

Greetings From
LIBERTY



THE CITY OF
LIBERTY
Dedicated to Community Excellence

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blueprint: economic development

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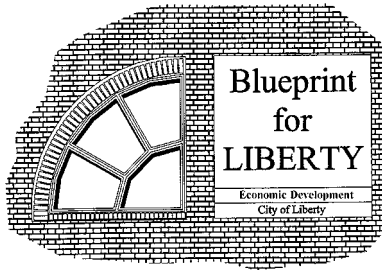
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blueprint: economic development

The Comprehensive Plan for the City of Liberty, known as the *Blueprint for Liberty*, includes several components that form together the City's long-range strategy for growth, development, and resource management. The *Blueprint*, in its complete form, will include the following elements: future land use; transportation; parks & open space; storm water; and economic development. Of these elements, the future land use plan has been completed (approved in August 1999) and all others are in progress. The trademark of this planning effort has been the emphasis on citizen participation and involvement, which has led to the formation of a series of strategies and recommendations that comprise the essence of the *Blueprint*. As a result of this emphasis, the *Blueprint* has inspired hundreds of Liberty's citizens to participate in the formation of the community's master plan.

In the fall of 2001, the City began an economic development goal setting process that has formed the basis of the effort to create an economic development element of the *Blueprint*. Over the past several months, approximately seventy citizens have attended a series of workshops that were designed to solicit input regarding the future of economic development in Liberty. The main objectives of this component of the *Blueprint* are to provide an analysis of Liberty's current economic and market conditions as well as establish a series of goals, recommendations, and strategies that will serve as guides for the City's future economic development endeavors.

As a result of the goal setting process, this economic development plan was developed. The plan establishes economic development recommendations and strategies to accomplish the following goals:

- Develop a comprehensive business development, expansion, retention and attraction program
- Foster a positive business climate in the City
- Promote a diverse and stable economy
- Encourage the development of certain target development sites
- Develop an aggressive marketing strategy
- Strengthen tourism promotion efforts
- Promote infrastructure improvements and investments
- Utilize available financing tools to encourage economic growth

The predominant theme of this plan, as developed through the goal setting process, is that Liberty recognizes the importance of enhancing and fostering a solid and diverse economic base while at the same time adhering to the sustainable growth and development principles that serve as the foundation to the *Blueprint for Liberty*.

economic development: new opportunities

ECONOMIC PRIORITIES

At the onset of this comprehensive planning effort, the citizen participants were asked to identify economic development goals and priorities that would serve as a guide to refocus, intensify and promote the City's economic development program. The results of this exercise have been assembled in the form of the following list of economic development priorities for the City of Liberty:

- Create job opportunities for our residents
- Encourage economic diversity
- Maintain an exceptional quality of life
- Promote a positive business climate
- Foster community partnerships
- Attract new office / light industrial businesses
- Enhance marketing efforts
- Advance the present tax base
- Provide opportunities for locally-owned businesses to expand
- Attract new retail businesses
- Promote an aggressive development strategy for the "Target Development Sites"
- Focus on promoting and making the most of the exceptional citizen base
- Promote sustainable growth
- Balance the relationship between the employment pool and residential base
- Encourage increased citizen involvement
- Encourage progressive thinking for long-term solutions



Citizen Survey

During the Winter 2001, the City of Liberty conducted a telephone survey of residents to determine the level of interest in certain economic development principles and ideas. Questions about the needs and wishes for certain types of development, job creation, and the quality of life in Liberty were rated on a scale from *Very Satisfied* to *Very Dissatisfied*. Residents were then asked to agree or disagree with statements regarding the re-development of areas throughout the City. More than 500 residents were polled during the course of the survey.



Citizen Survey

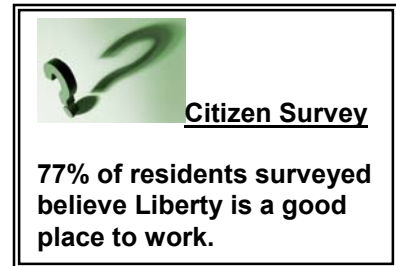
94% of residents surveyed consider Liberty a good place to live.

LIBERTY'S CONTEXT

The initial framework for the economic development program in Liberty began in 1998 when the City teamed with William Jewell College to complete a study of the local economic market. Gruen, Gruen + Associates, a firm specializing in the use of economic, social, and fiscal impact analysis, studied the conditions and patterns of Liberty's economy. This study examined both demographic and economic trends and established projections for the City's future growth. The purpose of the study was to provide a foundation for the eventual formation and implementation of a strategic economic development program. The results of this study created the following context for understanding the characteristics of Liberty's economy.

Market Profile

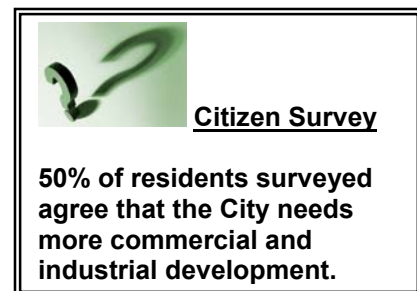
In order to fully understand the economic market, population data must be analyzed to draw out characteristics that can anticipate economic trends. Liberty's population is best characterized as a relatively young, family-oriented community with high growth patterns in household formation and household income, which supports the study's determination that Liberty has a great market for enhanced retail and service industry growth. The study also determined that since 70% of Liberty's residents are employed outside the City, Liberty is in a unique position in that its workforce would be able to support an influx of professional and skilled employment opportunities. Liberty's population is perhaps one of its greatest economic assets as it can be shown that the community has the resources to increase local employment opportunities and to provide current residents with greater economic choices.



Beyond providing an overview of Liberty's population, the Gruen study examines and analyzes the characteristics of the following three economic market sectors: Industrial, Office, and Retail.

Industrial Market

Liberty has many of the features that industrial firms find attractive. It has a central location with easy access to highways, rail, and air transportation. The area has a diverse labor pool and the educational attainment of residents is higher than the national average. Liberty is also in close proximity to suppliers and customers for many industries.



Liberty's industrial market and its potential for growth can be characterized by the following observations:

- Industrial land prices and lease rates in Liberty's two existing industrial parks, Heartland Meadows and the Liberty Industrial Park, are comparable and competitive to industrial land throughout the Northland.
- Liberty currently has a moderate amount of available industrial land and space, which should meet the needs of this sector in the short-term.
- The City's future land use plan has identified several areas throughout the City as potential industrial ground. Specifically, the areas adjacent to Heartland Meadows and along the western segment of the South Liberty Parkway are identified as future "Business Park" development areas that encourage light industrial and/or office uses.

Office Market

The Gruen study states that Liberty's office space is currently geared toward local users rather than serving a wider market base as firms providing business, professional and personal services have been the primary users of office space in the Liberty market. The study also emphasizes that Liberty's work force is well suited to accommodating a growing office market.



Citizen Survey

56% of residents surveyed believe Liberty should encourage the development of office centers.

Liberty's office market and its potential for growth can be characterized by the following observations:

- Office land and lease rates in Liberty are below average, as compared to those costs and rates throughout the Northland and the metropolitan area.
- Given the extremely low vacancy rate for built office space in Liberty, and considering the current market trends in this sector, a real and present demand for office development exists.
- Considering Liberty's workforce characteristics, an attractive labor pool to serve future office development is presently available.
- The amount of available land zoned specifically for office development in Liberty is rather limited, however, the future land use plan identifies several areas throughout the City that are well-suited for office park development. Specifically, the areas adjacent to Heartland Meadows and along the western segment of the South Liberty Parkway are identified as future "Business Parks".

Retail Market

The Gruen study reports that Liberty's population, given its affluence, age, and family composition is a prime consideration contemplated by retailers as they seek sites for development. It is also stated that Liberty is well positioned, from a marketing standpoint, to attract retail development. Presently, Liberty's greatest retail strength is in the areas of food, eating, and drinking establishments, which is primarily geared toward the local user. Liberty has experienced a decline in the amount of retail sales geared toward the regional user, in large part due to the commercial growth experienced on the Kansas City side of I-35. Another finding emphasized in the study is that Liberty can clearly support more square feet of retail space than is presently available in the area. In light of these points, the study estimates that opportunities exist for significant growth in this sector



Citizen Survey

56% of residents surveyed believe that the City should attract more large retail stores.

Liberty's retail market and its potential for growth can be characterized by the following observations:

- Given the extremely low vacancy rate for built retail space in Liberty, the market for additional space is strong.
- Considering the buying power of Liberty's citizens, pressures for future retail growth are likely.
- The Liberty Triangle presents a great opportunity to expand the City's retail base. Efforts to redevelop this site as a regional retail center should be encouraged.
- Retail development opportunities will increase in Liberty as the development of the South Liberty Parkway takes place over the next few years.

Comparative Advantages

Quality of Life

Residents of Liberty enjoy high quality community services and amenities. Liberty has a highly rated public school system and a top-rated liberal arts college in William Jewell College. Liberty Hospital is a notable comprehensive health care facility with excellent emergency services. The city is rich in history and maintains an active historic downtown square. Cultural and recreational opportunities abound in the City with more than 300 acres of parks, trails, and open space; a symphony orchestra, a performing arts theater, community center, and many other amenities.



Citizen Survey

91% of residents surveyed are satisfied with the quality of life in Liberty.

Location

Liberty enjoys an excellent location, with easy access to transportation outlets such as interstates, rail lines and air service. Liberty is 15 miles from downtown Kansas City and 20 miles from Kansas City International Airport. The City also benefits from a central location from which to access regional and national markets, as well as potential customers and suppliers. It serves as the county seat of Clay County and is the center of a majority of county legislative and judicial services.



Citizen Survey

95% of residents surveyed consider Liberty a good place to raise children.

Proactive Planning

Liberty has a long history of planning for economic growth and development. Through previous comprehensive planning efforts, a Future Land Use Plan not only provides principles for future development, but also a map of land use designations to guide balanced growth. It is estimated that the City is approximately 33% built-out to existing City boundaries. This suggests that Liberty can accommodate significant additional growth in its housing, commercial and industrial supply.



Citizen Survey

85% of residents surveyed are satisfied with the overall image of Liberty.

Qualified Workforce

Liberty enjoys a diverse labor pool, which ranges from low-to mid-level skilled workers to a growing base of high-skilled professionals and specialized craftsmen. Education has long been a community priority in Liberty and thus, educational attainment levels are traditionally higher in Liberty than for the U.S. and the metropolitan area as a whole. Additionally, it is estimated that 30% of Liberty residents are executives, managers or professionals.



Citizen Survey

74% of residents surveyed want to live and work in Liberty.

GOAL-SETTING PROCESS

Liberty has historically enjoyed a cooperative relationship with its business community, institutions, and citizens alike. It is a priority of the City to encourage public participation in all of its planning activities. This plan took its form from an involved public participation process that was focused on establishing a series of economic development goals for the City. This process consisted of three sessions dedicated to three distinct but interrelated areas of economic development: infrastructure, financing, and potential development sites.



Infrastructure

Infrastructure is a critical and vital component of economic development. In order to enhance the City's position so that it can better compete for new development, it is essential that the infrastructure system is both sound and capable of accommodating future development. Because unmanaged growth places a considerable strain on infrastructure systems, infrastructure planning is critical to the City's future success. In order to best position the City for its infrastructure planning efforts, it is imperative that strong relationships with the development community, private utility corporations, community partners and other public entities be maintained and enhanced.

Successful infrastructure planning should emphasize adequate and safe access to streets and highways, sanitary sewers, water; and proper connections for storm water drainage, public transportation, sidewalks and trails, utility systems and fiber optics.

Streets and Highways

Liberty's location at the intersection of several major highway systems provides excellent opportunities for businesses with considerable land transportation needs. Working with the Missouri Department of Transportation to maintain these assets continues to produce safer and more efficient road systems. Improvements to major intersections such as Interstate 35 and M-152, I-35 and M-291, and I-35 and Liberty Drive not only create better traffic flow, but also provide "gateway" development opportunities for Liberty. Each of these intersections allow for new commercial development to be creative and innovative places to attract visitors to Liberty.

City streets are also a high priority as a safe and efficient internal roadway network is critical to the success of a growing City. Typically, local and collector roadways are constructed by the developer and maintained by the City. The City has in the past used Neighborhood Improvement District financing to improve and upgrade certain City streets in order to improve access to and through neighborhoods.

Public Utilities

Liberty has long been dedicated to providing high quality utility services to its residents and businesses. Rising costs, population growth, and increased demand can often overextend service and therefore it is imperative the City continue its utility planning efforts. Liberty's commitment to enhanced service includes the planned expansion of the water treatment plant



Citizen Survey

54% of residents surveyed agree the City is responding well to growth pressures.



Citizen Survey

63% of residents surveyed are satisfied with the overall value they receive for their tax dollars.

and the expansion of the Rush Creek wastewater treatment plant. The City is also currently updating its storm water master plan that will establish controls to better maintain and manage storm water as it flows through the City.

Private Utilities

Cable, telephone, wireless, and Internet service providers are abundant in Liberty. Franchise agreements, the Wireless Facilities Ordinance, and general competition all work to insure that Liberty's residents receive quality service at reasonable rates. Businesses can expect high-quality access to mobile communication systems, high-speed Internet access, and better marketing systems through local providers.

The City works closely with its private utility providers to ensure that services are accessible to its residents and businesses and also to guarantee that the facilities and lines necessary for the transmission of these services are constructed and developed in a manner that is consistent with the City's goals.



Citizen Survey

86% of residents surveyed are satisfied with the overall quality of City services.

Financing

Liberty's efforts to actively market and recruit new businesses or allow for the expansion of existing businesses can be enhanced by certain financing strategies that provide developers with extra incentive to fund projects and supplementary improvements. Businesses wanting to locate in Liberty have many options at their disposal. These programs range from special development districts and tax credits to abatement and loan programs. In the past, Liberty has successfully provided programs for Tax-Increment Financing (TIF) and Neighborhood Improvement Districts (NID). In addition, several other financing programs that do not involve City participation or approval are available and have been utilized by Liberty businesses. *The City should be prepared to utilize any such programs that require its involvement, determining merit on a case-by-case basis. In addition, City staff must serve as an active conduit for businesses interested in pursuing financing through State administered programs.*



Citizen Survey

78% of residents surveyed agree the City should get a positive financial return on investments for its economic development.

Tax-Increment Financing (TIF)

Liberty established the Heartland Meadows TIF District in 1991 in partnership with Hallmark, Zimmer Development Corporation, Clark Printing Company, William Jewell College, Liberty School District, and the Liberty Hospital. In the first two years of the project, TIF bonds in excess of \$2 million were issued to finance infrastructure improvements. The project produced enough revenue to retire the bonds ten years early. The success of the project can be measured not only by the seven businesses that presently are located in Heartland Meadows, but also for those new or expanding businesses that will take advantage of the 130+ acres of developable area remaining in the future.



Citizen Survey

64% of residents surveyed agree the City needs more entertainment and cultural destination.

Neighborhood Improvement District (NID)

As mentioned previously, the Neighborhood Improvement District program allows money for street improvements, storm water drainage improvements, and public utility extensions. The program works as a special assessment on properties within the district, which is then applied toward the actual labor and construction costs associated with the design and construction of approved projects. Liberty has utilized this financing mechanism for several projects, including such recent projects as Church Road sewer extension; Heartland Meadows sewer, water and street extensions; and Virginia Heights sewer extension.

As the City looks to the future, several additional financing programs and credits could be considered for future (re)-development projects.

Other Financing Programs

- **Missouri First Link Deposit – Job Creation**
This is a State administered low-interest lending program available to an existing or expanding business that is geared toward job-creation and retention.
- **Industrial Development Bonds**
These low-cost, tax-exempt bonds can be used to finance up to 100% of the fixed assets for manufacturing projects.
- **Business Facility Tax Credits**
These State income tax credits are eligible for certain businesses for the creation of new jobs or for new capital investments.
- **Historic Preservation Tax Credits**
For certain eligible properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the State offers tax credits for restoration or rehabilitation to historic structures.
- **Urban Redevelopment Corporations (“Chapter 353”)**
This program is City authorized and controlled and is useful for projects that involve blighted properties ripe for (re)development. Designated areas may receive up to 100% in real property tax abatement for up to 25 years.
- **Community Improvement Districts**
Property owner(s) can establish these self-taxing districts to fund improvements and support business activity.
- **Special Business Districts**
This City or County established district allows for the taxation of property to fund public improvements.
- **Transportation Development Districts (“TDD”)**
This joint City / State program allows for the creation of special taxing districts (often sales tax) that fund transportation related improvements.
- **Transportation Corporations**
This State approved private entity may be formed to issue bonds for State transportation improvements.



Citizen Survey

Residents participating in the survey were asked to rate which types of employment opportunities they believed Liberty should attract:

| | |
|------------|------------------------------------|
| 65% | information/ communications |
| 51% | manufacturing |
| 66% | retail |
| 51% | wholesale |
| 50% | transportation |
| 69% | business/ professional |
| 77% | educational |
| 71% | healthcare/ medical |
| 61% | research/ development |
| 65% | entertainment |

Target Development Sites

The following sites were selected during the goal setting process because of their importance to the community and their ability to be (re)developed. *Because of the limited resources, the City will prioritize its efforts on these areas; however, it will not neglect other areas in which development may occur.*



Liberty Triangle

Bounded by Interstate 35, Highway 152 and Highway 291, this is an excellent location for development with high visibility and easy access. The Future Land Use Plan designates this area as a “gateway” to the City and calls for commercial and mixed-use development. The area is currently underutilized, with several residential properties that have abandoned buildings. It will require substantial redevelopment including further infrastructure improvements.

South Liberty Parkway Corridor

This is an area that will be prime for development with the imminent construction of the South Liberty Parkway. The initial focus in this area will be on the roadway from I-35 to Withers Road. There are a variety of land uses designated in the area. The area adjacent to I-35 is designated for commercial development. The area to the east of Hughes Road is designated for business use, and the area adjacent to Withers Road is designated as Traditional Neighborhood Design, which includes mixed-use development.



Citizen Survey

74% of residents surveyed believe the City needs more higher-paying, value-added employment opportunities.

The City and its residents have already made a commitment to this area. The City has conducted traffic studies for this area and is currently working with a consulting firm on a traffic and economic study that will show the potential for the area. The citizens recently approved two tax measures and an accompanying bond issue for the construction of the South Liberty Parkway and improvements to Hughes and Withers Roads. Engineering for these roads is expected to be accomplished in 2002 and construction to be completed in 2003.

Heartland Meadows and surrounding area

This high-quality business park has excellent access to interstates, and there is ample land available for further development both in and adjacent to the park. Most of the area is designated for business development; however, a portion near the Liberty Hospital is designated as Traditional Neighborhood Design. This area is also designated as a “gateway” to Liberty, and as such, should be designed to create a sense of arrival in Liberty.



Citizen Survey

60% of residents surveyed believe the City should provide incentives to encourage new development in older areas.

Downtown Business District

The historic square is thriving with retail shops and service companies. It will continue to be the central core and community-gathering place for Liberty; therefore, the continued vitality of this area is important to the community. The future land use plan calls for mixed-use development in this area.

Former Guy's Plant

This site includes a vacant 300,000 square foot manufacturing facility that is located in predominantly a residential area. The future land use calls for business use. The current owner of this property is a bank that foreclosed on the property.



Goal-Setting Forum

Participants in the goal-setting forums were asked to rate the Target Development Sites based on their perception of the potential of each site for redevelopment.

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Liberty Triangle | 88% |
| South Liberty Parkway Corridor | 100% |
| Downtown Business District | 38% |
| Heartland Meadows and surrounding area | 100% |
| Former Guys Plant | 37% |

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

The following key recommendations and strategies were derived from the information outlined in the Gruen study and the input received through the goal setting process. Each key recommendation is accompanied by implementation strategies.

1. *Create and implement a comprehensive business development, expansion and retention program*

- Enhance communication between the City, business community, the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Merchants' Association and developers.
- Maintain regular contact with major employers in Liberty to obtain information, and provide rapid and thorough follow-up to identified issues of concern.
- Work with state and regional economic development groups to support business expansions that will provide family wage jobs.
- Develop cooperative ways to encourage small business development by working with local lending institutions, the Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Development Center.
- Work with the Downtown Merchants' Association and the Chamber of Commerce on ways to attract investment and visitors to the downtown area.
- Investigate opportunities to more fully realize the potential of the downtown area by finding suitable uses for underutilized buildings and sites.

2. *Develop and implement a business attraction program. Provide a business climate in the City that will encourage the establishment of commercial and industrial businesses that will benefit the community, promote diversification and provide stability.*

- Identify and pursue potential business sectors whose location requirements fit well with the assets of Liberty. These business sectors include:
 - * Service firms, especially those in the professional, educational, and health sectors
 - * Transportation firms
 - * Manufacturing firms, especially those in the printing and publishing industries, food processing industry and transportation industry
 - * Retail trade firms
- Work with other area economic development organizations to obtain business leads appropriate for Liberty.
- Create a "strike force" that can be called upon to help recruit companies. The group will consist of business and city leaders that are willing to visit with prospects that may locate in Liberty to demonstrate how businesses can be successful in Liberty and display a healthy business climate.
- Further relationships with the real estate and banking community to identify information and partners critical to business investment decisions.
- Update and maintain a list of available sites and buildings on the City's web site.

3. *Encourage the development of sites prioritized through the economic development goal setting process (see Appendix A).*

- Encourage developers to consider these sites in the context of their future land use designations.
- Promote the design and construction of improved infrastructure in the Triangle and along the southern corridor of the City.

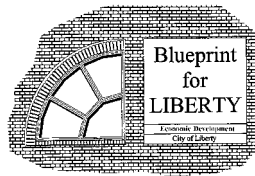
- Make developers aware of design assistance programs available for improved detail to urban design and architectural details.
- 4. *Develop a marketing strategy that focuses on the comparative advantages of living and working in Liberty.***
- Create and improve current marketing communication pieces.
 - Use the City's web site as a marketing tool.
 - Prepare a print media campaign in regional business journals and national site selection magazines.
 - Attend regional and/or national trade shows, especially those that appeal to targeted industries.
 - Partner with community groups to market the City.
 - Market the many amenities of Liberty, including extensive trail system, education, and access to quality healthcare.
- 5. *Strengthen tourism promotion activities in Liberty.***
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Merchants' Association, the Clay County Visitors' Bureau and other partners to market the community as a tourism destination.
 - Work with Kansas City and others to provide updated information for their tourism web sites.
 - Investigate and pursue opportunities for additional amenities that would support tourism.
 - Encourage community events such as Spring on the Square, Fall Festival, Liberty Gathering, and others that attract visitors to the community.
 - Target and recruit potential service industries related to tourism such as hotels and restaurants
- 6. *Promote infrastructure improvements to ensure adequate utility capacity to compete for new development and existing business expansion.***
- Support efforts to maximize funding of road improvement projects to expand the road network and increase road capacity.
 - Work with other utility providers and assist with the provision of utilities to the prioritized development areas.
 - Investigate alternative funding sources for infrastructure improvements.
 - Partner with utilities to provide incentives for new and expanding businesses.
- 7. *Effectively utilize available tools and mechanisms to encourage business expansion and attraction.***
- Prepare and develop a strategy that outlines future annexation plans for areas in unincorporated Clay County that have development potential.
 - Investigate and encourage the use of appropriate financing programs to assist with the development and redevelopment of the target development sites.
 - Work with regional, state, and federal programs to provide incentives and/or financing for businesses contemplating expansion or location in Liberty.
 - Investigate the possibility of the creation of a local revolving loan fund for business expansion or attraction.
 - Work with local financing institutions to provide financing for new and expanding companies.

CONCLUSION

The current economic conditions emphasize the need for a growing and diversified economy. The City and its citizens have recognized the need to aggressively pursue opportunities for growth and development. This is evident with the approval of a roadway development tax, quarter-cent transportation sales tax, and bond issue for the construction of new roads in Liberty.

This Plan establishes the economic development priorities for Liberty. As any business must continually monitor its economic performance, the City must undertake the same discipline and make adjustments as appropriate. As the details of the Plan are developed, benchmarks will be established to measure the City's progress in achieving the goals set forth in the Plan. The fine-tuning of economic strategies will help to mitigate weaknesses or vulnerabilities in the economic base of the community.

Economic development requires a coordinated effort and the collaboration of the public, private, and non-profit sectors to deliver the community with a high quality of life and an attractive business climate. The City will strive to enhance partnerships within the business and development communities, visitors, and citizens, which will help to achieve the mission of ensuring an exceptional quality of life for the community of Liberty.



APPENDIX: TARGET DEVELOPMENT SITE INFORMATION