

## Focus Session Summary—Vision Statement Workshop

### Intent

The City of Joplin's Downtown Plan was initiated with an Issue Identification And Vision Statement Workshop on Thursday, August 9, 2001. This first of a series of public policy work sessions and open houses was advertised to the various groups already involved with the revitalization of downtown efforts. About 12 participants representing the Mayor, City Staff, Vision 20/20 committee, Main Street, 353 Corporation and other community organizations participated. These groups form the "Downtown Task Force."

The primary purpose of the Workshop was to bring this Task Force towards a common vision for Downtown and add to the earlier stakeholder efforts. The session provided an opportunity for the various participants to, as a group, identify and rank issues that are critical to downtown and discuss initial strategies to resolve the issues.

### Workshop Format

The process for Issues Identification used at the Workshop was a structured idea-sharing process. Participants identified the issues they thought are most critical to downtown, clarified the issues and prioritized their importance. Information from the Workshop will be used as a basis for initial policy, goals and objectives development.

During the next step, the public will have an opportunity to participate in a Downtown Awareness Walk, which will highlight the visual strengths and weaknesses of the Downtown as seen through the eyes of downtown business owners, residents and the citizens of Joplin. A follow-up Public Workshop/ Open House will be held in mid-fall 2000. At that time the public and invited stakeholders will have the opportunity to verify findings and approaches developed.



***The Task Force identified and prioritized issues facing Downtown.***



***The Task Force discussed potential strategies for resolving issues.***



## Downtown Study Area

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During the Workshop the Task Force identified the actual and perceived boundaries of downtown as the area from A Street to the north (including all of the Union Depot area), extending south to 15th Street; and from Grand Avenue on the east, west to Moffet Avenue. The study area is generally identified as Downtown and contains a diverse mix of commercial, industrial, institutional and residential uses. Downtown includes the Jefferson Bus Lines, the George A. Spiva Center for the Arts and Convention & Visitors Bureau, Spiva Park, Main Street Joplin, the public library, post memorial art & reference library, Memorial Hall, Jack Lawton Webb Convention Center, Joplin Jr. High & gymnasium, George Washington Carver national monument, City Hall, Police Department & Fire Department, Chamber of Commerce, the post office, the Joplin Globe, the Salvation Army and several other “anchor” developments.

Participants discussed extending the boundaries of the study area south to 20th Street to include more commercial uses along Main Street. The consensus of the Task Force was that increasing the area to such an extent would jeopardize the effectiveness of the revitalization effort and that the narrow focus was needed.

## ISSUES

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### Themes

The downtown redevelopment plan will be discussed in terms of three primary themes or elements necessary for rebuilding downtown Joplin: **Connection**, **Animation** and **Renewal**.

1. The **Connection** theme focuses on how automobile, public transit and pedestrian modes of transportation link downtown to the surrounding neighborhoods, how they create circulation and movement within Downtown and how these connections can be improved.
2. The **Animation** theme involves all of the elements that bring life to downtown. These elements include retail, downtown living, institutions, civic uses, recreation, arts, planned events and other activities.
3. **Renewal** or reinvestment is the third element necessary for rebuilding downtown. Renewal and Reinvestment of the built environment is necessary, as is redevelopment of human and civic capital stock. This element includes economic development strategies, funding alternatives, capital improvements and other private and public investments in Downtown.

During the Workshop, the Task Force identified issues related to each of these three primary themes. Following identification, the issues were refined and prioritized. After prioritization, potential strategies for resolving these issues were discussed.

### **Connection Issues**

**Top five Issues.** The Task Force discussed issues related to the traffic, parking, pedestrian and automobile access and movement, how various land uses relate to each other, and the linkages between the downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. Following in order of importance are the five most important Connection issues identified and a short narrative about each:

1. **Need for off-street parking improvements:** Provide a stronger connection to downtown by providing adequate parking for areas inadequately served. A perceived lack of parking exists because either people cannot see parking lots from their destination, or they do not feel safe walking to their destination. Addressing parking issues in Downtown would therefore, also entail increasing the visibility and the perception of safety in and around parking lots. As downtown continues to redevelop, parking demand will increase.
2. **Create nightlife and entertainment district:** Develop a connection between Memorial Hall, the Performance Arts Center and other entertainment venues. This linkage would help create and support a Nightlife and Entertainment District in Downtown. The key to such an effort is to coordinate the various events and advertise them together in a "District Activity Calendar."
3. **Consolidate City Hall and other public buildings at 3rd and 4th Streets:** Create a Civic campus by consolidating governmental offices and activities into a defined district east of downtown. This campus would build upon the existing governmental uses east of downtown.
4. **Reduce truck traffic on Main Street:** Main Street is currently designated as a truck route, carrying a great deal of truck traffic through downtown. In the past, alternative routes through Downtown have been developed and enforced, but have not been successful because of limited turning radiuses, limited site distances and conflicts created by uncontrolled intersections. An alternative truck route needs to be created to divert the trucks away from Main Street and Downtown and minimize conflicts.
5. **Create a Downtown identity:** Use the media and public awareness processes to give the Downtown an identity of its own. Market the historical, commercial and residential assets to



bring more people to Downtown. Use repetition in design and amenities to make Downtown easily identifiable.

**Other Issues and Strategies Discussed.** In addition to the top five issues identified, the Task Force identified the following important Connection issues.

- **Support the historic district as an integral part of Downtown:** Build upon the historic district designation of residential property in northwest Downtown.
- **Improve public safety and the perception of safety:** Create a sense of safety in Downtown by improving communication, minimizing the impact of negative influences and educating residents about Downtown activities.
- **Match opportunities to development needs:** Use public-private partnerships to encourage redevelopment in desired areas and renovation of key buildings.
- **Provide/improve public transit:** Introduce a mass transit system like a trolley car to link the main attractions of Downtown. Other alternatives include a designated bus route during peak activity hours or special occasions.
- **Create gathering places:** Create gathering places where people can assemble, and relax in Downtown. These public gathering places also provide a sense of ownership in downtown and aid patrons by serving as landmarks and points of reference.

### Animation Issues

**Top five Issues.** The Task Force discussed issues related to recreation, the arts, retail activities, downtown living, tourism, events and other activities that bring life and vitality to Downtown. Following in order of importance are the five most important Animation issues identified and a short narrative about each:

1. **Develop a major activity center:** Create a downtown venue for performing arts, sports, concerts, and other organized events that will draw patrons to Downtown. Promote activities that do not conflict with existing activities such as events in the evenings and on weekends when greater parking is available. Redevelop Memorial Hall as a multi-use activity center.
2. **Create a unique identity for Downtown:** Identify and promote Downtown's niche within Joplin and the region. Use a logo, streetscape, landscaping, signage and other design

elements to create and easily identifiable Downtown. Promote uses, events and activities that show case or are unique to Downtown.

3. **Promote nightlife and entertainment:** Create an entertainment district within Downtown to enable the development of evening and weekend activities. Develop regulations that allow greater flexibility in design for the district, allowing creative and unique signage and lighting for example. The development of nightlife and entertainment uses promotes off-hour uses that bring patrons to downtown. Develop upper-story residential uses to build support for these activities.
4. **Improve the negative public perception of Downtown:** The public perception of Downtown is mixed. Many people perceive Downtown negatively as inconvenient, hard to navigate, unsafe and “dead.” Change negative perceptions by educating people about the uses and activities in Downtown. Enforce the positive aspects of Downtown through promotions, events and planned activities. Create unique spaces and landmarks in Downtown that attract users and promote Downtown.
5. **Create districts within Downtown:** Create mixed use, residential, industrial, governmental, institutional, social service and other districts within Downtown. Creation of districts allows the City to tailor incentives and regulations to each district based upon the intent of the district and its density. Consolidate uses that do not attract or support higher activity levels in Downtown. Creating governmental, institutional and social service districts within Downtown will minimize conflicts between necessities and services and entertainment, commercial and other similar activities.

**Other Issues and Strategies Discussed.** In addition to the top five issues identified, the Task Force identified the following important Animation issues.

- **Consolidate governmental uses:** Governmental uses should be consolidated east of Main Street in Downtown. A governmental campus would aid users, serve as an anchor to downtown and create development opportunities surrounding downtown.
- **Create gathering places (without restricting vehicular access):** Create public areas where pedestrians can meet, relax, be entertained, people watch and participate in other passive activities in Downtown. These areas would serve as landmarks within Downtown, but should not disrupt vehicular traffic. No streets should be closed to create a pedestrian plaza. While closing streets for specific events has merit, the concept of permanently closing streets to create a pedestrian plaza is outdated and is contrary to the goal of creating an easily accessible downtown.



- **Support and stabilize residential uses:** Residents are a key element of a successful downtown. The creation residential districts would allow specific programs and considerations to be made for residential uses. Programs such as down zoning single-family uses could be used. The guiding intent would be to stabilize the neighborhood surrounding Downtown.
- **Develop a theme attraction:** Develop an attraction that draws on the history of Joplin as a mining community or Route 66 and the role of multi-modal transportation in Joplin. These activities could be housed in renovated buildings in the heart of Downtown or serve as an anchor at the edge of Downtown, such as at a renovated Union Depot.
- **Provide needed services:** Promote grocery, drug and convenience stores in Downtown. Residents seek services when locating to downtown areas. The benefits of a successful downtown are unique environments and living spaces, historic architecture, entertainment and easy access to goods and services. Currently, few service or convenience commercial uses exist in Downtown eliminating one of the primary benefits of a downtown to a resident.

### Renewal Issues

**Top 5 issues.** The Task Force discussed issues that could induce reinvestment into the Downtown. The discussion also involved strategies that could be used to create and market an environment that would increase reinvestment in the area. Following in order of importance are the five most important Renewal issues identified and a short narrative about each:

1. **Indoor sports arena/performing arts center:** Joplin serves as a regional center. A major activity venue, increased entertainment activities, and regularly scheduled events would bring more people to Downtown. This activity will encourage more businesses and retail investment in the area. Memorial Hall and the Performing Arts Center provide opportunities for reinvestment and to create activity venue.
2. **On-street/off-street parking:** Parking is crucial for the revitalization of Downtown. In order to encourage investment in Downtown, investors must be assured that adequate parking is available or can be created to allow owners, employees and patrons easy access to the goods, services or activities the development will offer.
3. **Reuse of Brownfields:** Identify potential contaminated industrial sites that are large enough to be redeveloped either exclusively or in combination with abutting sites. Several industrial areas within Downtown appear to be contaminated and no longer add to the vitality of

Downtown. Environmental assessments can be conducted for these areas of possible contamination. If contaminated funds from the Federal Brownfields program can be sought to finance the mitigation, redevelopment and reuse of the areas.

4. **Housing/lofts:** Encourage renovation of the Downtown buildings' upper stories to allow for housing and lofts. Additional residential density brings more life into the area especially in the evenings, helps reduce building deterioration and ensures long term investments in Downtown.
5. **Minimize incompatible uses (target specific opportunities/partnerships):** Target opportunities to relocate incompatible uses. Minimize conflicts by consolidating similar uses into districts within downtown such as institutional and alternative housing districts. Target opportunities and partnerships that help to relocate incompatible uses to more appropriate areas such as industrial parks outside downtown, and thereby create opportunities for quality development that might prove as a catalyst for more compatible development in the area.

**Other Issues and Strategies.** In addition to the top five issues identified, the Task Force identified the following important Renewal issues.

- **Monetary commitment/city support:** The City must commit to the Downtown revitalization plan with monetary commitment and an active involvement with all development initiatives taking place in the Downtown.
- **Expand City Hall area:** The City should continue to invest in Downtown by consolidating City Hall and other government organizations into a Civic Campus.
- **Infrastructure improvements:** The funding of infrastructure and its maintenance should be taken very seriously, as it is a prerequisite for redevelopment. For example, Downtown Joplin has some stormwater problems that make certain areas of the Downtown undesirable for new businesses. Investment in infrastructure and the resolve of identified infrastructure problems can create stability in the Downtown.
- **Public safety and maintenance of a desirable streetscape:** Safety and more importantly, the perception of safety are crucial for redevelopment in Downtown. Investments in public improvements such as improved sidewalks, lighting, signalization, identified pedestrian crossings as well as public spaces designed to prevent crime through make downtown more appealing to users.



- **Rethink saving all buildings:** While historic preservation is an important goal for maintaining the character of Downtown, it is also important to be able to remove unsafe and dilapidated buildings that are not of crucial historical importance and provide space for newer development. Old does not always mean historic.
- **Public transit:** Introduction of some form of public transit would go a long way in creating a sense of place, link the various attractions of Downtown and indirectly help increase reinvestment into the urban core. Transit options are particularly important during evenings and peak activity days or hours.
- **Facade improvement/design guidelines:** While new development should be encouraged, certain guidelines that would help preserve and enhance the character of Downtown should be adopted. Facade improvement programs should be encouraged to improve the image of Downtown.
- **Work with the public and protect property rights:** While condemnation and acquiring of property might be essential to the redevelopment of Downtown, care should be taken while doing so. The Authorities must make every effort to work with the public and protect their property rights to the extent possible.

## NEXT STEPS

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### Awareness Walk

As a follow-up to the Visioning Workshop, the City hosted a “Downtown Awareness Walk” on Thursday, September 13, 2001 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The Downtown Awareness Walks are a key component of the Joplin Comprehensive Plan Update and the Downtown Revitalization Plan development. The walks provided an opportunity for residents, business owners, City staff members, elected officials and other key stakeholders to walk Downtown and analyze its positive, negative and dominant features. During the walks participants followed predetermined routes and discuss items such as private and public property maintenance, activities, off-street parking and the overall appearance of the area at view stops. The summary of these features “paints a picture” of key issues that will need to be addressed for Downtown Joplin to thrive in the future. These themes are then replicated in the Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Revitalization Plan to help elected officials make informed decisions about Downtown’s future.

**Open House**

The public's perception and impression have a significant impact on the vitality of Downtown. Likewise the insight gained from public discussions of the very complex issue of revitalizing downtown is invaluable. Concerns, needs, plans and dreams must be shared in order to ensure workable solutions for revitalizing Downtown.

Following the Awareness Walks the public had additional opportunities to raise issues, indicate preferences, and further record their perceptions and impressions. The meeting was held in October 2001 as an Open House. Information gathered and progress made to date was displayed for review and comment.

During the Open House City staff members, elected officials and Task Force members were available to discuss issues related to Downtown. The City Council was briefed on the progress to date in October, as well. Direction was given to the Consultant for further work.