



Meeting & Planning Discussion held: December, 4, 2025; January 6, 2026, January 20, 2026, February 5, 2026, and March 4, 2026.

WC Commissioner Approved: March 4, 2026

Wells County Government

Long-Term Planning Guide

Fall '25 & Spring '26

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|---|
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | 2 |
| WELLS COUNTY POPULATION TRENDS | 3 |
| WELLS COUNTY FINANCIAL DATA | 4 |
| COUNTY FINANCE QUESTIONS..... | 4 |
| WELLS COUNTY STAFFING..... | 5 |
| FTE STAFF | 5 |
| COUNTY STAFFING QUESTIONS..... | 5 |
| WELLS COUNTY FACILITY PLANNING | 6 |
| FACILITY PLANNING QUESTIONS | 6 |
| WELLS COUNTY OUTCOME OF PLANNING | 7 |

WELLS COUNTY POPULATION TRENDS

CENSUS POPULATION

1889 ~ Statehood

1890 ~ 1,212

1900 ~ 8,310 + 585.6%

1910 ~ 11,814 + 42.2%

1920 ~ 12,957 + 9.7%

1930 ~ 13,285 + 2.5%

1940 ~ 11,198 - 15.7%

1950 ~ 10,417 - 7.0%

1960 ~ 9,237 - 11.3%

1970 ~ 7,847 - 15.0%

1980 ~ 6,979 - 11.1%

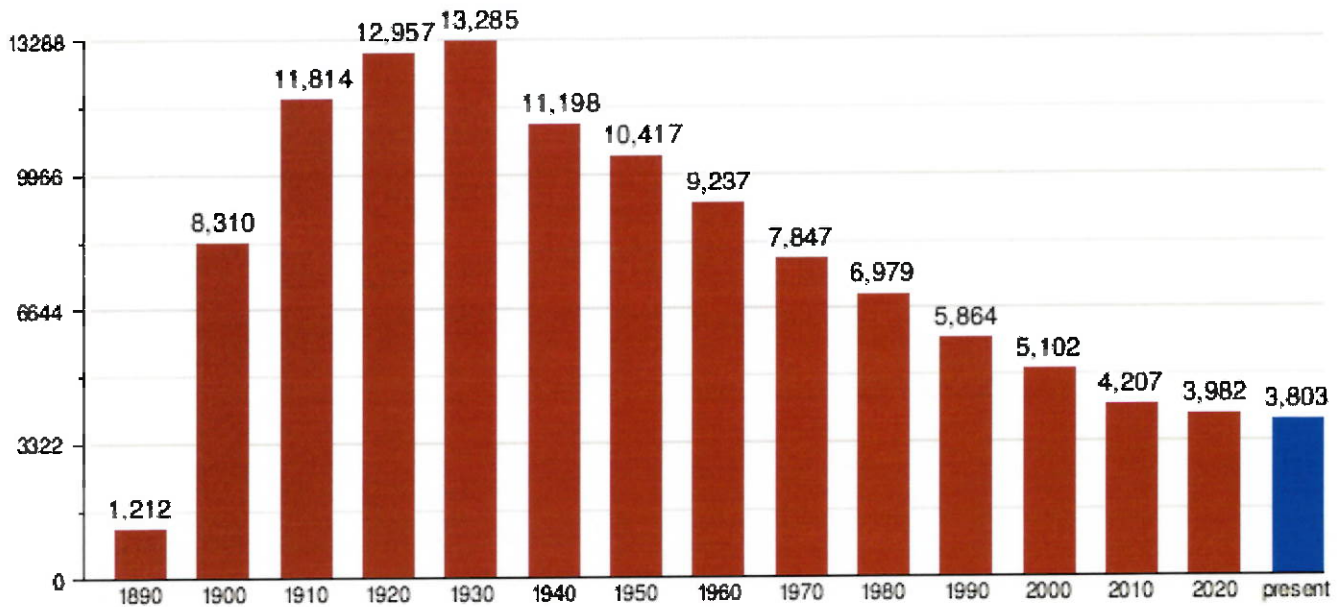
1990 ~ 8,846 - 16.0%

2000 ~ 5,102 - 13.0%

2010 ~ 4,207 - 17.5%

2020 ~ 3,982 - 5.3%

2025 ~ 3,803 (est.) - 4.5%



Data from U.S. Census Bureau

WELLS COUNTY FINANCIAL DATA

WC VALUATION, MILL RATE & COLLECTIONS

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Taxable Valuation</u> | <u>WC Mill Rate</u> | <u>WC Taxes Collected</u> |
|-------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 2025 | \$47,464,349 | 92.41 | \$4,386,181 |
| 2020 | \$44,015,251 | 80.72 | \$3,552,911 |
| 2015 | \$38,078,071 | 104.30 | \$3,971,543 |
| 2010 | \$21,544,001 | 115.36 | \$2,485,316 |
| 2005 | \$17,551,637 | 118.36 | \$2,085,135 |

COUNTY FINANCE QUESTIONS

1. What are the financial trends of Wells County?

Valuation took off during the oil boom and record ag production 10-15 years ago, but now lags behind both actual/market value and inflation in the products and services required to operate local government. As a result, the mill rate has started to rise and cannot/will not keep up with the implementation of new caps in ND. On top of this, WC will undergo a 4.0% decline in Ag valuation in 2026.

2. What are the future financial challenges for Wells County?

With little or no ability to expand the tax base in WC, we will begin to see dwindling levy space and we will slowly rise right up towards the cap. Employee benefit increases, capital maintenance costs, required technology/software increases, and increased equipment costs will far outpace our ability to access the revenue needed to keep up.

3. What steps should be taken both now and in the future to meet the short- and long-term financial needs of Wells County?

Assuming no increase in revenue streams, WC will likely have little choice but to downsize the FTE's in county government. Hopefully, the vast majority of this can be accomplished through attrition. With that, interdepartmental cross training will likely be necessitated. It should be understood this will ultimately reduce services and the time it takes to get certain items accomplished. Also, WC will likely be compelled to find other shortcuts in spending and capital resources/buildings.

WELLS COUNTY STAFFING

CURRENT STAFFING

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Auditor | 2 (4.4%) |
| Clerk of Court | 2 (4.4%) |
| Custodial / Maintenance | 1 (2.2%) |
| Emergency Management | 1 (2.2%) |
| Extension Agent | 2 (4.4%) |
| Human Service Zone | 16 (35.6%) |
| Recorder | 2 (4.4%) |
| Road Department | 9 (20.0%) ** |
| Sheriff | 5 (11.1%) |
| State Attorney | 1 (2.2%) *** |
| Tax Director | 2 (4.4%) |
| Treasurer | 2 (4.4%) |
| TOTAL | 45 |

** Currently has two additional part-time employees

*** Has had part-time additional summer help

STAFFING QUESTIONS

1. Does Wells County need to adjust staffing levels for next year? In three years? In five years? As aforementioned, WC will likely need to begin to reduce FTE's countywide. This means all departments are likely going to eventually feel a pinch. Fully staffed will not mean what the department currently has or what it, perhaps, used to have.

2. If yes to question 1, which staffing areas will need to be changed? What is the reason for these changes?

Outside of the HSZ, which is controlled and funded by the state, and the Clerk of Court's office which is partially state funded, all other departments are going to need to begin to cross train and share human resources. This should begin with retirements and resignations, and, hopefully, WC will be able to keep up in terms of cap space.

WELLS COUNTY FACILITY PLANNING

CURRENT FACILITY USAGE

Festival Hall

KTL Building

Road Dept. Shops

- **Bowdon**
- **Bremen**
- **Cathay**
- **Fessenden (2)**
- **Harvey**
- **Hurdsfield**
- **Sykeston**

WC Courthouse

FACILITY PLANNING QUESTIONS

1. Are facilities adequate for the purposes of Wells County?

WC facilities are more than adequate in terms of space. Efficiency is another matter entirely. It may become a challenge to maintain and provide utilities to all of the outbuildings, etc. and space may have to be re-purposed.

2. List any facility upgrades needed.

Upgrades and/or additions are not necessary, but maintenance will be critical to protect the capital assets we have. WC will address the KTL roof and tuckpointing w/ a gutter system at Festival Hall will be addressed in 2026. Future years will possible allow for foundation work at the Festival Hall and tuckpointing on the Courthouse building.

3. Can any current facilities be repurposed? Explain.

Through the government shutdown, WC housed Soil Conservation at the KTL in underutilized space. Certainly, WC has the capability of taking on much more. However, it is deemed questionable if WC should be striving to do this.

4. Do any current facilities need to be closed? Explain.

The day is likely coming where WC may not be able to maintain and provide utilities for all facilities currently being operated. Size, condition, location, and equipment access may dictate what can be kept operational. Are there potential efficiencies possible for WC?

OUTCOME OF PLANNING

COUNTY QUESTIONS

County Staffing Needs:

Overall, the Commission would like to utilize attrition at the county level to absorb positions where and when appropriate. Further, WC should promote and practice some level of job-sharing roles and transition planning where and when appropriate to maintain good governance in all offices. Lastly, the Commission is committed to promoting retention policies and practices with current staff.

County Tax Levies:

The Commission plans to place a question of the people on the ballot in '26 (*June and, if necessary, November Elections*) to raise the County Road & Bridge mill rate from 14 to 25 mills to keep up with the costs of providing Road Dept. services. Further, the Commission would like to maintain a cushion in the General Fund between what is levied and the 60 mills the county could request through the NDCC.

Facility Utilization & Needs:

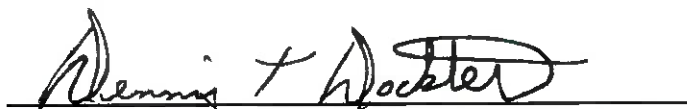
Maintain the facilities (*Courthouse, Festival Hall, KTL Building, and Road Dept. Shops*) currently operated by WC with the following prioritized capital improvements:

- KTL Roof ~ 2026 (*planned*)
- Festival Hall Tuckpointing and Gutter System ~ 2026 (*planned*)
-
- Festival Hall Foundation ~ 2027 or 2028
- WC Courthouse Tuckpointing ~ 2027 or 2028

Other:

The Commission is committed to developing a long-term plan for county road & bridge improvement/replacement. In addition, the Commission would like to dispense with all WC property that has no strategic use (*typically a bid process*), and conduct an auction sale to get rid of all equipment & property serving no useful purpose or with no historical value. Unsold items will be disposed of.

Commissioner Approved (3/4/26):



Dennis T. Dockter,
Wells County Commission Chairman



Daniel W. Stutlien,
Wells County Auditor