	5%	1%
Garage	29%	41%	25%	4%	1%

*percentages were rounded

Source: M&A Windshield Survey 2015

During the exterior home reconnaissance, it was identified that approximately 54 percent of Atkinson’s homes are ranch-style which became a popular style for single-family homes in the 1950s and 1960s, when the City experienced a housing boom. Ranch-style homes also typically fit the needs of today’s buyers; therefore, the style is still a very popular construction choice. Also noted during the physical reconnaissance of Atkinson’s housing stock, was the evidence of six percent of homes that showed signs of active improvements that were taking place during the windshield survey.

In complementary form with the windshield survey, a mail-out survey was sent to all households in the community. One of the questions in the Community Needs Assessment Survey asked each respondent to rate the condition of their place of residence. The options provided for response were:

- Good, no repairs needed;
- Needs Minor Repairs (less than \$3,000);
- Needs Moderate Repairs (\$3,000 - \$15,000);
- Needs Major Repairs (more than \$15,000);

Over 46 percent of respondents believed their homes were in 'good' condition, with no repairs were needed. Approximately 16.5 percent of survey respondents said their homes needed minor repairs costing less than \$3,000. Over 25 percent of survey respondents said their homes were in need of moderate repairs costing between \$3,000 and \$15,000, and over 11 percent of survey respondents believed their homes were in need of major repairs costing more than \$15,000.

As previously mentioned, the condition of the existing housing stock is an important piece to consider during an analysis of the current housing market in the community. There are already existing homes in poor condition in Atkinson and there will always be turnover of homes for a variety of reasons including homes selling and homes "falling off the market" due to age, lack of modern amenities, and condition. As a rule of thumb, approximately one percent of homes will "fall off the market" every year due to the reasons mentioned above. Some of these vacant homes may be sitting vacant because they are no longer safe for residents. Actions need to be taken in order to replace the homes that are no longer habitable. Demolishing these uninhabitable residences opens lots for potential infill development and helps clear some of the eye-sores around the community. Unfortunately, it always becomes a struggle for communities to remove these vacant homes. It also becomes challenging because uninhabitable homes do not disappear on their own; therefore, steps need to be taken to remove vacant, uninhabitable structures to provide lots for infill development. Most of the time this responsibility falls on the municipality. Several residents during the public input sessions discussed the need to remove substandard housing. It is no easy feat, but replacing the homes that are lost will help to maintain a healthy housing market in Atkinson as well as provide homes for potential residents.

In 1995, a study was conducted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This study estimated the percentage of housing units needing substantial rehabilitation of the occupied, permanent (non-mobile home), year round houses or apartments in the United States. These national percentages can be used to determine the local need. It was reported that approximately four percent of all owner-occupied housing structures were in need of substantial rehab or needed to be demolished. The American Housing Study also determined approximately six percent of all renter-occupied units were in need of substantial rehabilitation or needed to be demolished.

**Number of Units x Percent Needing Substantial Rehab = Units
Needing Demolished**

$373 \times 4\% = 15$ Owner-occupied Units Needing Substantial Rehab
 $176 \times 6\% = 11$ Renter-occupied Units Needing Substantial Rehab
 $15 + 11 = 26$ units needing demolished

Based on 2010 Census data reporting housing vacancies, results showed 50 housing units that were determined to be “other vacant” which consists of a majority of homes that are considered uninhabitable. This Census data shows a much higher uninhabitable structure percentage than the national standards applied to the City of Atkinson’s housing stock.

Based on the windshield survey completed for one-fourth of the existing housing stock, and adjusting to include all units in Atkinson, approximately 48 total homes, of the total 638 housing units community-wide are deteriorated beyond moderate repair. This number fits in-line with the Census housing data reporting “other vacant” housing structures that was previously described. Based on the national standards determined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation through HUD, Atkinson should have 26 housing units needing to be demolished. With the need to demolish anywhere between 26 and 50 existing structures in Atkinson and the concept of one percent of homes “falling off the market” each year due to age, lack of modern amenities, and condition; if the City is not able to address this issue of outdated, unsafe, blighted residential structures, the problem will continue to grow. Data shows, at most, 50 housing units are in need of major repair or demolition; there are 638 total housing units in Atkinson. Therefore, it is estimated that less than eight percent of the existing structures need to be razed. A majority of homes in the community are in good condition with several homes in excellent condition. The majority of homes in good condition are in need of at least moderate repairs for one of the categories evaluated during the windshield survey, i.e. the windows and doors in need of replacement but the rest of the exterior is in good condition.



Housing Rehabilitation Programs, whether through the City or a third party group such as Central Nebraska Economic Development District (CNEDD) could be an essential tool in helping residents pay for housing repairs, energy efficiency improvements, or major maintenance issues. Community leaders should continually look at ways to use these programs for the betterment of Atkinson. An owner-occupied housing rehabilitation program would be extremely beneficial for these homes. The major issue with the current program through the State of Nebraska are the strict income requirements the Federal government has set to determine eligibility for the program.

Because the aforementioned housing rehabilitation program is based on a household's annual income it is restricted for use to low income families. Another option could be for the City to create their own loan program for a separate owner-occupied housing rehabilitation setting guidelines and regulations based on the needs of the City. This option may be attractive to the City and its residents because the City could help middle-income residents while also boosting the existing housing conditions in the community. If the City creates their own revolving loan fund, they have the ability to set their own guidelines, income-restrictions, interest rates, pay-back regulations, etc. The City could create their own program to fit the needs of their community. A City-run rehabilitation program would help serve the need of middle-income families and should be something the City considers to assist and encourage homeowners with exterior and energy-efficiency concerns before they are beyond repair. Another tool to utilize for deteriorated structures is Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds through the already determined Redevelopment Areas or through a new Blight and Substandard Study. A new Study could locate more of the community in Redevelopment Areas, but is limited to 50 percent of the total City, by State Statutes. Tax Increment Financing could also provide the City of Atkinson and the Community Redevelopment Authority (CRA) with a tool to eliminate some of the vacant, blighted structures within the Redevelopment Areas.

Promoting home maintenance and improvements throughout the community and being able to offer programs to assist homeowners will help prevent more homes from becoming dilapidated. Community leaders should continually look at ways to incorporate these programs into Atkinson to provide incentives and assistance to the community's residents.

According to the 2010 Census, 1,204 of Atkinson's residents live in occupied housing units. There is a discrepancy between the population occupying the 549 occupied housing units and the overall population, 1,245, in Atkinson due to the 41 persons living in group quarters. Residents who live in group quarters are not counted as part of the population living in occupied households, because the Census separates group quarters and housing units. There are two types of group quarters, institutionalized and non-institutionalized. Non-institutionalized facilities include college/university student housing and military quarters. During the 2010 Census, 41 persons lived in institutionalized facilities which includes nursing homes, juvenile homes, and adult correctional facilities. All 41 persons reported to live in an institutionalized facility lived in a skilled nursing facility at the time of the 2010 Census. Of the 41 residents who lived in a skilled nursing facility, nine were male and 32 were female. During the Census, it was reported that 40 of the residents in the skilled nursing facility were 65 years or older.

When speaking with the local convalescent care facility through Good Samaritan Society, it was determined that in the spring of 2015 there were 38 people residing at the nursing home, but typically there are 40-43 residents. The facility is licensed for 61 residents. Prairie Winds Assisted Living Facility is another rental-type housing option for residents of Atkinson. Prairie Winds was constructed in 2002 and has 10 rooms which are all currently full. This facility is an option for the City's residents that are not yet ready to give up their independence but might require some assistance from time-to-time.

Although we know there are 549 occupied housing units in Atkinson, we need to evaluate the characteristics of those units. The 2010 Census reported that 373 owner-occupied housing units, equating to 67.9 percent, were owned and a total of 176, or 32.1 percent, of the occupied housing units in Atkinson are rented. Atkinson has a large percentage of residents who own their own home. When people purchase a home, it shows investment and longevity in the community. In Atkinson, the average household size of an owner-occupied unit is 2.28 people and slightly less for renter-occupied at 2.02. The overall average household size in Atkinson is 2.19, while the average family size is 2.92. This difference can be explained by the number of people in Atkinson living alone.

Table 1.8 shows persons per household in the 373 owner-occupied and 176 renter-occupied housing units. There are 212 persons in Atkinson living alone which is almost 39 percent of the total occupied housing units. Of the 212 persons living alone in Atkinson, over 58 percent, or 123 persons, are 65 years or older. As a note, none of the 212 people living alone were living in an institutionalized facility at the time of the 2010 Census. The statistic of residents who are 65 years or older and live alone is very distinct, and can help community leaders make informed decisions that will benefit the majority of Atkinson’s citizens. For example, community leaders can focus on finding developers who are interested in developing condominiums or apartments for elderly residents or empty-nesters to rent or purchase. Another amenity potentially attractive to elderly residents, would be the presence of an association that would, for a fee, take care of maintenance for the homeowners if a private developer cannot be attracted for the construction of senior housing.

Table 1.8 Persons per Household, Atkinson, 2010	
Owner-Occupied persons per Household	
Total:	373
1-person	113
2-person	155
3-person	36
4-person	41
5-person	16
6-person	10
7 or more-persons	2
Average household size	2.28
Renter-Occupied persons per Household	
Total:	176
1 person	99
2 person	28
3 person	23
4 person	9
5 person	9
6 person	6
7 or more-persons	2
Average household size	2.02
Source: 2010 Census	

Another point to consider when looking at persons per household and the large number of residents living alone in Atkinson is the fact that these 212 residents living alone do not all live in single-bedroom housing units; in fact, based on ACS data there are only 60 (±29) one-bedroom housing units in Atkinson. There is a good possibility that some of the people who live on their own, live in three or four bedroom homes. These individuals could maybe be willing to move to a smaller, up-to-date, and low maintenance home, if there were some available. If there were smaller homes, whether for purchase or for rent, and some of the 212 one-person households were to take advantage of the smaller units, it would add larger homes to the housing market that are desperately needed for families.

Table 1.9 shows the gross rent for units in Atkinson based on the 2009-2013 ACS. Median rent in Atkinson is \$587 (± 93). As seen in the table, it is reported that 27 (± 18) renters pay between \$300 and \$499 in rent each month, 59 (± 31) renters pay between \$500 and \$749 in rent each month and several renters pay more than \$750 per month. Local housing professionals discussed the current rental market in Atkinson, highlighting a slight shortage of rental units, with the amenities renters are looking for, available in the community; most people are looking for two bedrooms and are not particular on the type of structure, i.e. single-family detached home, duplex, apartment, etc. When discussing the rental market, a local realtor stated that most people looking to rent were living alone. During the Housing Study process, Employer and Employee Housing Surveys were delivered to some of the major employers in Atkinson. Based on the responses, the employers stated that affordable, well-maintained rentals were a top three priority for housing initiatives. Rental availability is more limited now than what was depicted during the 2010 Census; the City should continue to find ways to improve the rental market in Atkinson.



Table 1.9 Gross Rent, Atkinson, 2013	
Occupied Units Paying Rent	117 (± 38)
Less than \$200	4 (± 6)
\$200 to \$299	6 (± 7)
\$300 to \$499	27 (± 18)
\$500 to \$749	59 (± 31)
\$750 to \$999	15 (11)
\$1,000 to \$1,499	6 (± 10)
\geq \$1,500	0 (± 9)
Median Rent	\$587 (± 93)
Source: ACS 2009-2013 Estimates	

An affordable housing option in Atkinson is Elkhorn Meadows. The apartments are owned and operated by the Atkinson Housing Authority and subsidized through HUD. The facility was constructed in 1981 and has 20, one-bedroom units. Two of the units are handicapped-accessible. In the spring of 2015, 19 of the 20 total units were rented. The maximum rent for a one-bedroom apartment at Elkhorn Meadows is \$445; tenants may also receive rental assistance based on their income. The goal of Elkhorn Meadows is to help residents maintain their independence; residency is available to senior citizens who are 62 or older or any persons receiving disability. Typically these units are full and there may be a need for more rental units to provide housing options for senior citizens and disabled persons.



Table 1.10 shows two data sources for Atkinson’s housing values. One thing to remember is the ACS column provides an estimate with a margin-of-error for each housing value. All of the columns are for owner-occupied housing units only. The median household value for owner-occupied housing units is \$84,000 (\pm \$5,008) based on ACS data. ESRI’s 2014 estimated median household value is slightly lower at \$78,814. A local realtor shared information about the existing Atkinson housing market, stating that the majority of buyers are looking for move-in ready homes priced between \$100,000 and \$150,000. People who are selling their homes are typically getting the market rate and are able to sell their homes in a short amount of time. Some residents shared that many homes are sold by word-of-mouth prior to even being listed on the market. The majority of homes in Atkinson are valued between \$50,000 and \$100,000. In that value range, homes may be considered move-in ready with some having most modern amenities available, but needing updates. However, not all of the homes between \$50,000 and \$100,000 are decent, safe structures that meet the needs of today’s buyers including attached garages, updated kitchens, two bathrooms, three or four bedrooms, etc. Local housing professionals stated that most people are looking for larger homes with multiple bedrooms and some updates already completed. These professionals believed that there were very few homes on the market that are desirable to today’s buyers and that new home construction for single-family homes is crucial.

Table 1.10 Housing Values, Owner-Occupied Units, Atkinson, 2013

Value	ACS	ESRI
< \$50,000	86 (\pm 31)	132
\$50,000 to \$99,999	149 (\pm 49)	118
\$100,000 to \$149,999	68 (\pm 34)	77
\$150,000 to \$199,999	44 (\pm 23)	28
\$200,000 to \$299,999	21 (\pm 16)	18
\$300,000 to \$499,999	9 (\pm 12)	19
\$500,000 to \$999,999	0 (\pm 9)	7
\geq \$1,000,000	0 (\pm 9)	1
Total	377 (\pm 60)	400
Median Value	\$84,000 (\pm 5,008)	\$78,814
Holt County Median Value	\$90,500 (\pm \$5,760)	\$90,968
Nebraska Median Value	\$126,700 (\pm \$681)	estimate not reported

Source: ACS 2009-2013 Estimates, ESRI 2014 estimates

Table 1.11 shows a housing affordability analysis based strictly on data. This table shows the comparison of the household income range and the value of housing units that are currently present in Atkinson. The rule-of-thumb when purchasing a home is to multiply the household income by two; homes in that price range are typically what can be afforded by the buyers. Using this idea, the table shows where there are gaps and where there is a surplus of housing units present in Atkinson based on value. The following is a breakdown of the process:

- Column 1 - Household income range for residents in Atkinson
- Column 2 - ACS household income data from **Table 1.4** (modified to relate to owner-occupied units only, 68% of all housing units are owner-occupied)
- Column 3 - Column 1 multiplied by 2 (i.e. \$25,000 x 2 = \$50,000)
- Column 4 - ESRI data from **Table 1.10** that shows the number of owner-occupied units in Atkinson, based on value
- Column 5 - Column 2 subtracted from Column 4 (i.e. 86 - 93 = -7)

Table 1.11 Housing Affordability Analysis, Owner Units, Atkinson, 2013 Estimates				
Household Income Range	# of Households (Units Needed)	Affordable Range for Housing Units	# of Existing Owner Units	Gap/Surplus of Housing Units
less than \$25,000	93	<\$50,000	86	-7
\$25,000-\$34,999	39	\$50,000-\$70,000	149	43
\$35,000-\$49,999	67	\$70,000-\$100,000		
\$50,000-\$74,999	82	\$100,000-\$150,000	68	-14
\$75,000-\$99,999	54	\$150,000-\$200,000	44	-10
\$100,000-\$149,999	31	\$200,000-\$300,000	21	-10
\$150,000-\$199,999	4	\$300,000 or greater	9	-7
\$200,000 or greater	12			

Source: ACS 2009-2013 Estimates, ESRI 2014 Estimates, M&A

Based on this housing affordability analysis for owner-occupied units, Atkinson has a surplus of housing valued between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and all other value ranges show a gap for homes to purchase. This analysis is based solely on numbers for owner-occupied units in Atkinson; therefore, it does not take into account people living above or below their means, units available for rent, or the market-rate price of homes. Because of the way housing values are reported, the \$25,000-\$34,999 and \$35,000-\$49,999 as well as \$150,000-\$199,999 and \$200,000 or greater household income ranges had to be consolidated in order to correctly correspond with the data available for housing units in the related value ranges. Based on this analysis, Atkinson shows a gap of 41 homes valued over \$100,000.





Community leaders can use this formula in the future to determine where Atkinson's housing supply falls short. Quality and availability of decent housing is a decisive point for individuals and families when they are considering moving to a community. During the Employer and Employee Housing Surveys conducted in the Spring 2015, employers confirmed housing availability and affordability as an issue and concern for potential employees. Of the five returned employer surveys, three of them stated they would like to add additional employees and all five employers stated they have jobs available due to expansion or turnover needs. Over 91 percent of survey respondents from the Employee Housing Survey believe it is important or very important to have suitable housing to attract a quality workforce. A majority of those same survey respondents stated there is a lack of available, suitable housing and the cost of suitable housing is an issue for both renters and owners.

Atkinson should take steps to improve the community's current housing market for both buyers and renters. With a homeowner vacancy rate of 1.3 percent, a supply of affordable housing needs to be created; this will only happen with the construction of new housing units. In 2015, there is a real rental need in Atkinson compared to what data shows from the 2010 Census. A shortage of up-to-date, sizable rentals exists in Atkinson, along with a low supply of market rate, move-in ready homes available for sale. In order to maintain as well as grow and diversify the population base, Atkinson's officials must investigate feasible options for housing development in the community. It may be important for Atkinson's leaders to consider what other communities are successfully implementing to help with housing development as well as programs that have been created to help raze uninhabitable homes. Information from local professionals cannot be found through the Census or any other source online. Decision-makers need to continually engage in conversations with local professionals in order to determine what people are looking for when they are interested in moving to Atkinson.

Housing Market Needs & Opportunities

The purpose of this section is to use information discussed in previous sections to determine future housing needs and opportunities for Atkinson. Since the City's goal is to increase the population of the community by one-half percent each year, it is important to prepare for growth while being realistic about housing needs. The first step is to determine the number of units that will be in demand to satisfy the needs of existing individuals in the community and what type of housing will be needed to attract new residents. The second step is to determine what additional types of units would be most suitable for all residents in the community.

Both **Table 1.12** and **Table 1.13** shows the market supply/demand analysis completed for Atkinson. The market supply/demand analysis was completed utilizing population projections to help determine future population. Atkinson experienced a constant population between 2000 and 2010, equating to a 0.01 percent annual increase rate. This historic population change figure was used in the first table to show future housing unit needs even if the population remains constant over the next 10 to 15 years. During a public input session for the planning project, City stakeholders determined it was their goal to increase the population by one-half percent each year which is a feasible goal for the City, but will require improvement efforts on many different fronts within the City, including housing. The second table shows the market supply/demand analysis for the City's determined goal of a one-half percent annual increase in population to show the future housing needs if the community were to grow at the target rate.

In 2010, the average household size was 2.19 individuals. Subtracting the projected number of persons living in group quarters from the estimated 2025 population, for both growth rate scenarios, and dividing the total by the average household size, brings the projected number of households needed to 578 and 622, respectively, for the 0.01 percent and 0.50 percent growth rate scenarios. The desired vacancy rate of five percent must then be added to the total number of households needed. The 2010 known supply of housing units in Atkinson of 638 must be subtracted from the total number of households needed in order to determine the additional housing units required to meet the needs of the projected population figures.

**Table 1.12 - Market Supply/Demand Analysis,
0.01% Annual Growth Rate, Atkinson**

Projected 2025 Population (0.01%)	1,247
Projected Group Quarters (persons)	41
Average Household Size	2.19
Total Number of Households Needed 2025	551
5% Vacancy Rate	28
Adjusted Total Number of Households Needed 2025	578
Known Supply 2010	638
Estimated Total Demand	-60
Existing Substandard Units	48
2025 - 1% "Fall Off Market" Rate (units)	60
Adjusted Supply (new construction) 2025	48
Source: 2010 Census, M&A	

**Table 1.13 - Market Supply/Demand Analysis,
0.50% Annual Growth Rate, Atkinson**

Projected 2025 Population (0.50%)	1,342
Projected Group Quarters (persons)	44
Average Household Size	2.19
Total Number of Households Needed 2025	593
5% Vacancy Rate	30
Adjusted Total Number of Households Needed 2025	622
Known Supply 2010	638
Estimated Total Demand	-16
Existing Substandard Units	48
2025 - 1% "Fall Off Market" Rate (units)	60
Adjusted Supply (new construction) 2025	92
Source: 2010 Census, M&A	

It is also important to consider the existing substandard units as well as the projected number of units that will need demolished based on the assumed rate of one percent of the total housing units "falling off the market" each year due to age and condition of the structures. One percent of the total housing units is approximately six units every year for the next ten years. By the year 2025, that will be an additional 60 units that will need to be replaced in order to keep the same number of housing units. The need to replace 60 additional units by the year 2025 seems to be a high number, but it is important to remember this is an estimated figure and it is a projected number taking into account the changes over the next ten years. By examining the number of housing structures that were built in 1939 or before, which is approximately 245 (± 55), it is not hard to understand why homes will continue to "fall off the market" and need to be replaced with structures that are up to date and suitable for today's buyers and renters. When taking these things into consideration, the plausibility for the City to have over 48 homes that are in need of major repair or demolition and another possibly 60 homes that will need the same over the next 10 years is not unreasonable.

Based on this data analysis the City would need to see construction totals of roughly 48 new housing units by the year 2025 to fill the need for an almost constant population with a 0.01 annual growth rate percentage. Even though this scenario represents a constant population, there is still a need to construct new housing units in the next ten years to replace aging and dilapidated structures. If the City were to grow at their target goal rate of one-half percent each year, 92 additional housing units would need to be built by 2025, approximately 9 housing units each year for the next ten years, to have enough replacement housing and to provide housing for the additional residents.

To err on the side of conservation and to ensure the City does not over-saturate the market, the 0.01 percent annual growth rate scenario will be used at this time to determine future housing needs for Atkinson. However, it is strongly suggested that City leaders continue to regularly monitor population changes in order to best prepare for any changes. Promoting a steady growth rate and encouraging extra development at certain increments (i.e. every third year based on demand analysis) is the suggested approach moving forward for the City of Atkinson. Also, the City should focus on housing demolition and site preparation for new construction as another way to handle some of the housing market concerns in the community. With nearly 50 homes existing in the community today that are in need of major repair or demolition, the City will need to find a solution to address this issue. Infill development is recommended for new construction at this time; although, the City should be prepared from a land accountability standpoint as well. This could include having adequate lots available for infill development in addition to land set aside for potential residential subdivision development potentially needed in the future. It is not encouraged for the City to invest in the public infrastructure necessary to build a large residential subdivision which is why infill development should be encouraged to help lower potential development costs. Investing in the public infrastructure necessary for large developments should only occur once the City has seen population growth close to their desired one-half percent annual rate or when private investment will pay for infrastructure expansions that may be necessary to support that rate of growth.

Homeownership vs. Rental Units

Like typical small, rural communities in Nebraska, Atkinson has a large population living in owner-occupied housing units. Over 68 percent of the occupied units in Atkinson are owner-occupied and 32 percent of units are renter-occupied. This study will assume that 68 percent of all new housing units should be single-family homes for purchase and that 32 percent of all new housing construction should be for rental units.

Based on these assumptions, and using the 0.01 annual growth rate percentage, Atkinson would need to construct 33 units for purchase and 15 rental units by the year 2025.

During our public input sessions, throughout the variety of surveys that were conducted, and all conversations with local community stakeholders and housing professionals the same common theme was repeated – more suitable, affordable rental properties and up-to-date housing for families are at the top of the priority list. Over 74 percent of respondents from the Community Needs Assessment Survey said that the availability of affordable rental housing in Atkinson was fair or poor and another 73 percent of survey respondents ranked affordable housing for purchase as fair or poor. There is a need for housing, both for rent and purchase in Atkinson. Residential development can look like many different things including single-family homes, duplexes, tri-plexes, four-plexes, apartment complexes, and townhomes. For owner-occupied housing development, single-family homes will best fit the need for Atkinson’s residents and potential residents. Although, private developers have been able to successfully construct many new duplex housing units in Atkinson, any type of rental housing will fill a large need in the community for transitional housing. Transitional housing is ideal for young single and married persons, new employees and residents in Atkinson, people constructing new homes, empty-nesters, and senior citizens not ready for assisted living or convalescent care homes. Because transitional housing is ideal for a variety of different age groups, life-styles, and life-stages, rental housing should be developed for different residents to fit the demands of varying life-style needs and preferences.

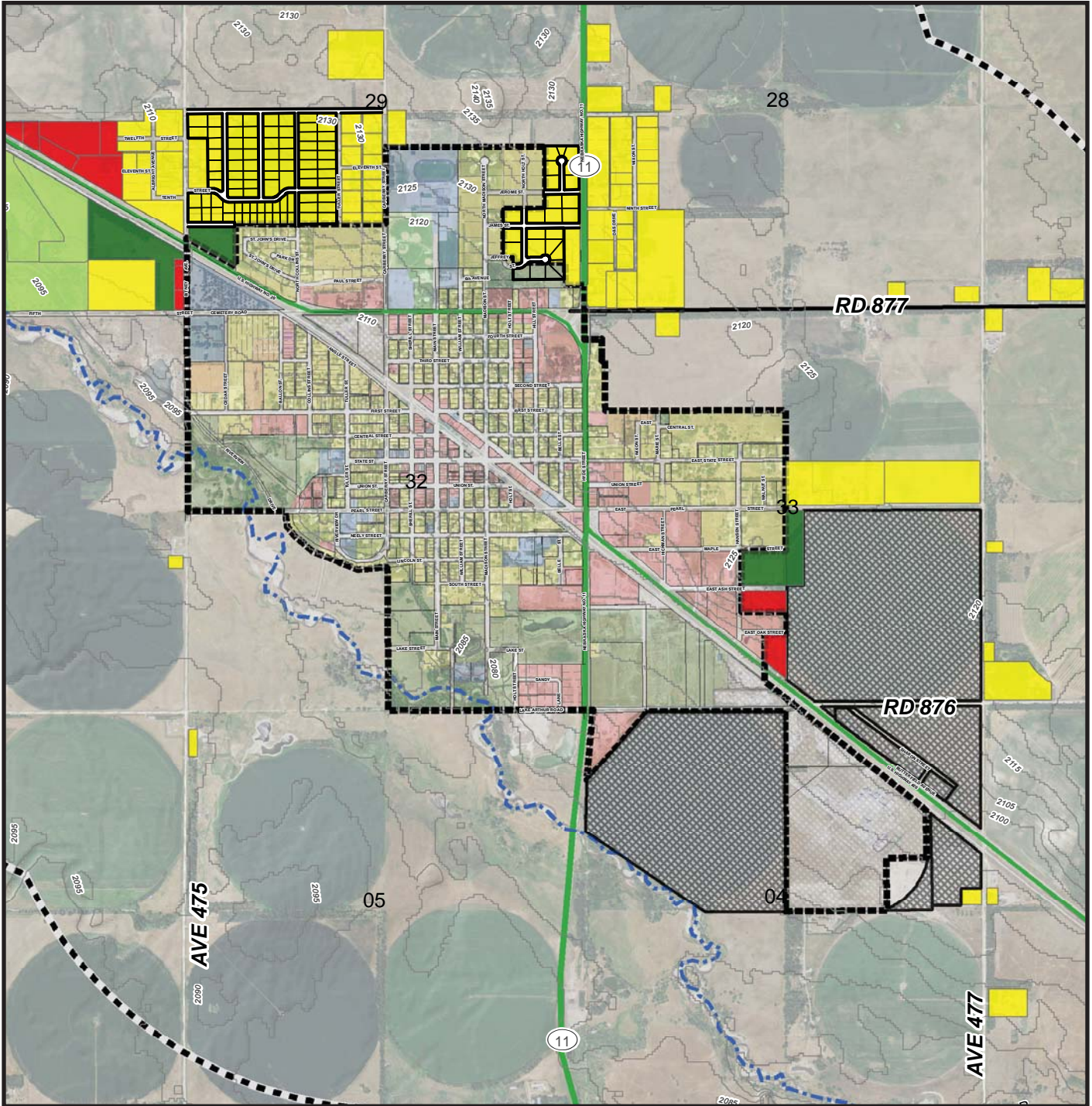
Residential Site Analysis

The City's Comprehensive Plan was completed at the same time as this Housing Market Study; therefore, areas for potential residential development were analyzed and depicted in the Future Land Use Plan Map in the City's Comprehensive Plan. The Housing Study for the City of Atkinson determined a need for additional housing units to be built in Atkinson, with 48 additional units suggested by the year 2025.










Future housing development in Atkinson should be carefully evaluated and planned to meet the needs of both current and potential residents. There are several areas shown for low-density and medium density residential development in the Future Land Use Map in the City's Comprehensive Plan; a copy of the map can be found on the following page. Based on residential development principles such as terrain, proximity to major thoroughfares with direct connection to employment for residents, choice in residential densities, and proximity to existing public infrastructure, services, and amenities the City's effective Future Land Use Plan Map shows several optimal areas for residential development. Potential areas for single-family housing are shown in yellow and multi-family residential development is shown in orange on the Future Land Use Map. There are several lots available for infill residential development; however, there is a large need for future residential development and potential sites for residential subdivisions should be located to depict locations to fit the needs of larger scale residential developments.

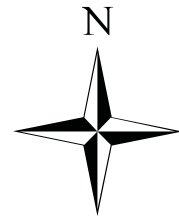
Housing development intended for owner-occupancy needs to include homes for a variety of price ranges to attract a variety of homebuyers. However, the housing affordability analysis shows a need for homes valued over \$100,000. Homes valued over \$100,000 can include several move-in ready, fairly new construction, and updated housing options for buyers in Atkinson. This is beneficial for many potential and existing residents including first time homebuyers, families, and professionals who can afford and are looking for a home valued over \$100,000. Most importantly new homes should have at a minimum three-bedrooms and two-bathrooms with an attached garage; by today's standards, those specs seem to be a minimum requirement for homeowners. Infill development for single-family homes should be encouraged because of the proximity to existing infrastructure, although lots sizes of existing platted lots may create challenges. If the City is not able to encourage residents to construct their own single-family homes, a stakeholder committee or investment group may need to utilize private investment dollars to build spec homes; this was recently done for a spec home in the community and lessons learned during the process should help to improve the project a second time around.

A variety of rental units should be developed in order to provide options for residents looking for transitional housing. Townhomes and duplexes, sometimes even four-plexes are ideal for a variety of residents. Townhomes and duplexes would be attractive for elderly residents and young couples without children. Families will typically look for single-family, detached homes to rent, providing private space and a bigger yard for their children. Because of the different needs and desires, it is important to develop different rental units to appeal to a variety of residents looking to rent in the community. There are a few potential areas for infill development of duplexes; these areas are near other multi-family housing units and where there are multiple vacant lots adjacent to one another. Having multiple vacant lots next to one another is important for multi-family development because more space is needed and it may be necessary to combine the lots to allow for duplex, triplex, or even four-plex development. Other areas of multi-family development are shown as buffers between single-family development and a higher density use such as commercial or light industrial. Multi-family residential land uses act as a transitional zone for mixed-use developments; appropriate transitional areas are shown in the Future Land Use Map.



Legend

-  1-Mile ETJ
-  Atkinson Corporate Limits
- Future Land Use**
-  Single-Family Residential
-  Multi-Family Residential
-  Commercial
-  Light Industrial
-  Public/Quasi-Public
-  Recreational
-  Agricultural/Greenspace



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Future Land Use Map
 Atkinson, Nebraska

Housing Objectives

As discussed earlier in this plan, there is a housing shortage in Atkinson for both renter- and owner-occupied units. In order to solve this issue a few things can be done. The obvious answer is to develop more housing, but to accomplish this goal, private developers or local investors will need to be willing to participate; otherwise, residential development will only happen when a person/family constructs their own private residence. Within Atkinson, there are a few types of lots available for development including infill lots spread throughout the community and several vacant lots in the platted J's Subdivision. Having options available for interested parties, is crucial for improving the existing housing market in the community.

Housing development and job growth/economic development fits the old adage, "What comes first the chicken or the egg?" Developing new housing will help attract new residents to Atkinson and work as a chain reaction, with new homes available, more families can move to town and enroll their children in West Holt Public Schools, keeping Atkinson a viable community with a high quality of life for all residents. More families in the community may also help create more jobs. If more jobs are available in Atkinson, it is most likely employees will want to live in the community. Decent, attractive, and affordable homes as well as shovel ready lots need to be available in order to ensure that new employees will live in Atkinson instead of a different nearby community. With a close correlation between the housing market and economic climate for businesses, it is even more crucial for housing market improvements to be taken seriously and made a top priority.

Housing market improvements such as developing new homes, improving existing homes, and creating a demolition program for vacant, substandard homes, were high priority projects discussed by Atkinson's residents and City leaders. Housing has become a major challenge for many communities in Nebraska, big and small; Atkinson is no exception. There are a number of homes in need of demolition and yet there is a need for more quality, affordable homes and rental units. The City must work to encourage new home construction as well as find feasible ways to demolish vacant, unsafe structures across the community.

Housing needs in Atkinson include the demand for additional, affordable rental units, mid-level housing for purchase between \$100,000 and \$150,000, and incentives for new construction as well as home improvements. Residents understand the need for additional housing and realize the importance the housing market plays on the overall viability of the community.

Mid-level housing development in the \$100,000 to \$150,000 price range was also discussed as a need by residents during a public input session. The housing affordability analysis also indicated through data analysis that there is a need for homes valued over \$100,000 fitting what residents said during the public input session. It would be challenging to construct a home for under \$180,000; therefore, this mid-level housing will have to come from existing structures in the community. Many updates to homes would need to be made in order to modernize a home and increase the value to the needed price range in order to attract a mature family in need of a move-in-ready home. Another option, discussed by residents during public input sessions, included the construction of "plain stock housing" as described by one resident. This bare-bones design would allow for more affordable housing construction and could then, in turn, allow homeowners to customize and make updates when it was more affordable. Basements would not have to be finished and garages would not have to be built, as long as there was space and the potential ability to make the improvements in the future.

The City also can be involved in housing improvements in a few different ways. Cleaning up lots and uninhabitable homes in Atkinson is an on-going task; however, it will create more lots for new infill development as well as rid the neighborhood of eye sores that are also potential safety hazards. Improving the condition of the existing housing stock will also help attract new residents to the community because the condition of the homes available will be more appealing to buyers. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) can be used to carry out plans for the demolition of structures determined by the City to be unsafe or unfit for human occupancy in a redevelopment area. This is new to the Community Development Law with LB 729 and Atkinson should look into this option to see how it could benefit the community. The City could also implement and enforce a nuisance abatement program to help identify all areas within the community in need of clean-up and proper abatement to ensure property owners are in compliance with nuisance codes, enhancing the health and safety of the community. Nuisance abatement can be a City-driven program or it can be completed by a third-party contracted by the City. Following the project will help identify properties that are detrimental to the health and safety of the community and will encourage and, when needed, enforce, property upkeep.

Atkinson can also access funds for demolition through Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). The one stipulation for this grant is that a new housing structure has to be constructed on the newly vacant lot, and the house will only be available to residents who qualify as low-to-moderate income (LMI). This is a way to rid the community of an unsafe, unsightly dwelling and replace it with a new home; however, the new home may not be available to all citizens who are looking to purchase a home. Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED) through CDBG has offered owner-occupied housing rehabilitation funds to help home owners make improvements to their homes including exterior and energy efficiency improvements. Although there are other ways to encourage home and property improvements, the creation of a purchase-rehab-resell program would also enhance the existing housing market. A purchase-rehab-resell program allows a group, whether it is a private investment group, economic development group, or some other group interested in improving housing in Atkinson, to purchase a home in need of rehabilitation, make the necessary improvements, and then sell the home. The money made from selling the property can then be used to purchase another property and restart the process. This revolving program is another way to help improve the existing homes in Atkinson and make needed improvements to provide quality housing for homebuyers. Each of these avenues could help enhance the overall housing market in Atkinson by encouraging property upkeep, home improvements, and demolition of unsafe structures.

The public-private partnerships will be key as the City tries to accomplish the goal of housing market improvements. If private developers are not able to relieve all of the pressure on the housing market in Atkinson, then local investors or a local committee may need to implement a plan for home development. Some communities have a group of residents who contribute money to begin the process; funds contributed are used to build a spec home, also employing a local contractor. The home is then sold and the money is used to build another spec home, continuing the home development process for these communities. This has been a feasible model for home construction in small communities throughout Nebraska and could be an avenue for Atkinson to consider although it takes a motivated leader and group of people willing to invest money for the housing cause. Other communities have proven this to be successful, and Atkinson has the ability and potential resources to do so as well. Atkinson has been taking all of the right steps to ensure the housing market is capable of expanding to support an increasing population and stimulate growth.

In order to make housing market improvements, the City should work to meet the following objectives:

Inventory infill lots and promote infill development;

Infill development, by nature, is less expensive because there is no need to extend public utility services. Infill development utilizes existing public infrastructure, filling in vacant properties with residences. Promoting infill development, can save the City funds by avoiding sprawl and the need to extend public infrastructure to new developments on the out-skirts of the community. There are a few potential infill areas that would be ideal locations for multi-family development. These areas should be considered for duplex to four-plex development because there are multiple vacant lots adjacent to one another, providing enough land for a multi-family development. There is a large need for rental housing in Atkinson and constructing these units on infill lots will help keep development costs down. J's Subdivision has lots still available and is platted for additional streets and lots to the east. Atkinson should continually market and promote all infill lots in order to encourage lower cost development options. Infill lots are scattered throughout Atkinson and vary based on availability, price, zones, dimensions, etc. The City and/or Economic Development Office should create a database or inventory of lots available for residential construction. Flyers and maps could also be created to help with marketing efforts. Location, current zoning, dimensions, costs, and ownership of lots should all be included within the flyers and maps to market the lots for new home construction.

Work with local businesses to determine housing needs for employees;

By working with local employers, the City may be able to get a feel for real-time and projected housing needs in the community. Having these discussions with employers is beneficial for multiple reasons, it shows support for the local businesses and it opens the line of communication between the City and employers to help provide beneficial information to one or the other. Local businesses may also be able or willing to offer assistance with improving the housing market conditions in Atkinson. Examples from other communities of business involvement in the housing market include businesses providing down-payment assistance for their employees, businesses purchasing homes to rent to their employees, and businesses building spec houses or affordable workforce housing to offer to new or existing employees. There are many ways businesses may want to get involved to benefit both the community and their company, but the conversations must be had between City leaders and employers to determine if they are willing or able to assist with housing market improvements.

Locates areas for future residential development;

The City should use the Future Land Use Plan Map in the Comprehensive Plan to establish target areas for all types of residential development including large lots, single-family homes, transitional housing, and other types of medium-density rental housing in order to fill all of the needs in the community. Although the City may not need to develop additional residential subdivisions at this time, it is important to target areas that are attractive for residential development in order to plan for effective growth and development in Atkinson.

Develop Purchase-Rehab-Resell Program;

Developing a Purchase-Rehab-Resell Program would help solve multiple challenges facing Atkinson including housing needs and outdated, aging housing stock. A Purchase-Rehab-Resell Program could be initiated by the City or another entity in the community. The Program would be designed to target ideal homes for rehabilitation, purchase the homes, renovate each property, and sell the property. Money gained during the home sale could then be used to purchase the next property for rehabilitation. Purchase price and renovation needs should be evaluated for each potential property to determine if the investment is worth the risk. The size, including number of bedrooms and bathrooms, for each potential property is also important to consider in order to invest in properties able to meet buyer's needs once the rehabilitation project is complete. Grant funds are available to initiate a Purchase-Rehab-Resell Program. The City could partner with other community entities to ensure this program is successful. Many community stakeholders expressed their desires to have a program like this in Atkinson in order to improve the condition of existing homes and provide homes fitting the buyers' needs in Atkinson.

Enforce property up-keep through Nuisance Abatement Program;

All vacant lots and vacant, uninhabitable homes are potential properties for infill residential development. A strong nuisance abatement program, whether completed by the City and legal counsel or by a third party source, is important to encourage property upkeep and provide ways for the City to appropriately encourage renovations or property demolition of non-compliant, unsafe structures. Nuisance abatement is the enforcement of nuisance codes in the City, to bring properties in compliance with City codes. The process includes City Council approval and authority, code review, letters mailed to non-compliant property owners, periods of time to allow property owners to abate any nuisances, and further legal action if necessary when working with non-compliant property owners. A Nuisance Abatement Program is important to residents and City leaders to ensure properties are maintained and efforts are being made to rid the community of unnecessary eye sores and potential safety and health hazards.

Clean-up vacant out lots and uninhabitable properties;

All vacant lots and lots with vacant uninhabitable homes are appropriate for infill residential development. The City should access different avenues available to them to assist with the clean-up of vacant lots and uninhabitable properties. Infill development is attractive because it is a lower cost development option; therefore, efforts should be made to create more available lots. Also, by cleaning up vacant lots and uninhabitable homes the City will be able to rid the community of unnecessary eye sores and safety and health hazards. Based on data presented previously in this study, approximately 48 homes need to be demolished due to age and condition. Nuisance abatement, TIF, a few grant programs, and City dollars are a few ways Atkinson can work to demolish substandard properties and clean-up lots.

Create Investment Group to develop spec or stock homes;

Stakeholder citizens should be encouraged to create an Investment Group of some type to build spec housing in Atkinson. Many times people are afraid to construct a new home on their own; however, if a group of residents was able to get the ball rolling, it may prove to be beneficial for existing and potential residents as well as provide some relief for the housing market. Some housing professionals in Atkinson were concerned about the success spec housing in Atkinson because previous attempts have not been as successful as desired. However, if the home can be marketed and sold prior to completing construction, it is more desirable for the contractor, investor, and homebuyer. The homebuyer is then able to personalize the home to fit their needs, the investor is able to get their return, and the contractor is able to work with the homebuyer to finalize the home based on their wants and needs. Therefore it is encouraged to market the home prior to and/or during construction so the home does not sit because of poor finishing touch decisions that do not fit the buyer's taste. This may also be an opportunity to develop, as one resident explained "plain stock housing" to create a more affordable construction option which would then allow homeowners to personalize and complete updates when it best suited them.

Investigate Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation Funds; and,

Grant funds are available through NDED to develop a revolving loan or grant program for qualifying homeowners to rehabilitate their homes. Homeowner qualification standards are set by the Federal government and are different for each County. Atkinson would be required to follow income standards set for Holt County and the program would also be dependent on the number of people living in each household. These grant funds are only available for low-income families and due to the income restrictions set by the Federal government, many homeowners will not qualify for assistance. However, there would still be several eligible homeowners in Atkinson who could take advantage of funds to help them with necessary home updates. In order to offer funds to a broader range of residents in Atkinson, the City could also create their own loan program for owner-occupied housing rehabilitation setting guidelines and regulations based on the needs of the City. This option may be attractive to the City and its residents because the City could help middle-income residents while also boosting the existing housing conditions in the community. If the City creates their own revolving loan fund, they have the ability to set their own guidelines, income-restrictions, interest rates, pay-back regulations, etc. The City could create their own program to fit the needs of their community.

Encourage property upkeep.

The City should work to incentivize as well as continually follow-through with nuisance abatement throughout the community to encourage residents to maintain their properties. A clean community is attractive to visitors, potential residents, and potential new businesses. A "Yard of the Month" program or some type of incentive could be created to encourage residents to maintain their properties and take pride in the way the community looks. Property upkeep is essential as the community works to encourage new development.