



Big Springs, NE

Comprehensive Plan 2022

DRAFT

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Energy goals and strategies for increasing energy efficiency and reducing costs are indicated throughout this plan by this symbol.

Produced with help from Panhandle Area Development District and Civic Nebraska.

Introduction

Big Springs envisions a town that is a peaceful and vibrant place to live, work, and raise a family. Its people wish for the town to be a hub of transportation-related and seasonal amenities while still maintaining the quiet, small town feel valued by residents. Most importantly, Big Springs will provide for a high quality of life, vibrant sense of community, stability and predictability for public and private investments, and protection of its most valued resources- it's people, it's peaceful living, personal freedom, and a beautiful place to live and visit.

Through months of public input, the community found the following aspects to be central to its vision of the future.

Big Springs will be a place that...

- **Preserves and celebrates its history**, protecting the unique sites & buildings and remembering the legacy of those who came before us
- Maintains a **small town feel & atmosphere**, a quiet, peaceful town a lot can be accomplished by working together with volunteers, that's free from overburden of red-tape
- Is a **great place for youth**, providing safety, activities, many ways to be involved, and freedom to learn and grow to be the future of the community.
- Has a **spirit of community**- with caring people, kindness, working together, a friendly place where people know their neighbors, new and old, and enjoy coming together.
- Has **thriving businesses and opportunities**, a town that invests in people willing to take a risk and build up their potential, and supporting local businesses

Implementing this vision is the work of all residents in Big Springs. Ensuring that development occurs in a manner that enhances, rather than works against, this vision is one important role of the village government. Regulating land use in the community can protect the safety and well-being of the community by making sure land use conflicts are avoided and private and public investments are protected. The zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations are the primary ways the village regulates land use. Before the village can regulate land use through zoning, it must develop a plan for development in the community, which becomes the rationale for decision-making on land use. The comprehensive plan brings together land use, public facilities and utilities, transportation, and housing to outline goals and strategies for how development should occur in the community.

This plan was developed with extensive participation from the Big Springs community. It builds on this input and past documents to provide updated direction for the type of future Big Springs wants for itself and how development should occur to achieve that vision.

This plan will serve the above vision by advancing the following goals:

- Protect public and private investments from natural hazards
- Grow businesses and jobs in vibrant commercial areas
- Protect quiet, small town feel of current and future residential areas
- Promote cost effective maintenance and improvement of public facilities and infrastructure
- Accommodate safe and efficient transportation for all users

Development Concept

- Reinvestment and renovation in existing residential neighborhoods
- Vibrant downtown business area
- Welcoming stop for travelers, signage to draw into town
- Increased quality and access to built and natural recreation amenities
- Southwest growth area- Possible new residential and commercial
- Northern residential growth area- Possible new residential



Population & Economic Trends

Population Trends

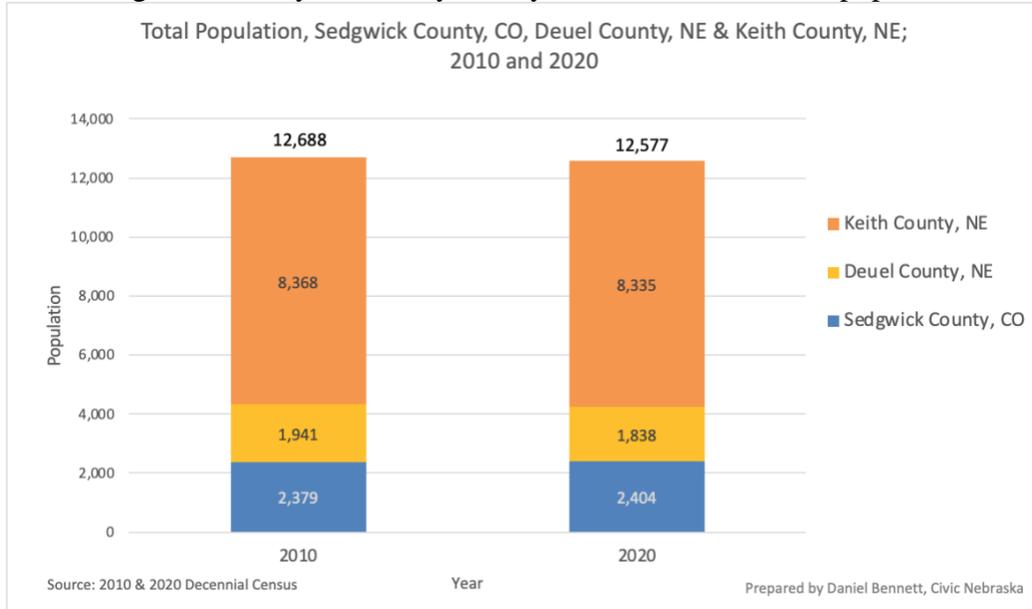
The population of Big Springs has remained mostly unchanged in the past decade. In a time when many small communities are losing population, simply retaining population should be considered a win, and likely indicates some in-migration to counter natural population decline.

Hispanic or Latino is the primary minority ethnic or racial group in the community, comprising 8% of the population. There is also a small American Indian population.

Big Springs, NE Population by Race & Hispanic or Latino, 2010 & 2020				
	2010		2020	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total:	400	100.0%	394	100.0%
Population of one race:	391	97.8%	378	95.9%
White alone	378	94.5%	351	89.1%
Black or African American alone	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	3	0.8%	7	1.8%
Asian alone	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Some Other Race alone	10	2.5%	20	5.1%
Two or More Races	9	2.3%	16	4.1%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	32	8.0%	33	8.4%

Source: 2010 & 2020 Decennial Census

The three-county area, including Keith County, NE (Ogallala), Sedgwick County, CO (Julesburg), and Deuel County, had a population of 12,577 in 2020, down just slightly from 2010. Sedgwick County is the only county in the area to increase population in that time frame.

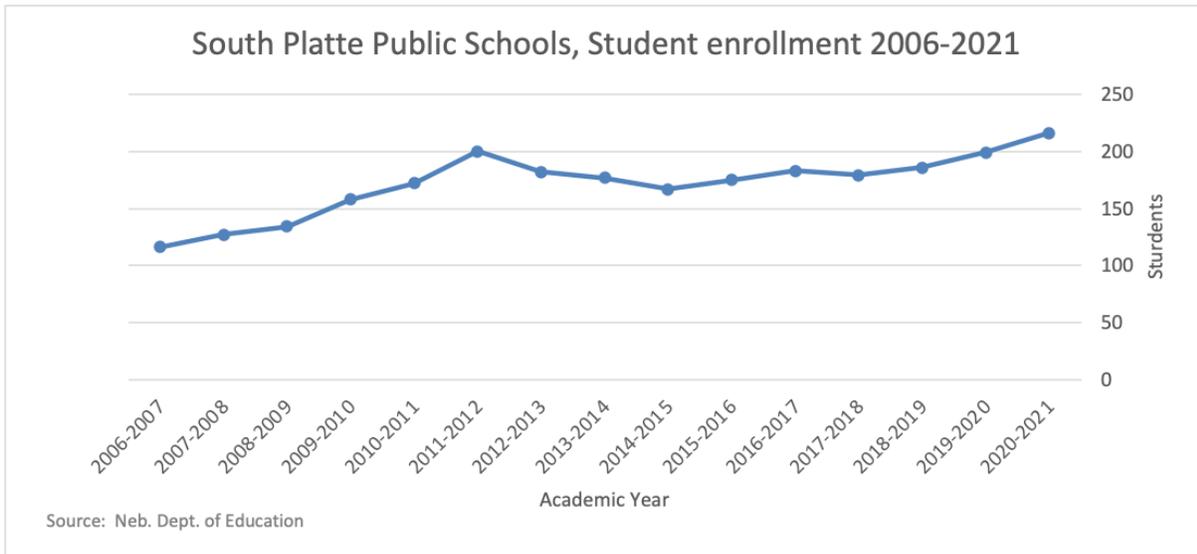


Despite slight population loss from 2010-2020, **the population under 18 years of age increased in the same time frame, representing over 22% of Big Springs’s population in 2020.** This indicates an increase in families, which could also indicate shifting housing and amenities preferences in the community.

Big Springs, NE Population under 18 years of age, 2010 and 2020			
Year	Total population	Population under 18 years old	% population under 18 years old
2020	394	88	22.3%
2010	400	75	18.8%

Source: 2010 & 2020 Decennial Census

This increase in the under 18 years old population, as well as students who opt-in to the district, has created an increase in student enrollment in South Platte Public Schools in recent years. **The 2020-2021 school year recorded the district’s highest ever enrollment at 216 students.** South Platte Public Schools has the **second highest rate of free or reduced lunch eligibility in the region with 55% of students qualifying.** Eligibility is based on income and household size. For a family of four, household income must be at or below \$49,025 to be eligible for benefits.



Big Springs had 208 housing units in 2020, 174 of which were occupied and 34 which were vacant. This is only a slight increase in the housing vacancy rate over the past 10 years. **This roughly 15% vacancy rate is roughly 50% higher than the state rate of around 10%.**

Big Springs, NE Housing Occupancy, 2010 & 2020			
	2010	2020	Change 2010-2020
Total Housing Units	217	208	-9
Occupied	186	174	-12
Vacant	31	34	3

Source: 2010 & 2020 Decennial Census

Business and Economy

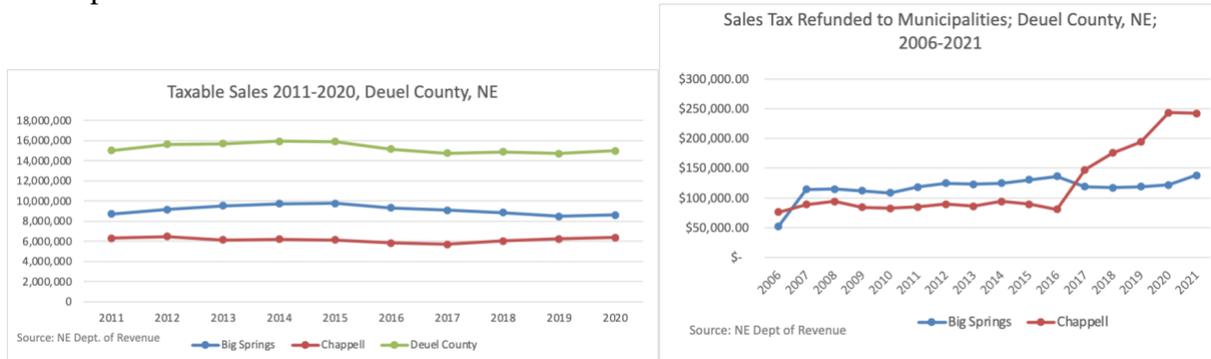
Retaining and growing businesses is a priority for the Big Springs community. “More businesses” was the most common response in a community-wide survey for what could be focused on to maintain or improve. Many existing businesses are important to the life of the town: Herbers, tire shop, bank, gunsmith, salon, grain elevator, truck stops, campground, and Spahn Marine, are all examples.

20 years ago, community members said there were more businesses, in particular the grocery, hardware store, bar, gas station, and restaurant were important. Today, residents cherish the existing businesses while recognizing that many of the businesses they previously relied on are no longer here. More people commute for work and shop in the towns where they are employed. Fewer farmers has also decreased the number of unique businesses in the area. If nothing is done differently in the coming years, there are fears that businesses will continue to close without new ones coming in behind them. **Loss of businesses would not only lead to fewer job**

opportunities and potential loss of population, but fewer things to do and places to get together for everyone in the community.

Maintaining businesses and occupied commercial properties is not only important for the vitality of the community and opportunities for workers, but also impacts the financial position of the village government. **Occupied storefronts and fully-utilized properties help support paying for town's infrastructure and current level of service.**

Taxable sales in Big Springs have generally held steady or slightly decreased in recent years, with the exception of 2021 when Big Springs saw a slight increase. Despite its smaller population, Big Springs continues to receive more taxable sales than its neighbor Chappell, indicating that **much of Big Springs's taxable sales are coming from outside the community.** An increase in sales tax revenue to nearly \$250,000 per year in Chappell can be attributed to an increase in its sales tax rate, from which the increased revenues are dedicated to economic development.



Summary

Big Springs has held a steady but slightly declining population, although the population under 18 has increased. This information, combined with a slight decrease in total housing units and increase in student enrollment in the school system, indicates that interest in Big Springs among families is fairly strong. The Deuel County population 65 years or older is estimated at around 23% and could increase to 36% of the population by 2030 as the baby boom generation ages. These trends will pose opportunities and challenges for Big Springs to address in its amenities, housing, and civic life over the next 10 years.

Local businesses are a part of the heartbeat of the Big Springs community, and residents know retaining and growing businesses will be key to the community's success in the future. While consolidation of operations and increasing online sales will continue to make commuting for work and shopping a reality for Big Springs residents, the village can support small-scale local producers, artisans, essential services for residents, and travel oriented businesses. Big Springs's location, small size, tight-knit connections, and a service-oriented staff are all assets which can encourage people with small businesses to grow their ideas in Big Springs.

With proactive efforts in housing, business development, and civic life, it's possible that Big Springs could continue to maintain or grow its population in coming years. Without new investments in these areas, Big Springs's population is likely to decline.

Land Use

Current Land Use

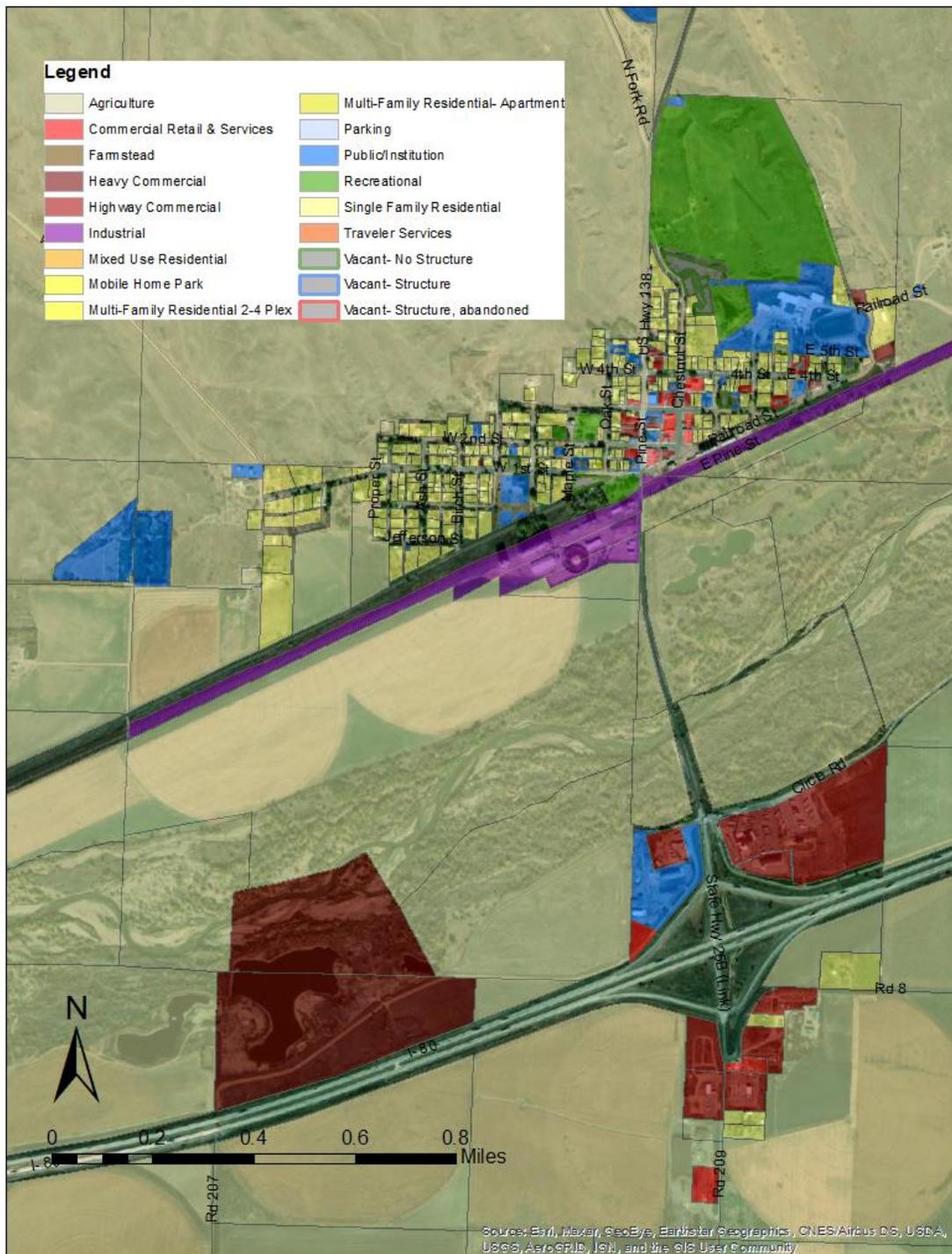
Big Springs has two primary areas of development, the main town which lies on the north side of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks on Highway 138, and the I-80 interchange commercial development. These two areas of development are separated by the South Platte River and the surrounding floodplain which is largely undevelopable.

Much of the land in the main part of town is residential, generally single family. Churches and the park break-up the residential uses in the west residential area and the school is a significant presence in the east residential area. **A few vacant, dilapidated properties in the residential areas, while small in number, pose threats to safety and well-being of the neighborhood residents.** Several houses that are not vacant, but still in disrepair, could also soon also fall into dilapidated condition. Despite these properties, the housing stock is generally in good condition. In the community survey, **“safe, clean, peaceful house and neighborhood to live in” ranked second highest in satisfaction among respondents.** A few lots have been platted for new residential use adjacent to north Chestnut street.

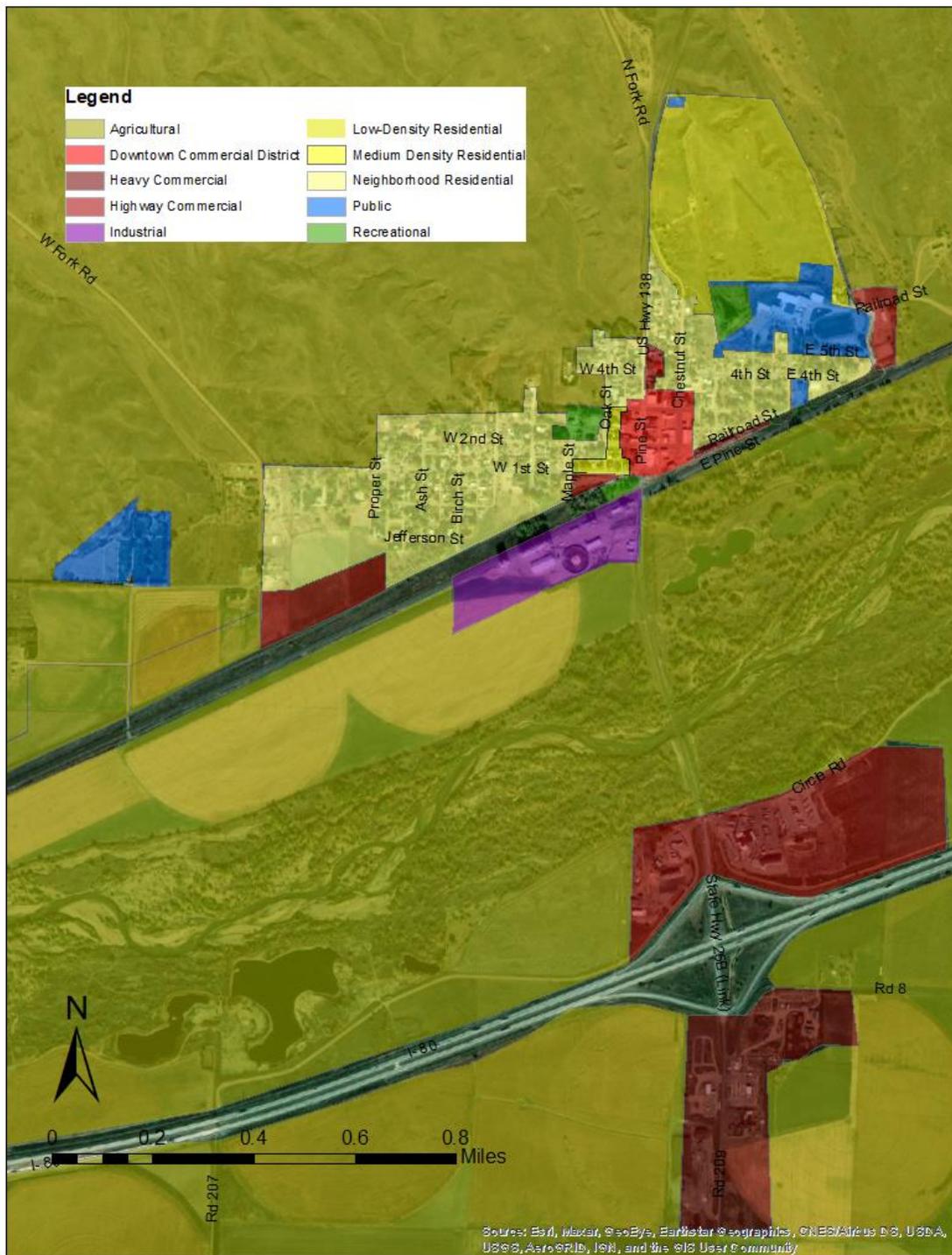
The downtown commercial district covers more or less two blocks from Pine Street to Chestnut Street and 1st Street to 3rd Street. Land uses in this area are mixed and include residential, commercial, public uses (village office, fire hall and library), storage, and a few vacant buildings. The grain elevator and rail on the south edge of town are the village’s only industrial uses.

With the exception of the golf course on the north side of town, east of Pine Street, agricultural land surrounds the village on all sides. Pastureland of steep, rolling hills and valleys comprise the land north of town while the land more suitable for crops and hay comprises the agricultural land along Highway 138.

Current Land Use Map

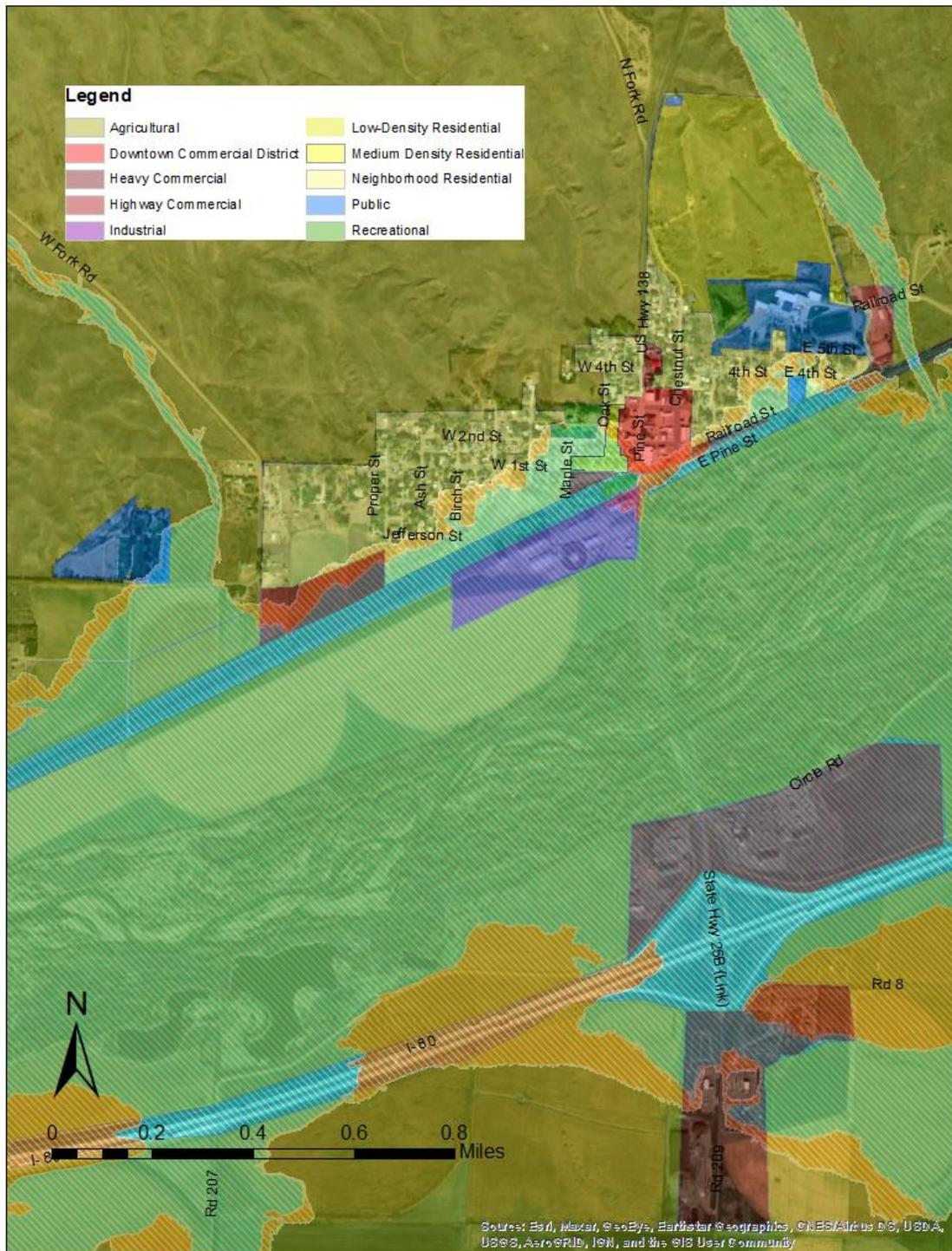


Future Land Use Map



Future Land Use Map, with Flood Plain Overlay

Blue = 1% annual risk of flooding; Orange = .02% annual risk of flooding



Future Land Use Plan

Protecting public and private property investments by reducing conflicts between incompatible uses (like industrial next to residential) is one of the primary jobs of the planning commission and village government. Conflicts between incompatible land uses occur because of incompatible *intensities* of use. Land uses with compatible intensities will be grouped together and negative effects of higher intensity uses should be mitigated when adjacent to lower intensity uses, such as residential. These intensities of a site can be measured by **hours** of activity, types of transportation **access**, the **mass** of the structure, and the **emissions** generated that may affect nearby properties, such as sounds, smells, and traffic.

Decisions can be made to ensure land use compatibility by assessing the compatibility of **hours**, **access**, **mass**, and **emissions** of any two land uses, or the acronym **HAME**. This process creates criteria for considering changes in land use on their impact to surrounding uses rather than a rigid structure based on broad categories of residential, commercial, or industrial.

The following future land use goals will be pursued by the village:

- **Protecting public and private investments from natural hazards**
- **Growing businesses and jobs in vibrant commercial areas**
- **Protecting quiet, small town feel of current and future residential areas**

Protecting public and private investments from natural hazards

- *Work with natural topography, namely the South Platte River floodplain and the rolling hills to the north, to minimize risks of natural hazards and make cost effective investments as land develops.*

Development between the train tracks and the south bank of the South Platte River should be avoided due to the floodplain. Much of the land in the I-80 interchange and on the south side of the main village also lie within the floodplain. As new development or redevelopment occurs the village should work with the Department of Natural Resources and local floodplain manager to ensure development occurs above the base flood elevation. Community-led housing renovation investments should be prioritized outside of the floodplain unless the home can be raised above the base flood elevation.

Any development in the northern hills should ensure that the sewer lines follow the lower valleys so that gravity can pull the flow.

Growing businesses and jobs in vibrant commercial areas

- *Take advantage of highway access and I-80 interchange for heavier vehicle and traveler oriented commercial uses.*

Highways 30, 138, and Interstate 80 all converge at Big Springs and provide business opportunities to meet the needs of travelers. The I-80 interchange is a large truck and traveler stop with lodging, food, and fuel amenities. The land around this interchange will

likely continue to grow with similar amenities and the Village should ensure orderly growth and safe traffic flows.

Opportunities for commercial uses also exist along Highway 138 heading southwest out of the village. **These commercial uses should be lighter and, with a buffer and some screening for headlights and noise, be generally compatible with the neighboring residential uses.** Uses that are vehicle oriented in nature, such as storage facilities, traveler oriented, regional retail, or light production would all be appropriate uses along Highway 138 as long as their intensities were generally compatible with adjacent neighborhoods.

Providing alternate locations for the development of storage facilities could help ease the demand for cheap storage space filling downtown buildings, opening these buildings up for commercial uses that rely on visitor traffic.

I-80 Interchange
<p>Hours: 24/7 Access: Vehicle oriented to accommodate interstate traffic, trucks in particular Mass: Low-rise buildings, set-back from the highway & frontage roads Emissions: Higher noise levels, smells tolerated</p>

Highway 138
<p>Hours: Daytime and possible evening hours Access: Auto-oriented access from highway Mass: Low-rise buildings, set-back from the highway Emissions: Low levels of noise and emissions associated with typical highway traffic tolerated</p>

- *Encourage commercial uses and building forms that create a vibrant market atmosphere and a desirable place to spend time in the **downtown area**.*

The downtown of Big Springs is not just a space for commercial uses but also serves as the activity and civic hub of the community. Overall, the downtown area should be retail oriented, safe for pedestrians, retain its historical identity, and have public investments enhance downtown as an attractive place to gather.

Commercial uses in the downtown area would ideally be retail-oriented and compatible with residents and visitors spending time in the area. Requiring structures to be built to the lot line preserves a **safe, pleasant pedestrian environment** and retains the historical structure of the area.



Big Springs has several historical features that have either been preserved or restored, giving the town a unique identity. This identity should be preserved. Further **historic preservation and restoration of buildings** would further help make Big Springs’s downtown an attractive, unique place to gather, visit, and do business.

Public investments that beautify and make downtown more comfortable help establish downtown as a hub for activity and place for visitors to stop and spend time and money at businesses located there.



Street trees not only make the area pleasant to visit but also can reduce summer cooling costs for shaded buildings and reduce

Shifting uses downtown away from low-value storage and warehousing should be a priority for the community. Currently county assessor’s records show that there is approximately 88,071 sq. feet of commercial building space in downtown Big Springs, over 55% of which is used for “storage warehouse.” For many small businesses 800-2,500 sq. feet is ideal to get started. Opening up parts of buildings to light production, retail, or office use or targeting buildings of this size for small businesses to use could help encourage new businesses to open space in downtown Big Springs.

Downtown
<p>Hours: Early morning-Late night, but not 24 hours Access: Pedestrian oriented, vehicle accessible Mass: 1-3 stories, built to lot line Emissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Smells and frequent noise associated with heavy commercial or industrial uses not tolerated, ● Heavy daytime commercial traffic allowed, ● Moderate evening noise and traffic associated with retail or gathering oriented businesses permitted

Protecting quiet, small town feel of current and future residential areas

- *Harmonious locations for diverse housing options, with higher intensity multi-unit housing directed areas with toward higher capacity roads and utilities.*

Multi-unit housing is an important part of providing housing options to a diversity of resident preferences and income levels. Duplex housing should be generally permissible in all residential areas with higher numbers of units directed towards higher intensity areas near downtown or along major roads.

- *Prioritize revitalization of underutilized residential lots in town, protecting quality neighborhoods and taking advantage of current infrastructure*



Vacant and underutilized lots not only pose a potential threat to safety, but also are a drag on neighborhood vitality. Infrastructure maintenance is supported by tax revenue, so too much erosion of the housing stock can increase the burden of remaining residents to pay for it. Pro-active approaches to prevent deterioration and replace dilapidated housing help protect infrastructure investments and quality neighborhood feel.

- *Protect desirable land and that provides ease of utility extensions for future residential- by the golf course and southwest edge of town.*

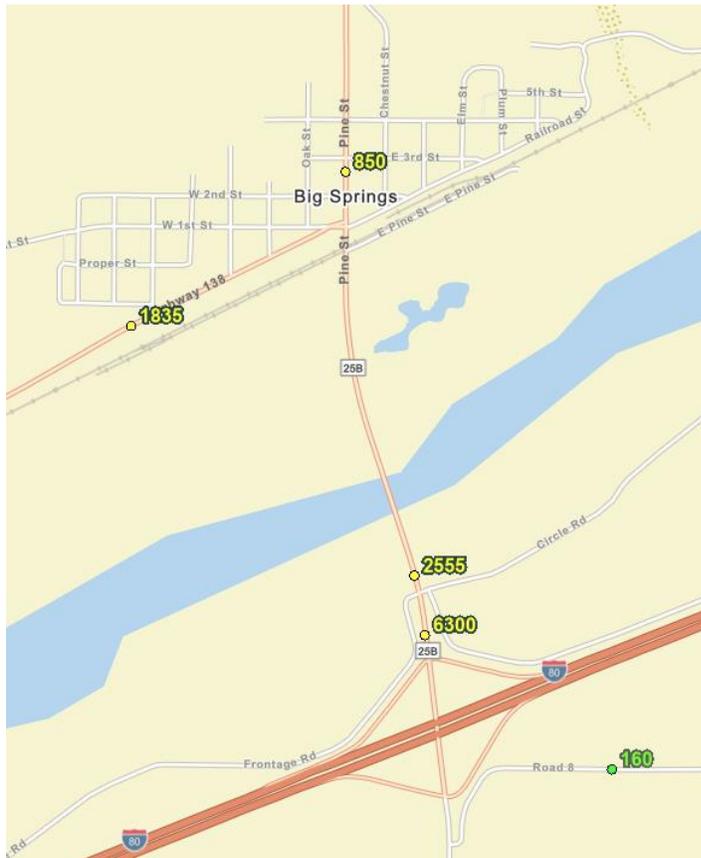
With the floodplain to the south and rolling hills to the north and east, the few areas of more easily developable land should be protected to meet future housing needs and light commercial uses. These areas are on the southwest edge of town just north of Highway 138 and up by the golf course and water tower. To ensure that utility extensions can cost effectively serve these future needs, any future subdividing of land in these areas should be done with utility service in mind and uses with high traffic, sounds, or smells should be discouraged so as to not deter the possibility of future development.

Residential
<p>Hours: Daytime hours of activity Access: Safe coexistence of pedestrians and cars, not designed for commercial or thru traffic Mass: 1-3 stories, set-backs to allow for consistent front, back, and side yards Emissions: Offensive smells & noises not tolerated, visual and noise screening where adjacent to highway, commercial, or industrial uses</p>

Transportation

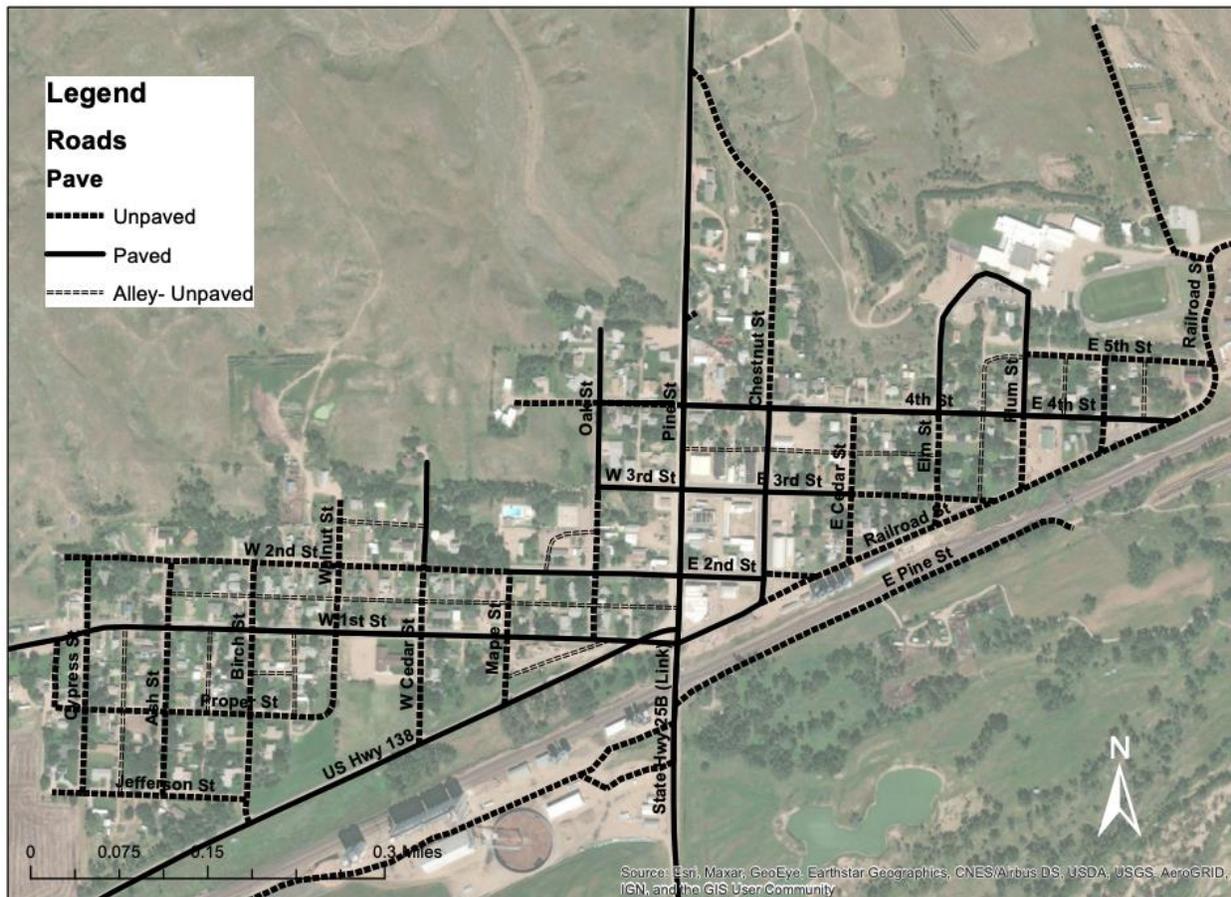
Big Springs’s current transportation is characterized by four types of roads, arterials, collectors, local streets, and alleys. Road conditions and maintenance were rated by the community to be generally satisfactory, with an average rating of 3.3 out of 5.

Arterial streets carry large volumes of traffic and carry traffic into and out of the community. Pine Street, which connects Highway 30 and Highway 138 and the I-80 interchange also serves as the primary main street in the downtown business district. At the I-80 interchange, direct access to this road is generally not provided but first requires a “turn-off” onto a frontage road to avoid back-up of heavy traffic. Highway 138 which takes traffic west out of town is also an arterial, connecting Big Springs to Julesburg, Colorado. Access to properties adjacent to Highway 138 is preferred to be off an adjoining road. **Any new direct access to these properties should be reviewed by Nebraska Department of Transportation.** Traffic counts for these arterial roads are seen in the map and table below. Truck traffic drops by nearly 80% after the truck stop turn-offs. **Completed paving of “Day Road” which connects I-80 to Highway 26 and Lake McConaughy to the north could draw more traffic via Pine Street through Big Springs, especially in summer months.**



Location	Annual Average Daily Traffic (2020)	Number of Trucks	% Trucks
Pine St. & I-80 Interchange @ truck stops	6300	1105	17.5%
Pine St. & I-80 Interchange north of truck stops	2555	245	9.6%
Pine St. between 2nd and 3rd	850	75	8.8%
Hwy 138 west of Birch St.	1835	220	12.0%

Source: Nebraska Dept of Transportation, Statewide Trafficflow Maps



Collector streets serve as connecting links to various parts of the community. Some of these streets are already paved and **should be prioritized over local roads in any future paving projects.**

- First and Second Streets serve as collectors for the west side of the community.
- Fourth Street serves as a connector to the school and serves in a similar collector capacity.
- West and east Cedar Street function in similar capacities serving the village park and the school, respectively.
- Railroad Street is a popular route to access the school and for the eastern residences to exit town to the south.

Local Streets function primarily to provide access to abutting properties. They typically have low volumes and serve short in-town trips.

Alleys are the smallest of village streets, are minimally maintained, and provide secondary access. They are found predominantly in the older sections of the community and within the commercial core.

The goal to achieve in transportation is to **accommodate safe and efficient transportation for all users.**

- *Easy and safe movement of vehicular traffic across the village, accommodating thru traffic without sacrificing local safety and ease of use.*

Local traffic should yield to thru-traffic on Pine and Highway 138. These routes are important for farmers, ranchers, and truckers as well as tourist traffic, and should remain safe and accessible routes for these users. However, low speeds and relatively narrow right of ways help calm thru traffic on these arterials in town. This helps ensure local traffic is also able to safely and easily get around town, especially on Pine where parking and local turn-offs create the possibility for more slowing or stopping of traffic.

- *Promoting pedestrian safety on streets in downtown, residential areas, and near the school*

Pedestrian traffic is an important component of how Big Springs residents, particularly its youth, get around town and pedestrian safety should be prioritized. Pedestrian safety not only benefits youth who cannot drive, but also the elderly population who may no longer be able to drive, which may be an increasing population in coming years.

Sidewalks and crossings with ramps are ultimately safest for pedestrians, but 20 mph¹ or less speed limits, trees planted close to the street, and signage for crossings can also help promote pedestrian safety. In the downtown areas, Pine Street should balance both the ease of through-traffic, much of it tourist or agricultural related, and the safety of foot traffic visiting public building and businesses. Cross streets on 2nd and 3rd Street can be more oriented to foot traffic. Signage, narrowing the crossing width and painted crosswalks can increase pedestrian safety and help make a comfortable environment for pedestrians. Planters, trees, benches and public art can also make a pleasant pedestrian environment. The visual “narrowing” these features provide for motorists also helps to calm traffic.

¹Tefft, B.C. (2011). *Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Severe Injury or Death* (Technical Report). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Public Facilities

Promoting maintenance and improvement of public facilities and infrastructure

- Planning for maintenance and access to high quality recreational facilities in all parts of the village, designed for use by all ages
- Maintenance and improvement of public buildings to serve needs for convening, educational, and conducting village business
- Cost-effective maintenance and extension of current utilities system while providing for future capacity and location demands

Parks & Recreation Facilities

Parks Overview

Big Springs has three recreation areas. The primary park, located off of 2nd Street, is home to playground equipment, picnic pavilions, the spring after which Big Springs takes its name, the pool, the museum, basketball and tennis courts, and a sand volleyball court. **Eiker Park**



is located on the southwest corner of the intersection of Highway 138 and Pine Street and provides shade and greenspace at the entrance to town, as well as an historical marker of the Sam Bass train robbery. Eiker Park is a great spot for travelers, but its location between the highway and railroad may not be ideal for unsupervised children. Lastly, the **Youth Recreation Pond** located northwest of the school provides for outdoor recreation and fishing opportunities. The pond is village owned land that has been upkept and improved by volunteer community projects.



The **Veteran's Memorial Park** is located at the corner of 2nd and Maple across the street from the swimming pool park and is a beautiful tribute to area veterans.

The site includes a walkway to the circular memorial site with three granite ledger stones engraved with the names of approximately 670 local veterans. The ledger stones are centered with a 30' American Flag pole, surrounded by 25' flag poles flying the flags for the six branches of the Armed Forces. Upkeep is supported by volunteers.

Nearly all Big Springs residences are within a ½ mile or 10 minute walking distance to a park. **To maintain this level of service, Big Springs should consider setting aside a lot for additional park space if it expands to the**

southwest or northeast or consider enhancing school or the pond properties to double as parks and recreation opportunities.

Parks were one of the most highly rated amenities for public satisfaction, though some improvements were mentioned to be made. The village should be proud of and build on the success of its parks as attractive amenities that contribute to quality of life for all residents.

Bathhouse & Pool

Bathhouse

The bathhouse is a 1950s building that has had renovations done in 2009 and some structure crack repairs in recent years. It includes an admission area and men's and women's showers and changing rooms. The bathhouse is thought to be about at the end of its life-cycle.

Pool

The Big Springs Pool is open Memorial Day to Labor Day. Staffing the pool to remain open in the summer is a challenge. While the pool has held together fairly well, upgrades and improvements are a priority for the community in the future. The pool provides a place to gather for youth and families in the summer and is a draw for quality of life in the community.

In the community survey, satisfaction with the pool and bathhouse rated fairly low, especially among younger adults, indicating a desire for improvements.

Utilities

Solid Waste (Garbage)

Solid waste removal services are provided out of Waste Connections from Ogallala and service is generally sufficient. The village maintains its own dumpsters. The village should budget for new dumpsters on an ongoing basis. New development should include a plan for solid waste removal, ensuring it can be provided without blocking roads, sightlines on corners, or blocking sidewalks. Service alleys, if built, should ensure they have dimensions and capacity to handle sanitation truck traffic without erosion complicating normal use.

Water System

The water system, including the water tower, was updated in 2008. All cast iron lines were replaced. Lines range from 4" mains to a 10" transmission line that runs along Chestnut Street and also across the river to the Interstate businesses. Most residential blocks are served by 6" mains that run beneath the streets. The water meter system is estimated to be in need of an upgrade in the next five years.

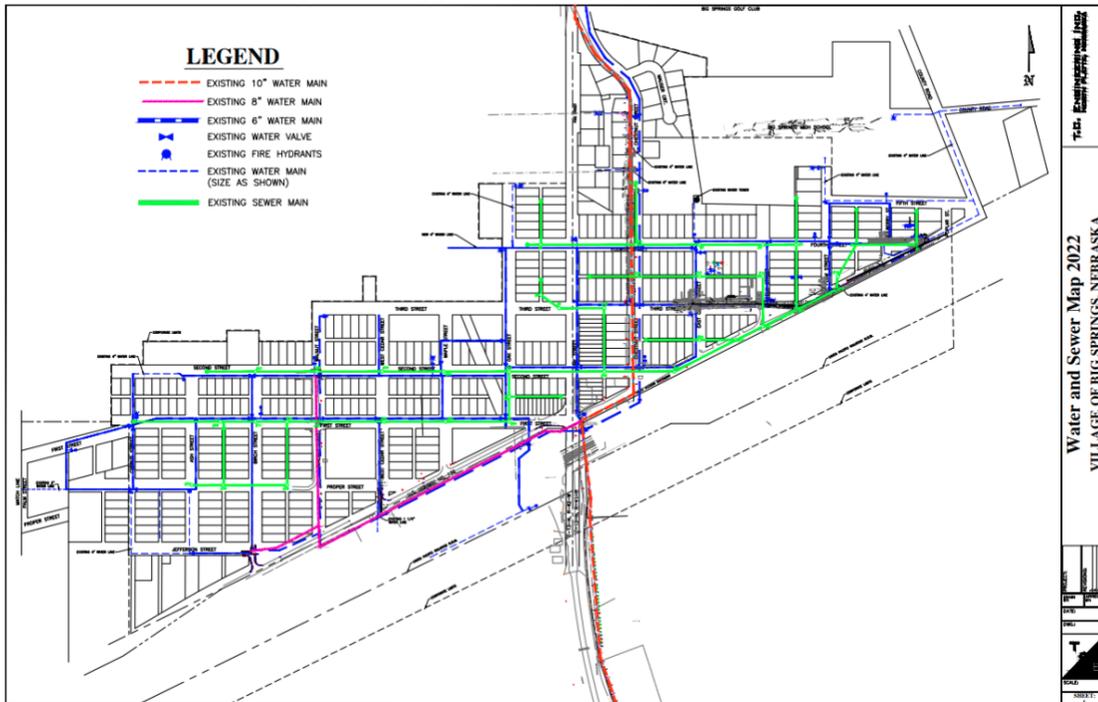
The existing water tower has an effective capacity of approximately 175,000 gallons. Big Springs’s wells are each designed for 500 gallons per minute. A limiting factor on new development is the height of the water tower and the minimum pressure should be about 30 PSIG all the time, with 40 PSIG preferable.

Sewer & Wastewater

The existing treatment facility is likely close to the designed organic load. The hydraulic loading is approximately 554 population equivalents per day. Significant expansion of the community’s population would require a plan for expansion of the treatment facility. Sewer mains generally run beneath streets and in service alleys where possible. The north side of Interstate-80 is served by village sewer and three lift stations that pump wastewater across the river to connect with the rest of the village’s system. Some properties are still served by orangeburg pipe service lines, which will need replacing in coming years.

Three full-retention lagoons serve the village which were built in the mid-1990s. Flooding and infiltration is occasionally an issue, with the last emergency release occurring in 2013.

Water and Sewer Map 2022 (approximate locations)



Village Buildings

Village Office

The Village Office building is located downtown on Pine Street and is home to the village clerk's office, the board chamber, and restroom. The building is in good condition with updates made around 2010.

Village Maintenance Shop and Storage

The Village municipal maintenance shop on Plum Street houses most of the Village's vehicles and maintenance equipment. Slightly more space would be needed to house all of the village's vehicles and equipment (including plow blades, sand spreader, etc.) indoors. Housing vehicles and equipment indoors can prolong the life of public purchases. The building has heating and cooling and has a restroom.



A village-owned brick storage shed in the park houses the mower and park maintenance equipment. The building is susceptible to flooding so if the building ever needs to be reconstructed it should be elevated above the flood level.

Library

The Village Library is owned by the village but decisions on operations are made by the Library board. Two part-time staff members run the Library. Hours of operation are Mondays 1:30pm-4:30pm and Thursdays 1:30pm- 6:30pm The library is located in the historic bank building and has the following among its assets:



- 13,828 books in its collection.
- High speed internet public access
- 1 public computer, and 1 staff computer

Public opinion in the survey rated the library very highly in satisfaction, scoring an average of 4 out of 5. The 20-39 age group rated satisfaction slightly lower than other age-groups indicating possible room for growth to meet the needs of that age group. Comments were received about possible collaboration with the library to provide programming for youth or expanding its capacity as a public gathering space.

Depot Museum

The old Big Springs Depot, located on the park property, is a historic building first built in 1867, relocated in 1906, then finally relocated in 1975 to its current location in the park, where it is now used as a museum. The village owns the building. Currently, a volunteer looks after the maintenance and is in charge of opening the building for visitors. The building has no water, no gas, and no air conditioning. The building is heated by electricity to keep the collection safe in colder months. The Depot museum had 75 visitors from 2020-2022 and is open by request or to coincide with events in the area.



Public opinion in the community survey rated museum and historical sites in the middle of the road for satisfaction, rating 3.1 out of 5, indicating general satisfaction with the museum and other historical sites, but also opportunities for increased use and future improvements. Residents were positive about the building recently being painted.

Cemeteries

The Big Springs cemetery is owned and run by the cemetery board. The Cemetery Board has an interlocal agreement with the village, budgeted each August, to receive an allotment of tax dollars once per month. The cemetery also receives donations. No money is contributed by the county. It has 2 full cemetery sections with 198 lots and a third Section has 225 lots which is almost full. A fourth section has the groundwork and sprinklers completed which will provide space for 200 additional lots, which should be plenty to meet future needs. Movement towards more cremations may stretch use of the remaining available lots further.

There is no official caretaker for the cemetery aside from a paid mowing position, but board members volunteer to contribute. Recruiting and keeping caretakers can

be a challenge. Ideal candidates are people with flexible schedules, making retired or partially retired people possibly good candidates. Someone with plumbing knowledge is a positive asset to have involved with upkeep. A connection from Julesburg who has a backhoe currently does the digging for graves.

Incremental upgrades to the sprinkler system is one of the primary capital costs, which are wrapped into each year’s operating budget.

Rural Cemeteries

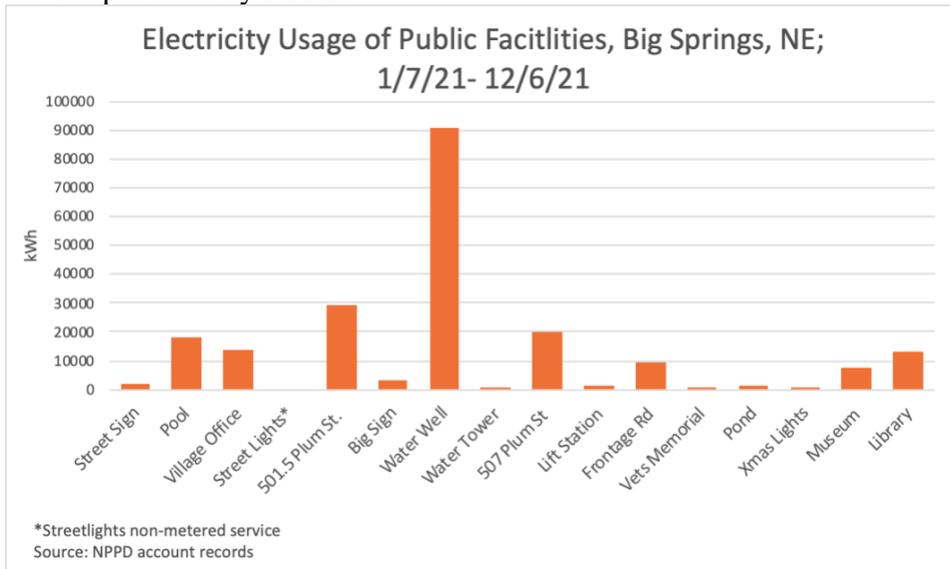
The Big Springs area has two rural cemeteries: the Day town cemetery, and a Lutheran Cemetery, both north of town. The person who mows the Big Springs cemetery also maintains those cemeteries.

Golf Course

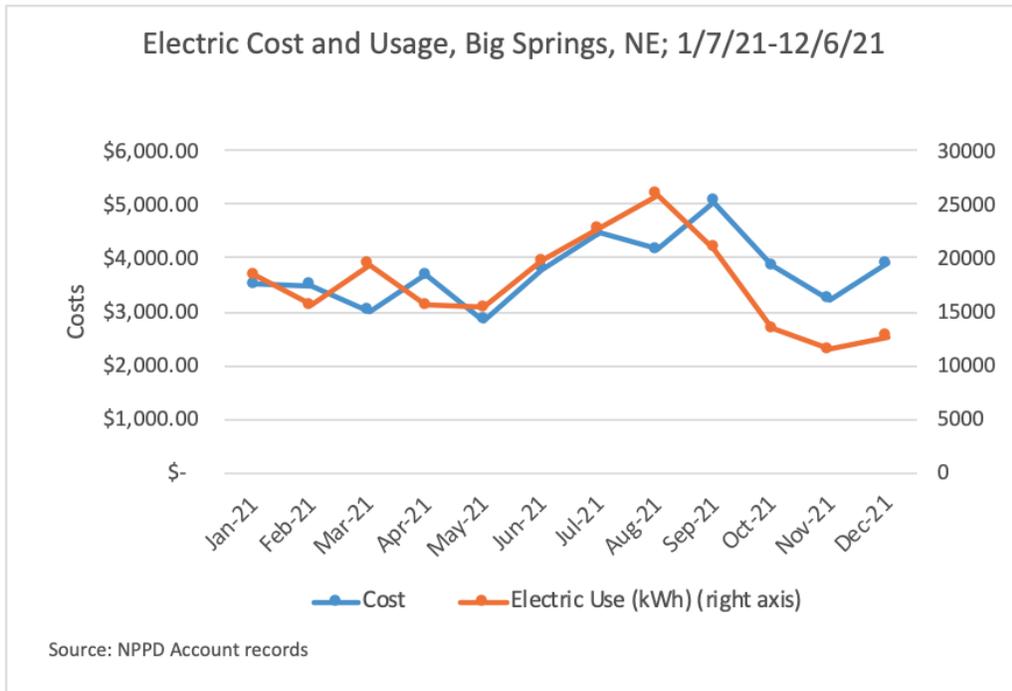
Big Springs is home to a 9-hole sand greens golf course. The course is privately owned and maintained and is not irrigated. This facility is situated north of town, providing sweeping views of the South Platte valley and also has a clubhouse available for event use. Green fees are affordable at \$5/day or \$35 for an annual pass.

Energy Usage

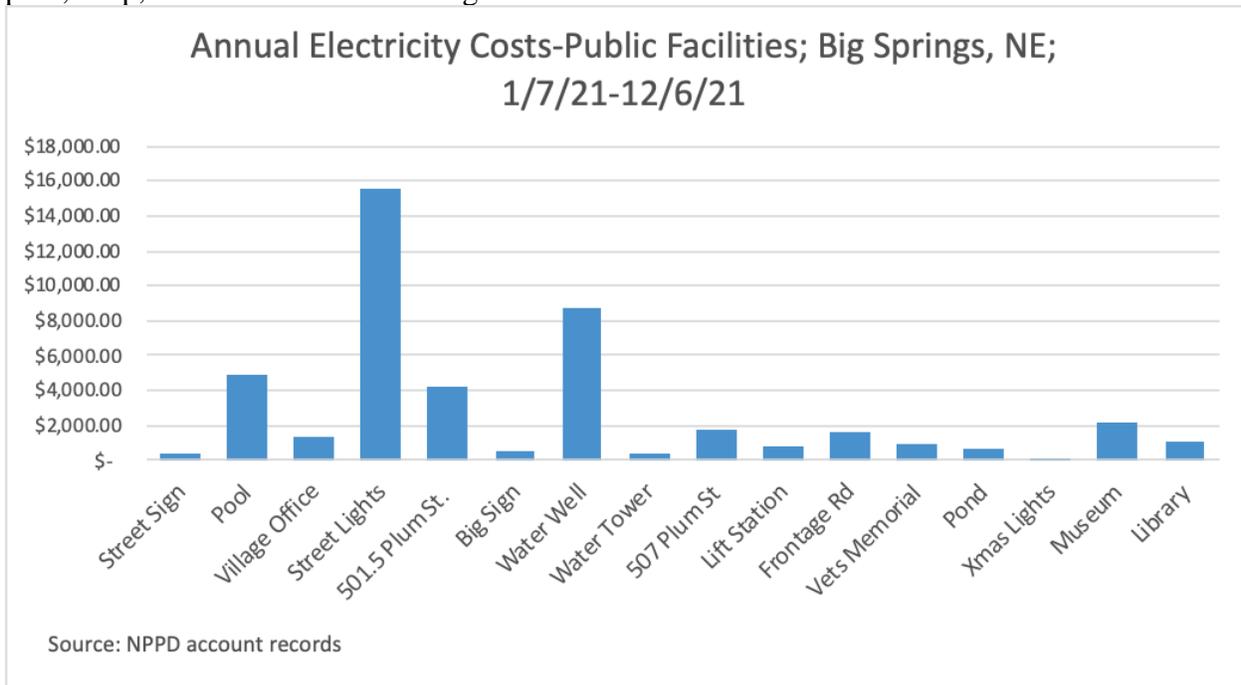
Electric and gas usage for public facilities can be seen in the chart below. The highest energy users are the well, the shop, pool, village office, and library. Streetlights are a non-metered service provided by NPPD.



Costs and usage for the entire year can be seen in the chart below. Monthly usage fluctuates between 11,000 kWh and 25,000 kWh, with the higher usage months being in the summer.



Annual costs for public facilities can be seen in the chart below. The streetlights, water well, pool, shop, and museum have the highest electric costs.





Options for reducing electric use and costs include:

- Installing solar panels on public buildings like the library, village office, or shop. In public buildings, solar panels are a good option for reducing the long-term energy costs to the community. Since energy costs are often highest on hot summer afternoons, solar energy systems can also reduce the amount of peak energy the village has to buy in summer months.
- Weatherization and energy-saving heating and cooling systems when the current devices need replacing or updating; new installation of insulation and windows on current buildings to make the buildings more energy efficient. A schedule and priority of improvements could be created and included in a Capital Improvement Plan.
- Prioritizing redevelopment of lots in town also saves resources and energy by ensuring existing infrastructure is utilized before expanding to new lots.

Staff

The village clerk is a part-time position with office hours of 8:30 am-1:00 pm Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and 8:30 am-4:30 pm Tuesday and Thursday. This position serves to assist the public with questions, payments, and business with the Village and coordinates communication among the elected, appointed, and volunteer boards. This position also maintains the books, legal notices.

Maintenance and public works staff has been just one person for the past several years, but two positions have been hired in the past. 1.5 to 2 full-time maintenance and public works staff persons have been recommended to help keep up with the workload and provide additional security that the work can get done even if one staff member is unavailable.

Contractors currently fill-in to keep-up with maintenance tasks when village staff is on vacation or unavailable. A list of contractors and sufficient training to accomplish these day-to-day tasks should be continued to provide for continuity in the event staff is unavailable.

Leadership & Involvement

Implementation of the comprehensive plan requires strong leadership and involvement from the community. Full and stable boards, competent and communicative village government, and engaged citizens help the village carry out the strategies in this plan. Respondents to the community survey were least confident in the village government with an average rating of 2.8 out of 5. The village of Big Springs outlines two goals to bolster trust and civic capacity:

- **Trusted and engaged leadership**
- **Inclusive and consistent communication**

Key takeaways from the community survey showed that making available multiple modes of communication and providing engagement opportunities on weekday evenings or weekend daytime hours were key to involvement. Some specific details are:

- 9am- 3pm on weekends was the most popular overall time for engagement opportunities
- About 50% of respondents were available from 5-7 pm on weekdays, including over 60% of 20-39 year olds; 60+ year olds were most available 9am-3pm weekdays.
- “Find a leader and talk in person” was the most popular way to share a concern overall, but 70% of 20-39 year olds preferred to “call, visit, or email the village office”
- Over 70% of 20-59 year olds get their information about town happenings via social media, compared to just 30% of 60+ year olds
- Word of mouth and the community message signs are the second and third most important ways respondents get information.

Trusted and Engaged Leadership

- *Full boards with informed members through ample public information, active recruitment, and adequate training resources.*
 - Informational sessions for all positions and public calls for applicants to fill appointed board positions can help leaders find good candidates and encourage more people to volunteer or run for leadership positions.
 - Utilizing regional and statewide networks and professionals to provide training sessions for board members can help them to understand their role and make good decisions.

Inclusive and consistent communication

- *Increased communication between village board and community through documented ways to contact leadership, clear protocol for communicating minutes and announcements through multiple channels,*
 - Documenting and posting how community members can contact leadership can help open lines of communication. New residents may not know how to find leaders to leave a comment and not all people can come to village board meetings.

Alternate ways of getting in touch can help residents feel heard and help board members set appropriate boundaries on how to receive feedback.

- Minutes and announcements could be posted in ways more easily accessible to the public. Utilizing the many volunteer boards and groups, mailings, and public signs in town can help get information out. A new village website could help make information available to all people as well as coordinating with citizens to make accurate information available on social media.
- *Increased information about decisions and regulations and consistent opportunities for open public testimony.*
 - Posting regulations, permits, and payment information online is a way the village can make information more accessible to residents. This also helps provide predictability of time and costs for those wishing to develop.
 - The village should utilize active networks such as the fire department, businesses, school, and churches to help spread information and invite residents to be engaged. An active and updated list of connectors to these networks can help coordinate activities and disseminate information.
 - Informational sessions and soliciting feedback about major decisions before taking action can help build trust between the village government and residents. Information about these sessions should be shared with the above networks, locations, and publications.
 - A monthly newsletter or flier providing information about upcoming events and happenings could help provide consistent information to all citizens. Piggy backing on utility bills and partnering with the school or another organization that already reaches a broad audience could help provide information in a cost effective manner. Special care should be taken to all those in the Big Springs community are reached by information, however, not just those with a utility bill or children in the school.

Engagement and Implementation

This plan was developed with extensive input and engagement from an steering committee and community members. Activities included:

- 18 individual interviews with planning commissioners, board members, and other leaders
- Six steering committee meetings
- A youth focus group with 14 students
- A community survey with 50 responses
- A community workshop with over 30 individuals in attendance



The planning commission will be the primary local “experts” tasked with consulting the comprehensive plan for guidance when making decisions on land use and zoning. The village board and staff should also be familiar with the comprehensive plan as it relates to the community’s goals in land use and public facilities.

Most of what the community wants to see completed, however, like more housing and businesses, will take initiative of private citizens with the village government in a supportive role. For this reason, a quarterly collaborative meeting among event organizers, government officials, and neighbors is recommended to share information, make offers and requests, and touch base on the strategic goals of this planning process. Since these efforts are volunteer powered, the most important “outcome” of these meetings should be growing relationships, getting residents connected to each other and involved in community activities. Leaders should continue to draw on the various community networks that were mentioned as being important to civic life, include the following and more:

Veterans: Legion and Vets Memorial	Farm and Ranch Families	Ag Valley Co-op	Zion Lutheran Church	Community Events- July 4, Santa Day/Tree Lighting, Memorial Day and Alumni Weekend
Community Foundation Fund	People new to town	Museum Board and Volunteers	Big Springs Methodist Church	Phelps Hotel Volunteers
Student Council, FFA, 4H	National Honors Society	Rudy’s Tire Group	Assembly of God and Wed. Night Youth Group	Lunch Bunch and Food Pantry
School Booster Club	Pre-School Families	Volunteer Fire Department	Community Businesses	Farmers Market

The second most important outcome should be moving forward community priorities. A shorter, action-oriented document that’s easy for volunteers to update and pass on to others has been started and could be used to keep track of progress.