

Otero County



2017 CEDS

Prepared by Southern Colorado Economic Development District

1104 N. Main Street

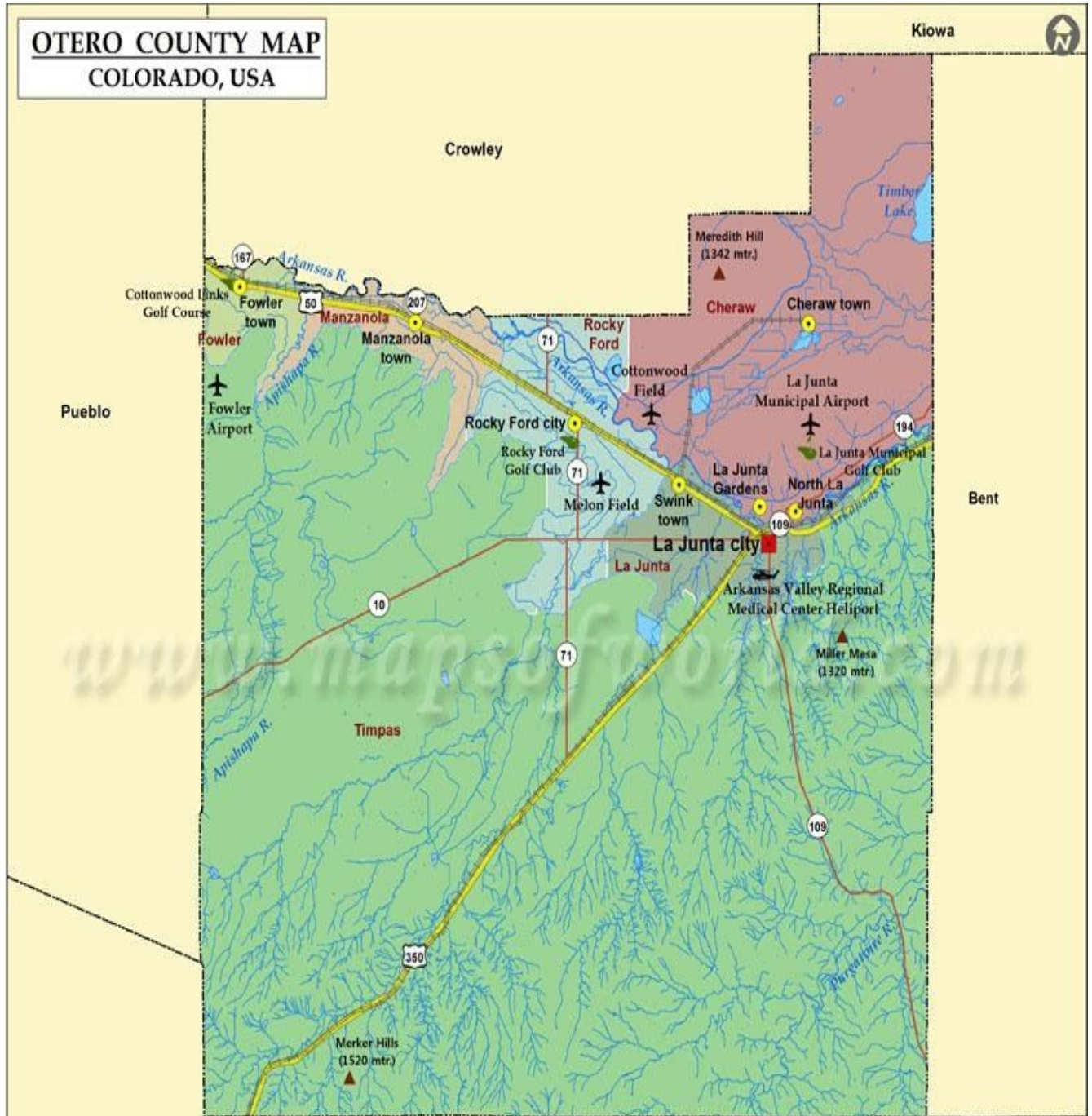
Pueblo, Colorado 81003

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OTERO COUNTY MAP COLORADO, USA



LEGEND

Major City/Town	Railroad	Highway Class	River/Stream
County Seat	Airport Type	Federal	River/Lake/Reservoir
Golf Course	Small	State	County Subdivision
Mountain Peak/Hill	Heliport	Other	County Boundary

Las Animas



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Summary Background

Otero County is centrally located in the Southeastern region of Colorado. The county is 1,268 square miles with a population density of 14.8 per square mile. The average elevation is 3,600 feet.

Otero County was established in 1889. The county seat, La Junta, means “The Junction”. The pioneers recognized the location of Otero County as a trade center, and the same outlook remains today as it continues to be the trade hub for Southeastern Colorado. Otero County’s diverse economy consists of industry, agriculture, historical sites and recreational activities.

County Commissioners

Keith Goodwin
Kevin Karney
Jim Baldwin

Legislative Districts

Congressional District	4
Senate District	2
House District	64

County Seat

La Junta

Population

The population of Otero County for 2015 was 18,343. The population growth for the last five years in Otero County was at -2.6%.

Population by Age

Under 5 years	1,179	5 to 9 years	1,360	10 to 14 years	1,254
15 to 19 years	1,452	20 to 24 years	1,039	25 to 29 years	997
30 to 34 years	973	35 to 39 years	955	40 to 44 years	1,020
45 to 49 years	1,278	50 to 54 years	1,347	55 to 59 years	1,352
60 to 64 years	1,157	65 to 69 years	949	70 to 74 years	825
75 to 79 years	726	80 to 84 years	493	85 years and older	465

Population by Community

Cheraw	247
Fowler	1,182
La Junta	7,077
Manzanola	434
Rocky Ford	3,957
Swink	617
Unincorporated	4,829

Population data retrieved from American Fact Finder

www.factfinder.census.gov

Poverty

In 2015, Kids Count reported 69.9% of school age children qualified for free/reduced lunch compared to 14.9% in the State.

www.kidscount.org

Housing

The average household size is 2.39 compared to an average family size of 2.64. The homeownership vacancy rate is 2.6% and the rental vacancy rate is 13.9%.

According to the National Low Income Coalition, affordable rent represents the generally accepted standard of not spending more than 30% of gross housing costs. The fair market rent in 2015 for Otero County is \$731 for a two bedroom home. In order to afford rent at this amount, a household in Otero County must earn \$29,240 annually. At the minimum wage of \$8.31 hour, one minimum wage earner would have to work 68 hours per week.

Data retrieved from National Low Income Housing Coalition

www.nlihc.org

Education

Six districts provide K-12 education in Otero County. Higher education is available locally at Otero Junior College and the Colorado State University Pueblo (four year University) in Pueblo.

The 2014 American Community Survey estimates that 82.5% of the total population 25 years of age and older has attained a high school diploma; 10.1% have attained a Bachelor's Degree or higher.

Student enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year is 962. The dropout rate for Otero County is 1.59% and the graduation rate for Otero County is 85.94%

Data retrieved from Colorado Department of Agriculture

www.cde.state.co.us

Agriculture

In 2012, Otero County had 706,750 acres of agricultural land. There are 541 farms, with an average of 1,306 acres. The market value of products sold was \$144,235,000 of which \$30,027,000 (21 percent) were crop sales and \$114,208,000 (79 percent) were livestock sales. The average per farm was \$266,607. Government payments in 2012 were \$2,473,000 with an average per farm of \$8,384.

Data retrieved from US Department of Agriculture

www.agcensus.usda.gov

Travel Impact

Dean Runyon and Associates report that \$18.2 million dollars were spent by visitors to Otero County in 2015. Not only does travel affect the revenues to a community, but jobs must be created to maintain services to visitors. Approximately 255 full and part time jobs were attributed to travel and tourism in Otero County in 2015 with five million dollars in earnings, \$475.2 thousand in local tax revenue and \$540.5 thousand in state tax revenue.

Data retrieved from Dean Runyon and Associates

www.deanrunyon.com

Local Economy

Since October 2015 the unemployment rate for Otero County has ranged from 5.7% to 4.0%. The current unemployment rate for Otero County is 4.0% in October 2016. The average earnings for Otero County in 2014 were \$34,073.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis

The starting point for a credible economic development strategic plan is a SWOT analysis. By working with Otero County stakeholders the following was identified:

Strengths

- Climate, clean air, lots of days of sunshine
- Good schools, education – quality, access, affordability
- Quality of life – friendly, close knit people with good intentions willing to work toward similar goals and who are passionate about bettering the community
- Industrial Park
- Otero Junior College within the region, bring in trade certificates
- Ag community with strong ag component to the workforce
- Availability of natural resources
- Low cost of living

- Limited local regulations
- Airport, roads, highway

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Strengths Continued

- Region cooperation with other S/E Colorado counties, collaboration between government/industry entities
- Historic elements with support from the State
- Healthy living opportunities
- Hospital/nursing homes present
- Manufacturing businesses
- Available land, lots of room for improvement/expansion
- Strong leadership, reliable administration, responsiveness, flexibility
- Close enough to metro area without all of the traffic and people
- Nature – canyons to explore
- Low crime rate
- Move in ready business opportunities in all downtown areas, interest in bringing in new businesses/employees
- The people that work in the area

Weaknesses

- Healthcare, quality of care, lack of providers, lack of variety of providers, nursing home availability, facilities to support aging population, most needed resources outside of county
- Housing stock – for sale or rent, quality, affordable, run down, ill managed
- Population – aging, huge generation gap
- Lack of skilled labor, quality of workforce, lack of skill set diversity
- limited water, too many independent water companies, water quality/quantity for ag and residential
- Old infrastructure, lack of foresight planning at city level (Rocky Ford has made some financial decisions that have had a big impact on community members without running numbers first), potholes, curb appeal along Highway 50 is not good in any community
- Lack of entrepreneurial spirit or knowledge

- Low education levels, poor school outcomes, weak school education, lack of educated community (school system is failing), students don't receive quality education
- Inflexible/rigid tax base, poor leaders, red tape that new businesses have to start-up, lack of flexibility in government
- Attitudes: general population apathy, inbreeding of thoughts, values, perspective, lack of openness to new ideas & people, "inbred" mentality, "insiders" don't want change, lack of motivation, lack of creative thinking, resistance to change, stubborn, "good ole boy" in local government, a population that is not curious about what is going on and the activities available to them, we've never done it that way, apathetic mind set that we will never be anything more than we are right now, no thinking out of the box, not enough people want to try new things, apparent lack of interest in becoming involved in community prospects by younger people, older generation discourages younger generation, they roll up the streets in the afternoon, "we will form a committee and study that" (for years no action).

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Weaknesses Continued

- Not enough marketing & promotion of the area's excellent historical sites, weather, available labor & how easy it is to travel in all directions, marketed as a retirement community, lack of social media know-how/advertising
- High poverty rate – perpetuates itself, lack of assistance for those just above poverty
- Drug issues, high drug use (heroin), proliferation of drugs (heroin, opiates), theft
- Young, talented leave the area for better jobs, limited entertainment draw for young professionals, nothing for young people in the way of organized activities
- Lack of renewable energy
- Otero Junior College closing of automotive department, no integration of Otero Junior College into community, not enough training programs in basic skills to retain jobs, may not be addressing work force needs, focusing on transfer to 4 year institutions, lack of social media know-how/training/advertising
- Lack luster response of law enforcement to common concerns
- Lack of job opportunities, lack of ability to attract primary jobs, lack of downtown businesses, lack of employment, dependent on few businesses to sustain strong economy, lack of variety in retail
- Lack of capital, lack of imagination for getting businesses here, waiting for business to approach instead of seeking out business, always advertised as retirement community, lack of ability to attract primary jobs, lots of empty and ugly buildings
- Lack of new technologies
- Lack of viable newspaper

- Just far enough from metro area that it is burdensome to live/work in the area
- Lack of mobility

Opportunities

- Trade schools – plumbing, electrical, carpentry, welding, CDL, SSDI/SSI work center/vocational rehabilitation center; free basic skills training – computer Word, Excel, Typing, Call Center etiquette; bring back education and train our children; training to increase skilled laborers & replace aging workforce; Otero Junior College can create/stand up new programs quickly to meet needs of area
- Attitudes: opportunity is also sized by do gooders with selfish intent and that turns off reliable citizens. There needs to be some sort of enforcement for side-tracking via stupidity ie: Facebook, dream bigger, take chances, be less risk averse; be more encompassing of younger people in our communities
- Attract new business and fill empty buildings, revitalize downtowns, development of creative corridor
- Expand infrastructure, develop Highway 50 as a state byway
- Redefine the area into an attractive opportunity for younger families. create destination activities to bring outsiders into the community
- Develop renewable energy
- Expand medical facilities, nursing home
- Capitalize on history of area

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Opportunities Continued

- Program to help pay student loans for people who will work in area for a length of time (5 to 10 years)
- Housing development
- Develop biking/hiking trails
- Agriculture; grow interest in “buy local” movement and specialty crops in Otero County; develop hemp industry; expand crop choices for farmers; conduit to improve water
- Senior housing development, expansion of retirement homes, multi-generational communities
- Attract cluster businesses to compliment brewery industry
- Cheap land; room to grow; lots of land to develop inexpensively
- New tax base
- Decentralization of services and sales through internet

Threats

- Poor internet & slow development of all infrastructure
- Conservation easement
- Declining population
- Business closures; lack of primary jobs; large employer failure
- Lack of capital
- Lack of funding to bring open buildings up to code; run down appearance of neighborhoods & downtowns; decaying infrastructure
- Out migration of youth
- Lack of focus
- Hospital/nursing home closures, trend toward outsourcing vital healthcare services
- Climate change
- Public vs private sector ideological complexities
- Water: Removal of agricultural water; drought; loss of water; water quality
- Government regulations
- Drugs/crime; increased drug traffic
- Attitudes: staying positive, fear of change; general disdain and feelings of hopelessness concerning the area

Youth Engagement

Otero County conducted a teen survey of school youth in order to get a youth perspective of the county. Following are some highlights of the survey:

- 43.83% of youth feel that the worst problem facing the county/community is lack of jobs
- 69.69% feel that the biggest reason they do not picture themselves living in the county in the future is because they will make more money elsewhere
- 58.01% do not see themselves living in the area in the future

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- 587.18% plan on attending a four year college after high school graduation
- 40.56% feel that having more entertainment and recreation options would make the community a better place to live
- 51.03% feel that Otero County is an average place to live as a teen

Otero County has identified a number of strategic priorities. These include:

- Housing Development
- Nursing Home Development
- Develop hiking/biking trails
- Workforce
- Develop Renewable Energy
- Water Resource Development
- Infrastructure Development

Goal: Housing Development

The lack of affordable housing for workforce and residents along with numerous aging houses with asbestos stymies economic growth and diversity when businesses can't recruit employees because there is no place for them and their families to live. Asbestos, rising rents and a lack of low price housing stock are factors contributing to a housing crisis.

Goal: Nursing Home Development

Otero County has an increasing aging population. The demand for senior and nursing home care outweigh the supply.

Goal: Develop biking/hiking trails

The development of biking and hiking trails in Otero County would create recreational opportunities for year round residents as well as visitors to the area.

Goal: Workforce

Providing a well-trained, skilled workforce is vital to the economy. Recruitment of skilled workers as well as education and training programs will enable a diverse workforce for businesses to draw from. Skilled workers also command higher wages.

Goal: Develop Renewable Energy

The cost of energy is a major factor when considering economic development. The development of renewable energy such as wind and solar would be beneficial to the economic development of the community.

Goal: Water Resource Development

Water, especially in the arid west, is absolutely crucial to development. The pipeline for domestic water consumption from Pueblo Reservoir was designed to provide potable water through a pipeline to all communities in the Lower Arkansas River Valley. Completion of the project would provide high quality domestic water to the area.

Goal: Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure is a prerequisite for industrial development. This includes basic utilities, adequate roads, and prepared sites. Most development will occur in dedicated industrial parks or sites, most of which will require infrastructure development to promote full development.

Resiliency

In the event of a disaster, the Southern Colorado Economic Development District (SCEDD) plays a support role to other partners in planning and recovery efforts following a disaster.

Otero County Emergency Management Information:

Otero County Emergency Management
719-383-3000

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