

VERDIGRE  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
COMMUNITY NEEDS  
RESPONSE  
2022-2027

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## **Mission Statement**

*From Policy Manual:* The Verdigre Public Library believes it is essential to provide materials and services which will help area residents obtain information that meets their personal, educational, and professional needs.

*For Community Needs Response:* The Verdigre Public Library is striving to learn and meet the needs of Verdigre and its surrounding community.

## **Community Profile**

### **Location**

Verdigre is located in the Bohemian Alps of Knox County in northeast Nebraska. Highway 14 runs north and south adjacent to town. The Verdigre Creek flows north on the east edge of town and joins the Niobrara River and Missouri River within twelve miles.

**Population** (2020 Census. Community data provided by NE Public Power District [sites.nppd.com/communitysearch](https://www.nppd.com/communitysearch) )

### **Village of Verdigre 552**

- Median Age: Males 50, Females 57
- Persons birth to 19 19%
- Persons 20 to 64 49%
- Persons 65 and over 32%

### **Knox County 8,526**

- Median Age: Males 46, Females 50
- Persons birth to 19 23%
- Persons 20 to 64 50%
- Persons 65 and over 27%

### **Language and Ethnicity**

English is the primary language spoken in 90.4% of homes. In 2020 Verdigre was 97% White, 3% Native American and 1% Hispanic or Latino. Knox County was 87% White, 11% Native American (esp. Santee Sioux and Ponca Nations) and 4% Hispanic or Latino.

### **Education**

Verdigre Public School (K-12) was part of NE Unified District #1 for twenty-one years then returned to being a stand-alone school district in 2020-21. The preschool has been part of the school system since 2017. Verdigre's and Niobrara Public School's junior and senior high have an athletic co-op.

For 2021-22, Verdigre had 143 students enrolled. There were 65 students in 7th-12<sup>th</sup>, 78 in PreK-6<sup>th</sup>. In the community 90% of the population have a high school degree or higher. 20% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Geographically, the colleges closest to Verdigre are Northeast Community College in Norfolk, NICC in Santee, Wayne State College in Wayne and

Mount Marty University in Yankton, SD. Online opportunities for higher education are more prevalent.

### **Work Life**

In 2020, it is estimated that 52% of the Verdigre population (or 285 people) were in the labor force; 48%, not in labor force (e.g., retired). The 2020 unemployment rate was below 1%. Employment by industry: Health Care/Social Assistance 27%, Agriculture 21%, Retail Trade 9%, Educational Services 8%, Construction 6%, Public Administration 5%, 3% each for Admin/Support/Waste Management Services, Finance/Insurance, Wholesale Trade and Arts/Entertainment/Recreation, 2% for Manufacturing and, finally, less than 1% for the areas of Transportation, Accommodation/Food Services, Quarrying/Oil & Gas, Professional/Tech Services, Utilities, Information and Real Estate/Rental/Leasing.

Major employers in Verdigre include Herbert Feed and Grain, Verdigre Public School, Alpine Village Nursing Home and Assisted Living, Alpine Village Community Daycare, Tom's Family Foods, Schreier's Lumberyard, Verdigre Farm Service and Sucha Repair. There were 65 businesses and/or village-owned buildings affected by the 2019 flood.

Some residents commute to work at the prison in Springfield, SD and agri-businesses in the region. Average daily commute in Verdigre is 0 minutes! In Knox County the average commute is 18 minutes.

### **Household and Family Economics**

In Verdigre household types are divided between families 60% and individuals 40%. Median household income was \$51,362 for Verdigre with 24% of households making 0-\$25,000, 23% households making \$25-50,000, 25% in the \$50-75,000 range and 27% making \$75,000 and above. In school, 52% of students qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch. Families below the poverty level were listed at 8.8%. Knox County had 64% family households and 36% otherwise and the median income was \$54,728.

### **Housing**

Statistics from 2020 showed occupied housing at 85% in town. Of 288 total housing units, 187 were owner occupied and 58 were renter occupied. There is generally a shortage of quality housing that is not in need of repairs or updates. The 2020 median home value in Verdigre was \$103,571 (which is hard to believe).

### **Communication**

Verdigre has an outstanding privately-owned weekly newspaper, *The Verdigre Eagle*. The closest radio station is KBRX in O'Neill. There are a lot of social media options like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. More and more websites exist for local businesses, churches, the school, and, of course, the library. Public notice spots are abundant throughout town.

### **Recreation/Cultural/Civic Opportunities**

**Recreational** facilities in Verdigre include three parks--Wildwood Acres, George Shannon Gazebo Park and Veterans Chalupnik Park--with public swimming pool, playgrounds, walking

trail, RV/tent camping, sleep-cabins, picnic shelters, disc golf, bandstand, tennis/basketball courts and softball facilities. Elsewhere in town there are a baseball diamond and football field. The school has a gym and weight room which the public may use. The Verdigre Creek, Niobrara State Park (12 miles away) and Missouri and Niobrara Rivers offer more recreational fun. The Verdigre area is popular for hunting, fishing, ATV-ing and bicycling. Various events are held annually including Kolach Days, tractor rides, trail rides (horse), 5k/10k Runs, ATV rides, polker runs, JAKES Day, Vendors in the Valley, Verdigre Vanoce and more. In 2021 Verdigre was included in a Knox County Study Area about economic development funded by the Nebraska Unicameral as part of Bill LB406. The study addressed the elements of a tourism ecosystem including attractions, lodging and support services.

**Cultural** opportunities include annual community events such as Kolach Days, style shows, Verdigre Vanoce polka dances, gun show, vendor fairs, farmers market, summer softball/baseball. The American Legion & Auxiliary sponsor programs for Memorial Day and Veterans Day. There is a Verdigre Heritage Museum with three buildings—an exhibit hall, an historic jail and a mill. The Verdigre Community Chorus draws members from many towns and has annual performances in December and June. For kids, Fouette Dance Studio offers group dance classes, and Inn Tune Studios and Mrs. J. Frank offer private piano/guitar/accordion lessons. All studios hold performances open to the public. The Verdigre Public Library hosts art shows, National Archives/Smithsonian poster exhibits, Nebraska Humanities speakers, continuing education classes from Northeast Community College as well as local speakers and programming for all ages. Verdigre Public School has active art, music, speech and drama departments, along with sporting events during fall, winter and spring. County-wide there are festivals in Niobrara, Winnetoon, Creighton, Center, Bloomfield, Wausa and Creighton, Powwows hosted by both the Santee and Ponca, and the Knox County Fair. In 2020 a new event center opened--The Barn at God's Country—which is only nine miles from Verdigre. Besides being a wedding/party venue it hosts cultural offerings.

**Civic, social, governing and faith-based groups** are numerous and active: Verdigre Improvement Club, American Legion and Auxiliary, Verdigre Fire and Rescue, Verdigre Valley Senior Citizens (less active since the pandemic), 4-H Clubs (Lucky Lads & Lassies, Sparta Sparklers), Girls Softball, Boys Baseball, Girl Scouts, Verdigre Community Foundation, Verdigre Library Foundation, Verdigre Public School Foundation, Alpine Village Community Daycare Board, Wildwood Acres Park and Pool Committees, VOW (Verdigre Organized Women), Verdigre Vanoce Committee, Verdigre Development Corporation, Verdigre Housing Authority, Verdigre Creek Longbeards, Pheasants Forever, Village of Verdigre Town Board, Alpine Village Board of Directors and Verdigre Public Library Board of Trustees. Many of the social clubs, except for Sparta Sisters, ceased activity in the last three years. United Methodist Church, St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church and Valley Community church are active parishes that host many events and social/spiritual offerings. Additionally for young people, the school has FFA (agriculture), HOSA (health occupations), Art Club, Speech & Drama, Student Council, organized sports and more.

*The common goal of all these organizations is to make the Verdigre community a great place to live, work and play.*

## **S.W.O.T. Analysis (as requested by Nebraska Library Commission)**

### ***Internal Strengths of the Library***

- Friendly and knowledgeable staff. One part-time director and 2-3 substitute librarians. We often employ youth interns over the summer.
- The facility, built in 1996, is spacious, attractive and ADA-compliant. Good location right off Main Street with ample parking. Open 26 hours/week.
- Six to nine public computers (one is ADA, two are laptops), one staff computer, a color printer/copier, wired and wireless 100x100 internet and miscellaneous other technology for patron use. Internal connections were updated in 2020. Per our Technology Plan, the Library Foundation updates computers each year.
- Print collection is large and varied with sections for youth, young adult and adult. The entire local newspaper collection is accessible in three formats: bound books, microfilm, digital (as of 2019). School annuals were digitized in 2020. Electronic materials are provided to patrons through a NE Overdrive subscription. Special collections: Verdigre, Genealogy, Czech. There is also a magazine exchange and Library of Things (2020).
- Reference and technology assistance offered as able. Inter-library loan. Doorstep Delivery to AVC Daycare and homebound patrons. Slim & Teeny Sharing Library added outside during pandemic. After-hours pick up locker (2021).
- Programming is offered for adults in spring and fall and for kids during summer. Art shows and other exhibits are offered regularly. In 2017-2020 the library had collaborations with the school, community daycare, Improvement Club, Alpine Village, Verdigre Vanoce (Christmas), Knox County Extension, Village of Verdigre, and Verdigre Community Foundation.
- Governance is strong--committed Library Board and supportive Village Board.
- Community relations are healthy and mutually-supportive. During the 2019 Flood Crisis this library helped the Village communicate public service announcements via patron emails, social media and door-to-door interactions. The library added flood history artifacts to its permanent collection.
- Library helped the health department with online registrations for the COVID vaccine as well as offering 2020 census assistance.
- Digitized collections include local newspapers, Centennial book and school yearbooks.
- Budget has been adequate the last few years with steady funding from Village of Verdigre, Knox County Supervisors and Nebraska Library Commission. Yearly budget is around \$39,000. The director has supplemented budget with grants to fund continuing education (TRLS), interns, makerspace and Rescue Act (NLC), internet and special construction (E-rate) and a community conversation on flood mitigation (*ALA/ARSL Libraries Transforming Communities*). Donations occasionally come from the public and the Library Foundation.
- DVD collections for family and adults have improved and are housed in new wooden media towers.
- Fiber Optic was laid in Verdigre for the first time in 2021 because the library secured grants from E-rate Special Construction and the Nebraska Universal

Service Fund. Internal connections were updated in 2020 using E-rate category 2 funds.

- New lighting was installed in south book aisle and all lights were upgraded to LED in 2020.
- Curb appeal improvements: Unique metal art bike rack (2020), red picnic table (2021), sturdy trash receptacle, drive-by book return, solar sconce lighting (2022).
- Good cooperation and knowledge/resource sharing between Knox County libraries and others in the Three Rivers Library System.
- Library director has provided the service of grant-writing for the Village of Verdigre, Verdigre Public School and Verdigre Community Foundation (besides for library)

### **Internal Weaknesses of the Library**

- No separate meeting room. Noisy activities must be held before or after regular hours. Verdigre does have various facilities available to rent for meetings/events.
- Low wages and part-time work for staff. Annual cost-of-living raises have been instituted which has helped morale.
- Lack of storage space.
- Lack of children and young families using library
- Not many teens frequent the library (though they are readily willing when director needs volunteers).
- Director needs occasional technology help, especially to set up and maintain computers.
- Building and grounds need repairs or improvements: shingles (probable replacement due to hail 2022), exterior ADA improvements (grab bar by door, exterior lighting, railings along parking lot), garden work, possible patio for wifi users
- The March 2019 flood surrounded library and water entered under front door. FEMA repairs yet-to-do are carpet and front door replacement. Furnace and air conditioner were replaced in 2019 with FEMA funds. Library needs to mitigate against future flooding. We keep portable dams near each door.
- Service areas that could be improved: families with young children, tweens after school, teens, young adults, senior citizens, adult literacy.
- Library could improve as a Welcome/Tourism Center
- Library could be a gathering spot for senior citizens.
- Library of Things (and collections, generally) are under-utilized
- Library has few open hours after five p.m..

### **External Opportunities in the Environment**

- Verdigre community works well together.
- Civic organizations add to quality of life.
- Village Board, within its limited budget, is addressing issues related to streets, water supply, sanitation sewer and personnel. In 2017 they added modest

economic development efforts and grant-writing (by the library director). Since 2019 the Village has been in flood recovery mode.

- All age groups support cultural/entertainment/educational opportunities. Library director is an administrator for the facebook group: “Knox County Arts, Culture and Entertainment”
- Aging adults have shown a need and desire to use technology.
- Verdigre serves as a recycling collection point for other communities.
- Carousel Thrift Shop, established in 2014, donates much money back into community and has many volunteers.
- Alpine Village Community Daycare, established in 2015, is always at full capacity. The Verdigre Community Foundation helps with funding.
- Verdigre worked hard to recover from the 2019 flood disaster. Volunteers and donations poured into town. (The library director served as the coordinator of out-of-town volunteers for several weeks after the flood and helped the Village with the FEMA process for a year.)
- The community of Verdigre, its nursing home, school and businesses, seemed to weather the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020-22 fairly well.
- Little Free Pantry was established in 2018 (in alley behind the Carousel).
- Businesses opened (or new owners) in 2020-21: Reiman Coffee Company, Misty’s and The Main Spot Café.
- Cell service improved in some areas. A Verizon tower was built near town.
- The Nebraska Strong Recovery Project was active locally related to flood and pandemic 2019-2021.
- Verdigre Public School is strong and well-staffed.

### **External *Threats* in the Environment**

- Increased risk of severe flooding. Seeming lack of village-wide support for mitigation efforts such as a protective levee system. [Or possibly people assume the Village Board trustees “will take care of it”.]
- There is a need for more and affordable broadband.
- Staffing shortages in many businesses, ex. daycare, nursing home, restaurants.
- Housing shortage. No apparent action by Verdigre Development Corporation.
- Farm economy has ups and downs.
- Many people work multiple jobs (often low-paying) to make ends meet. Little Free Pantry gets much use.
- Village has expensive infrastructure needs.
- Competing social activities can prevent good attendance at programs.
- Technology constantly changes and needs updating.
- Businesses closed in 2021: Cozy Corner Café, Verdigre Bakery (reduced hours)
- Czech and Native (Ponca, Santee) cultures could be promoted more.

### **Community Needs**

- Flood mitigation. Raised awareness of ongoing flood risks.
- Housing (better, affordable); rental options, including apartments

- Promotion of local businesses, support for start-up businesses
- Activities in town for all ages (low-cost, convenient, high-quality)
- Continued Village infrastructure repairs
- Improved appearance of commercial areas
- Continued improvements to public swimming pool and parks
- More or new jobs; higher wages. More remote jobs.
- More workers for existing businesses.
- Educational programs on issues related to senior citizens
- Better cell phone service and broadband (*Library did fiber build 2021*)
- More attractions and services for tourists who are already coming
- Still need additional daycare options to community daycare
- Keep school strong
- Keep rescue squad staffed with volunteers and funded for equipment
- Keep community daycare staffed and funded
- Keep Alpine Village staffed and funded during low Medicare reimbursements
- Repairs needed for ZCJB Hall
- Capture local history and promote Czech heritage
- Family friendly events during Kolach Days
- Grant-writing for community organizations

### **Goals and Objectives of the Library Based on Community Needs**

Community Need #1—Grant writing for community organizations. ZCJB Hall repairs.

Goal: *Economic Development and Promotion of Local Businesses*

- Assist ZCJB Hall to research and apply for grant funds for repairs. Lodge Presidents Debbie and Steven Ives are the contacts. Assist Village of Verdigre to apply for grants. Clerk Heidi Ruzicka and Village Maintenance TJ Brewer are the contacts.
- Update “Verdigre Area Businesses Phone Directory”. Keep it available in physical and digital formats.
- Monitor LB 406 (STAR WARS—economic development projects in northern Knox County) for how library can help Verdigre benefit.

Community Need #2—Family friendly events during Kolach Days.

Goal: *Encourage tourism*

- Host a multi-generational Chalk Art Contest during Kolach Days. Model chalk event after Central City Library’s and Denver’s annual events.
- Continue to host/fund an entertainer or educational presentation for after turtle races.

Community Need #3— Activities in town for all ages (low cost, convenient, high quality)

Goal: *Activities for senior citizens.*

- Twice annually, host a Nebraska Humanities program. Also engage local presenters. Possibly: "Creative Aging through the Arts" grant from NE Arts Council. Host author/illustrator visits as able.

Goal: *Activities for developmentally disabled.*

- "Let's Move in Libraries: Wellness fun for adults" (Friday afternoons)

Goal: *Activities for children other than Summer Reading Program.*

- Tuesdays After School: 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesdays—Lego Club, 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays—Full STEAM ahead.
- Implement Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to school district children ages 0-5. Partner is Verdigre Library Foundation.

Community Need #4—Capture local history and promote Czech heritage

Goal: *Help local cemeteries get their records digitized and available online.*

- Coordinate with St. Wenceslaus (Deacon Keith Pavlik and [www.saintsww.org](http://www.saintsww.org)), Riverside (Dean & Don Pavlik) and Hillcrest (Jim Sokol and Betty Jacot) cemeteries on the status of their records. Assist with digitizing. Find out where to upload the information and add it to the library's online archives. Also talk to Kathy Farnik about rural cemeteries.

## **Evaluation**

The Library Director will have the primary role in development and implementation of the above objectives and will be responsible for keeping any necessary statistics. The Director will encourage ongoing conversations between all interested parties. The Library Board will review the Strategic Plan every January and make recommendations about budgeting, staffing or modification of goals.

## **Review of Strategic Plan 2017-20**

Goal #1: *Economic development and promotion of local businesses*

- The Library Director will compile a brochure of Verdigre area businesses. *DONE, and needs to be updated. No welcome packets were created or housing resources developed by VDC.*
- The Library Director will become an administrator for the Village Website and help with updates. *NOT DONE. (Library director IS an admin for Village's website, but has not added their website work to her job description.)*

Goal #2: *Develop tourism and promotion of Czech heritage*

- The Library will host an activity for kids and families during Kolach Days and, if necessary, collaborate with the community for financial support. *DONE: Lego Guy 2017, Mr. Stinky Feet 2017, The Kilted Man 2018, Wildlife Encounters 2019, Juggler Pete 2021.*

- The Library Director will maintain a set of Czech translations for Verdigre businesses. *DONE (Improvement Club made impermanent signs one year.)*
- The Library will host a barn quilt painting workshop. *DONE and should do again. Director has not developed Czech-style motifs, yet.*

Goal #3: *Activities for all ages (low cost, convenient, high quality), possibly multi-generational*

- The Library will host at least one workshop per year where elders can pass on specific skills to youth (e.g. needle crafts, wood working, cooking). *DONE Crochet-with-Connie Church and Cooking for Kids with Cheryl Vesely & Muriel Stark. Should do again.*
- The Library will coordinate and host at least one workshop per year where youth can pass on specific skills to elders. *NOT DONE. Hosted one “Tech Tutoring by Teens” but no adults showed up.*
- The Library will try to create an event that promotes interactive storytelling between youth and elders. *NOT DONE*

Goal #4: *Educational workshops on issues related to senior citizens*

- The Library will coordinate and host a workshop on estate planning, especially when farms are involved. *NOT DONE. UNL Extension addresses this issue well.*
- The Library will coordinate and host a workshop related to medicare and/or elderly fraud. *DONE once. Hosted Medicare Part D enrollment appts.*

### **Planning Team 2022**

Verdigre Public Library wishes to thank the following people for their input! Community members: Leroy and Alex Hollmann, Cathy Barta, Linda Paesl, Bill Jedlicka, Dixie Hanefeldt, Holli Kirwan and a few library patrons who wish to remain anonymous. High school students: Heidi Hollmann and Michaela Ravenkamp. Knox County Economic Development: Kelly Hanvey and Stacy Miller. Village Clerk: Heidi Ruzicka. Library staff: Pat Holland, Barbara Salvatore, Rachel Pavelka. Library Board members: Dylan Hamilton, Diana Sukup, Donna Effle, Pam Kotrous and Fran Blessen. Library Foundation members: Zoe Vakoc, Kristi Rohrer, Darla Gilreath (also Donna and Fran). Library Director: Katrina (Katie) Hollmann.