

Information about Rural Living in Dickinson County

Introduction

If you are contemplating buying or building a home in the unincorporated area of Dickinson County, it is important for you to know that living in the unincorporated area is different from life in the city.

Agriculture is very important to the Dickinson County economy and has priority in the rural areas. It is the policy of the State of Kansas and Dickinson County, to conserve, protect and encourage the development and improvement of farmland for the production of food and other agricultural products. Kansas has a right to farm law to help protect agricultural activities from nuisance lawsuits. These facts are provided for informational use in your decision making about rural living.

Agriculture

Local farmers often work from early morning until late at night, especially during the planting and harvesting seasons. With this activity there can be a lot of noise from farm machinery near your home, increased vehicle traffic to and from the fields, dust, pollen and mold spores from crop and crop residue, and possibly the lights of equipment shining onto your property. It is possible that normal and accepted farming practices may be disruptive to your lifestyle and/or affect your personal health.

Land preparation and other operations can cause large amounts of dust, especially during windy and dry conditions.

Farmers sometimes burn their crop stubble after harvest. This may cause a lot of thick smoke, an odor and burning ashes falling on neighboring property.

Concentrations of animals may cause objectionable odors and attract flies.

Some farm animals can be dangerous.

Utilities and Services

Electric services, natural gas, cable T.V. and other services may not be available at the same level as in the city, or in the case of water supply and sewage treatment, they may be your responsibility to provide.

If a public sewer system is not available to the land that you are contemplating buying, you will be required to construct and/or maintain an on site wastewater system to serve your house. This system, depending on the type, may be expensive. The maintenance of a small wastewater system may also be time consuming and unpleasant. Permits for wastewater are issued through Department of Environmental Services.

Rural water districts serve parts of the rural areas of the county. You should check to see if the land you are contemplating buying is served by a water district. Even if served by a water district, the district's system and policies may restrict your water use. If you need to drill an on site water well, you should check the situation thoroughly.

Natural gas service is not available to all rural county areas. In some areas propane gas (LPG) may be the only fuel source. Propane gas (LPG) is normally more expensive than natural gas.

An electric service power line may not be located close to the land you may be looking at. If a power line is not within a certain distance, you may have to pay for an extension of service to the land. The costs of this extension may be based on a per foot charge, and an additional charge for each power pole needed. You should check out the total costs of such an extension if the land is in that situation. Winter ice and windstorms can bring down power lines and you may be without power for many hours.

It may take longer for fire, emergency medical and law enforcement services to respond to an emergency in the county than it would in the city.

Weather

Those who live in the county often experience nature at a greater intensity, both positively and negatively, than the city dweller.

Even normally dry creeks can flood after heavy rains. County zoning does not allow building in an identified floodway. Although discouraged, building can be done in the 1% chance flood area/ 100

year floodplain. Flood plain maps are available for review in the county planning and zoning office. Dickinson County now has them available online, on the GIS Interactive Map They are also available at www.fema.gov in the flood map store. They are viewable and printable on line. Flooding of roads may make them impassable, isolating you from work, shopping and school or emergency assistance. Winter snow storms can also make roads impassable, especially if the wind drifts the snow. All major roads will be plowed and opened before minor roads are opened. There are no tornado warning sirens in unincorporated areas of the county.

Miscellaneous

Clay soils are expansive and may cause damage to foundations. Information on county soils is available from the NRCS (National Resource Conservation Service).

Wild animals can be fascinating neighbors, but they may also pose dangers. Deer may cross roads unexpectedly. Skunks can be odoriferous. Coyotes, badgers, skunks, raccoons, opossums, and other animals are known to cause damage to gardens and buildings and can cause the death of pets. Hunting of animals takes place in rural areas and is controlled by property owners.

Road Access

The fact that you are able to drive to your potential future home site on a beautiful sunny spring or summer day does not mean that is a situation at all times. Flooding has already been mentioned. The following should also be considered.

Dickinson County maintains over 207 miles of paved roads and over 108 miles of sand or gravel roads. The townships in the county maintain over an additional 940 miles of mostly sand surfaced roads. The condition of these various roads varies greatly. The total amount of paved county road mileage makes it difficult to maintain the roads at a level you may be accustomed to.

County or Township policy may prevent you from having direct driveway access onto a county or township road. Paved county roads are classified as arterials, for high speed through travel and therefore your access may be limited. Check with the Dickinson County Highway Departments.

Extreme weather conditions may create difficult driving conditions. Rain, or melting snow, can turn sand roads into temporary quagmires. Floodwaters may close roads temporarily. Snow, especially if drifting may make roads impassable.

Vehicles cause dust on unpaved roads. Unpaved roads may be slippery when wet, possibly making it difficult to steer and brake. Braking distance on gravel or sand roads is much greater than on paved roads.

The minor township road intersections often do not have stop signs or other traffic control devices.

The bridges on minor roads are usually narrower than bridges on major roads.

Large, slow moving farm vehicles and equipment often travel the rural roads.

Low use/low maintenance roads may not be upgraded.

Mail delivery may not be convenient in some areas.

School bus routes should be considered if you have, or will have, school age children.

Travel on unpaved sand or gravel roads will increase vehicle maintenance costs.

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

All lands within the Agricultural Zone are located in an area where land is used for commercial agricultural production. Owners, residents, and other users of this property or neighboring property may be subjected to inconvenience, discomfort, and the possibility of injury to property and health arising from the normal and accepted agricultural practices and operations, including but not limited to noise, odors, dust the operations of machinery of any kind, including aircraft, the storage and disposal of manure, the application of fertilizers, soil amendments, herbicides, and pesticides

Building permits are required for building in the unincorporated areas of the county. You lot will need to meet the minimum zoning requirements.

When a land owner plans to divide their land into two or more parcels of land for housing, and the parcels are smaller than 40 acres, there must be subdivision approval from the county. A building permit cannot be issued to build until all zoning and subdivision requirements are met.

There may be existing easements on the land that are not visually apparent. These easements may give another party the right to build a pipeline, or other facility or utility on the land, and prevent you from building where you may want. Be sure to check for easements. A title search may be useful.

You may be provided with a plat drawing of your property. To be accurate the land needs to have been properly surveyed by a state licensed surveyor and monumented with property pins.

Subdivisions may have private restrictive covenants that placed limits on what can be placed on the land. You should check to see if there are any covenants on the land you are thinking of buying. A copy of any deed restrictions can be obtained from the Dickinson County Registrar of Deeds.

Subdivisions may have roads or other facilities that are private and maintained by the subdivision lot purchasers. Maintenance fees and operations may be overseen by a homeowners association there may be yearly fees that you will be expected to pay.

Zoning and/or subdivision changes may occur in any area, bringing change to the rural setting. Some cities in the county have extra territorial jurisdiction beyond the city limits. You may also need to work with city officials in such locations.

In Conclusion

Remember there is a difference between country living and living in the country.

The above information is by no means exhaustive. Making a decision as to whether or not to live in an unincorporated area should be approached with as much knowledge as possible. Do not assume anything when making your decision. Make every effort to gather and consider all of the facts bearing on the decision, the negative as well as the positive.

This document prepared for informational purposes by
Dickinson County Planning Board
Board of Dickinson County Commissioners
Zoning Administrator

Contact:

Tim Hamilton
Dickinson County Zoning
109 East 1st St
Abilene, KS 67410
785-263-4464
E-mail: thamilton@dkcoks.org
Zoning and Subdivision
Regulations can be found on line.

Derek Norrick
Dickinson County
Environmental Services
2363 Jeep Rd
Abilene, KS 67410
785-263-4780
E-mail: dnorrick@dkcoks.org