

DOWNTOWN TASK FORCE
REPORT
October 3, 2011

Task Force Members:

- Craig Swanson – Chair
- Judith Del Porto
- Ellen Todd
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Special Thanks to Kurt Pycior (Pycior & Co.)

Mayor's Direction:

The Task Force is to consider opportunities within the downtown area with fresh eyes and ideas working together to understand the downtown and what needed to be done to make it a greater place.

Vision:

Downtown Liberty is the heart of the community rich in history and offering opportunity for new experiences. Our downtown is a walkable, unique destination for all who are looking for an inviting, thriving, and active shopping, entertainment, and business area surrounded by historic neighborhoods.

Key Findings (real and perceived):

- Downtown Liberty is a successful destination location in the Kansas City region:
 - The marketing efforts by existing organizations continue to play an important part in downtown's success.
 - The current HDLI organization has continued to increase communication and coordination of the downtown businesses.
 - The preservation of the historic buildings and events draws regional and national visitors.
 - Existing architectural guidelines are an important part of maintaining the unique character of Liberty and should be followed.
 - Existing governmental presence is important and should be maintained.
 - The downtown has a history of stable, long-time businesses.
- The downtown is not just the "square". It is a larger area from the Liberty Junior High School to William Jewell College ("Hill to Hill") and from south of the railroad tracks to Mississippi Street.

- The condition of the existing streetscape, i.e. curbs, streets and sidewalks needs to improve.
- Funding continues to be a challenge to meet current maintenance and future development and improvement needs.
- The Downtown Master Plan (November 2005) includes some key recommendations that remain important today.
- The downtown is not easy to find for visitors coming for the first time; designated entrances and a defined boundary are not clearly identified to let visitors know they are “here”.
- Although downtown is a mixed use area, more retail and specialty stores are needed.
- There is a growing ethnic population within the area and the downtown should continue to seek ways to welcome the diversity.
- Coordination of the downtown district is often a challenge and opportunity because of the multiple property ownerships and business mix.
- People still look to park in front of their destination.
- Students from William Jewell College are not present in downtown.

What we have learned from other downtowns:

- Land use density in a successful downtown should be higher than other parts of the community. People should be “bumping” into each other on the sidewalk as walking is a better form of transportation than driving.
- There should be lots of different types of residential choices within downtown or immediately adjacent to it.
- Downtown is not just a project, it should not be just a shopping area for local residents; it should be a place or experience for many people.
- In a downtown you park your car once and walk.
- Successful downtowns are always faced with challenges and opportunities, it is critical to be flexible and patient.
- Create a community “living room”.

Identification of Downtown:

The first step after creating a Vision for downtown was to define downtown. Past studies have identified the “square” as Liberty’s downtown. The task force has identified Liberty’s downtown as a much larger area that surrounds a business core area. The core area is considered the downtown and where most of the resources should concentrate while the outer boundary is where a person should start to “feel” that they have entered into the downtown.

Principle Strategies:

Downtown Liberty is a healthy district that has taken lots of hard work and dedication on the part of property owners, businesses, organizations and agencies. These groups recognize that the work never ends, that it faces challenges in the coming years – attracting new business and new shoppers,

creating new jobs, and maintaining the historic heritage of its past, but most importantly maintaining momentum that has been gained.

The strategies developed by the task force address the future of downtown with an important goal in mind – being a unique destination offering opportunity for new experiences. The opportunity to add new business, develop and build additional buildings on vacant land or underutilized land and attract residents all within downtown is critical to the Vision developed.

The task force agreed upon several strategies that need to be addressed and are included in Attachment B. The task force elected not to identify specific properties for future development and redevelopment as many factors could alter implementation of a specific site including market conditions, ownership, and economics. However, it is understood that certain steps need to be taken first as a foundation for the remaining strategies to be successful. The following strategies were determined to be the priority action steps that should be taken first (in no particular order).

A. Branding and Marketing

Branding is a way to develop an identity that can be used in a coordinated manner in marketing campaigns, printed material, entry and highway signage and web page marketing to reinforce what is downtown Liberty. By engaging in an all-out branding and marketing campaign several things can be accomplished including:

- Finding a weekly or monthly event which individuals around Kansas City Metropolitan area can come and enjoy. Examples of a standard, regular event that has been done include: 1st Fridays in the Crossroads District, 3rd Thursdays in Lee's Summit, Good JuJu artist center in the West Bottoms and Jazz on the Square at both Zona Rosa and Town Center Plaza on Thursday nights.
- Marketing and advertising blitz to let the Kansas City Metropolitan Area know what we have in Downtown Liberty.

B. Infrastructure

- **Street/crosswalk/curb rehabilitation.**

An inventory of the roadways within the downtown boundary should be conducted to assess the condition of streets, curbs, sidewalks, street trees and crosswalks. There are locations where curbs and street pavement have deteriorated as well as well as parking lots and sidewalks. These needed improvements should be prioritized by city staff. Crosswalks have been temporarily repaired as bricks loosen and break. Use of brick and/or brick pavers is not included as a priority by the task force but the use of the current bricks (if salvageable) could be utilized in other ways. A visitor should not only enjoy being in the downtown, but enjoy the experience getting here as well. Many street trees have died over the years and should be replaced.

- **Streetscape.**

A streetscape has been started but not completed in the downtown area. Review the existing plans and complete the streetscape designed and if needed, improve upon the existing plans so that a visitor knows when they have entered downtown as well as making it a destination that people seek out. In addition to the plans that need to be completed we are recommending to look into the feasibility of widening the sidewalks around the courthouse on the store-side where possible. By widening the sidewalks it will allow for outdoor dining for the restaurants and retail shops to display merchandise outside their store during special events.

Streetscape is not just streets and sidewalks. Streetscape includes furniture for people to sit on, pedestrian level lighting to feel safe, trees to provide shade, landscaping and art to draw people to the area or add an additional element beyond shopping. These elements need to be added to the downtown to complete it.

- **Wayfinding Signage**

Area signage will direct individuals to public parking, historical sites, government building, and downtown shopping districts (i.e. Mill Street/Square). By having signs located in clear entrances and exits to downtown as defined by this report, individuals will be able to know they have entered the area in addition to the streetscape.

- **Wi-Fi**

Offer free Wi-Fi to downtown visitors and customers as it will be a draw for individuals to take advantage of what downtown has to offer, in particular students from William Jewell. Many places administer it different ways depending upon the needs of the customer base for the area. The administering of free Wi-Fi will be determined in the branding and marketing campaign that should be completed.

C. Strengthen and Create Partnerships

A successful downtown environment in Liberty cannot be accomplished by one individual or one group. It is created from collaboration of private individuals, local businesses, public agencies, corporate partners and community groups. Partnerships are critical to achieve results. Partnerships are needed for funding, support, marketing, and success.

- **William Jewell connection should be strengthened.** William Jewell is a vital component of the community. Not every community can boast that a higher educational institution is located within its downtown. Involving students in the activities downtown and creating a curriculum/work environment where students can collaborate with business is recommended. *The City and William Jewell Administration should work together to develop a student work study program, i.e. Downtown gift card program where students create a business plan, work with merchants and implement the program.*

- **Community/Business/Corporate sponsorships.** Many ideas through the task force discussions involved looking for assistance to “kickstart” programs that would create a more expansive downtown to attract employees during the day, residents (in and outside Liberty) and students from William Jewell and Liberty School District. Making downtown a place that people want to spend their spare time in not only brings people but attracts business and corporations to locate within the community. *Secure private sponsorships for events and student activities located downtown.*
- **Public/Private partnerships.** Sharing resources and talent can only bring good things. Cooperation in developing financing opportunities and streamlining approval processes will strengthen relationships for downtown success.
- **Church partnerships.** Sunday services (as well as other days services or fellowship is held) bring many people downtown. Although many stores are not open on Sundays, having an attraction that could draw Sunday crowds to come back another day should be explored. By adding additional self-guided tours (sculpture, artwork, historical) the Sunday population may be enticed to stay after services or come back.

D. Regulatory Review

City codes and ordinances should be reviewed to streamline approval processes for events held downtown.

A few examples of such codes and ordinances that should be reviewed are:

- Policies for special events
- Signage
- Private usage of sidewalk area
- Special Use Permit obtained once for same event that occurs several times during the year
- Building permit and/or business license fee reductions if ground floor space is used for retail/restaurant only.

E. Event Area

Today events are held in and around the downtown but not necessarily in one place. Many times when an event is held streets need to be blocked off, which is fine for a few events each year but is not conducive for holding a multitude of events.

An outdoor event space that can flex with the season and has a multitude of uses is recommended to be built in the downtown area. The task force is not recommending a specific location since factors not under its control are at play. The space should be designed to be able to handle events such as but not limited to:

- Concerts (spring – fall)
- Ice skating (winter)
- Theatre productions (spring – fall)

- Recreational games and sports (i.e. Frisbee golf, bocce ball, etc.)
- A centralized gathering place with free Wi-Fi when events are not being held.

The area can also be leveraged to be a centralized location for the events already held in the downtown area. The location must be close to downtown in order to utilize existing parking.

Other Important Issues:

A. *Parking:*

Parking is probably the most common concern in any downtown area, large or small. It must serve many patrons including customers (short-term and long-term), employees, property owners, business owners, visitors (i.e. jury prospects and tourists) and residents.

- **Current conditions**

Parking availability, location, and enforcement will always be a priority concern. Several Parking analyses have been conducted over the years, resulting in changes to time restrictions and enforcement. Currently parking remains restricted but enforcement has been reduced to budget constraints. Past discussions have included the construction of three parking garages within the downtown area. Those discussions should continue however prior to availability of funding, additional off-street surface parking spaces should be considered.

Parking problems only occur during specific periods of time, mainly, Monday through Friday from 9 am to 3 pm. The largest public parking area within the downtown, located at Missouri and Kansas Streets are largely vacant in the evening and weekends. This is due to both City Hall and County facilities closed during these times. The second largest parking area, located along Mill Street and west of Leonard Street is vacant most of the time except during jury call, usually on Mondays in the morning.

- **History serves its purpose**

Downtowns similar to Liberty are unique in that most business uses, including retail and office, are not required to provide their own parking due to the compact size of the lots. These downtowns are also unique in that most visitors and shoppers would park their vehicle and walk to their destination and hopefully visit other businesses as well. The downtown pharmacy visit also becomes a visit to the post office and market.

One of the best known examples within the Kansas City region is The Plaza. The Plaza has similar experiences Liberty downtown has; art fairs, street closures for special events, concerts, different ownerships and a variety of business. However, visitors do not expect to park directly in front of their specific location and therefore the Plaza as a whole becomes the destination not just the one business. Employees do not park directly in front of their locations and are rather encouraged to only park in specific

locations, giving customers priority. Although there are several parking garages at The Plaza, there also exists hundreds of square feet of office space as well.

It is interesting to note that the distance from the public parking area at the southeast corner of Missouri and Kansas Streets is approximately 479 feet from the County Courthouse yet the furthest parking space in the parking area for Walmart to the front of the store is 442 feet and the furthest parking space in the parking area for Target is 513 feet to the front of the store. When visiting an enclosed shopping mall, parking in one location and walking the length of the mall is common.

The task force is not proposing to alter the existing policy but is recommending parking management should be enforced consistently.

B. Funding:

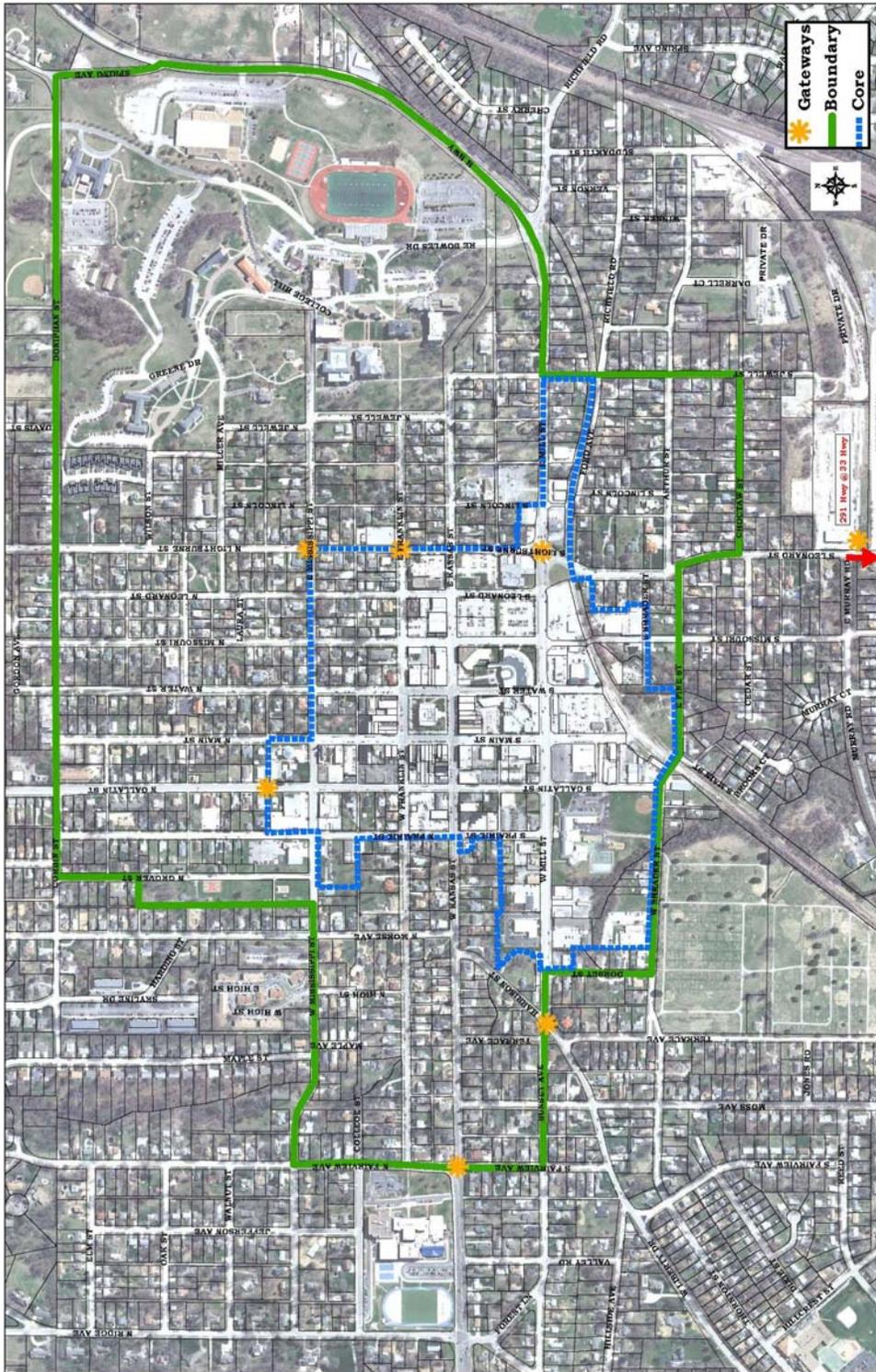
Continued, stable funding is critical for downtown revitalization. The task force has identified several funding sources beyond general fund monies of the City. It is encouraged that several funding sources be utilized to achieve the recommendations of the task force. For example, the Chapter 353 tax abatement incentive will assist property owners in improving their buildings; a Community Improvement District can help fund needed infrastructure improvements; and a hotel/motel tax would assist in tourism and marketing efforts to encourage visitors downtown.

ATTACHMENT A

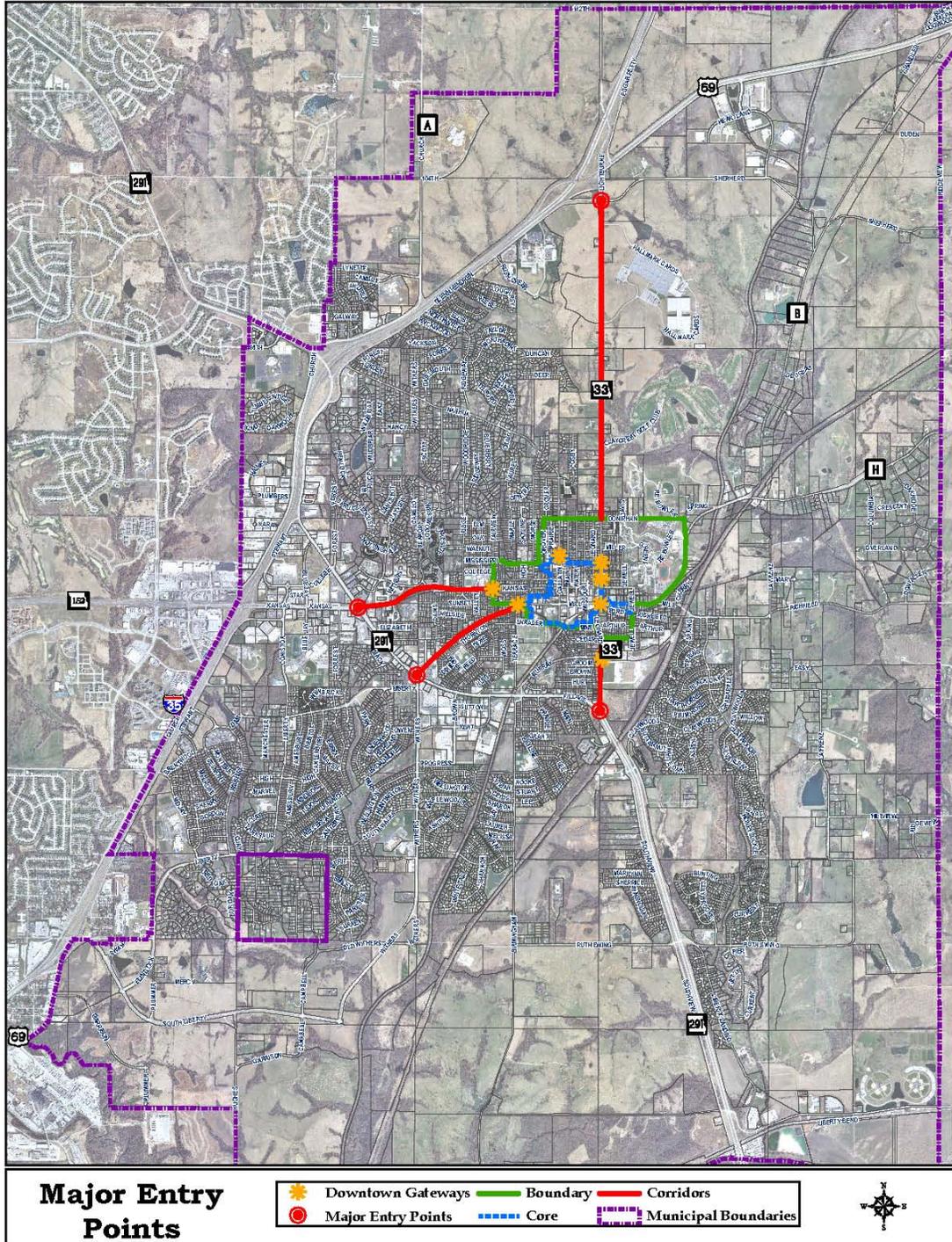
MAPS

- 1. Corridor Map**
- 2. Entry Map**
- 3. City/County Ownership Map**

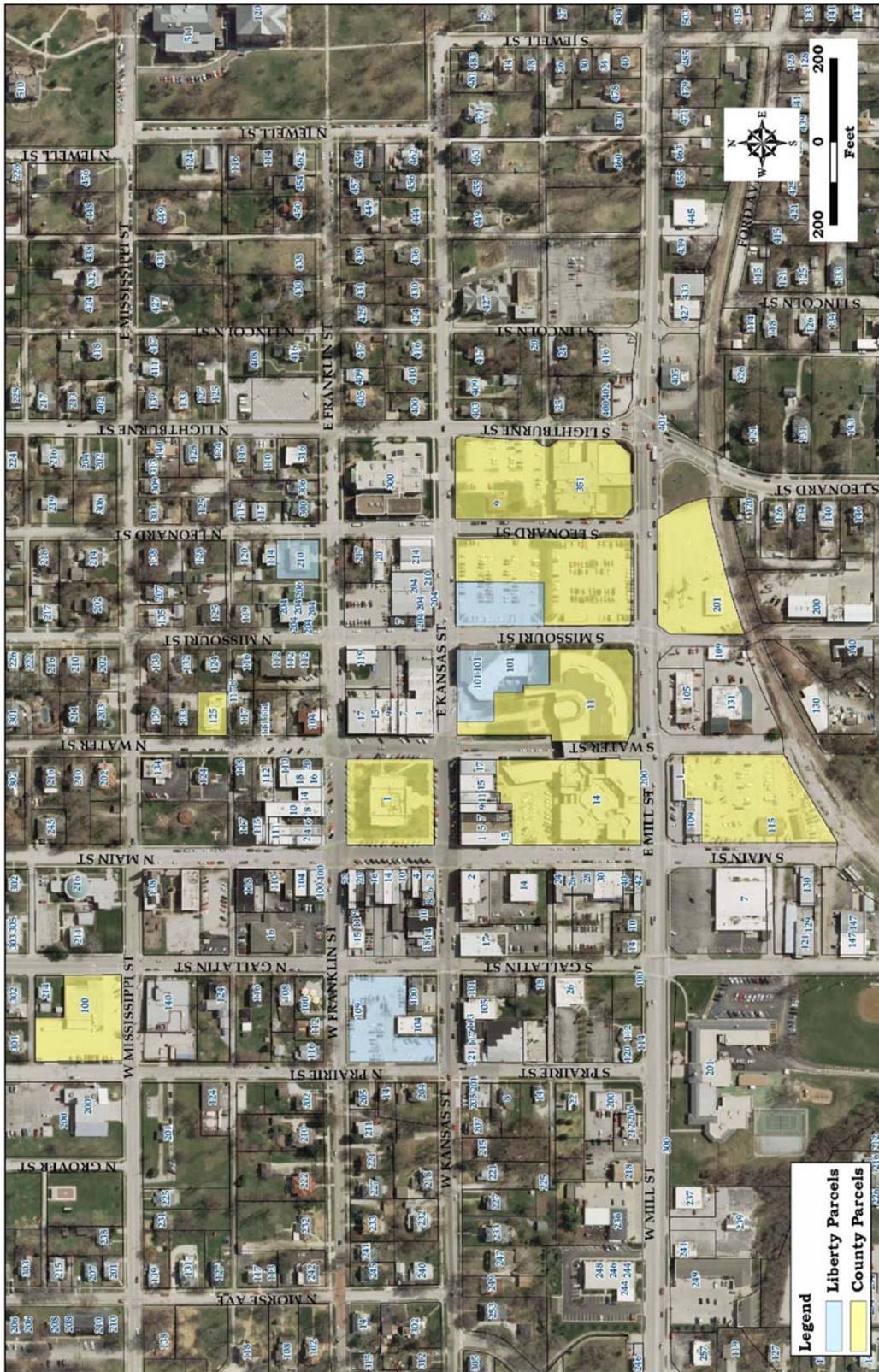
1. CORRIDOR MAP



2. ENTRY MAP



3. CITY/COUNTY OWNERSHIP MAP



ATTACHMENT B

TASK FORCE STRATEGIES

PARTNERSHIPS

- William Jewell connection
 - Create new curriculum for work/study program
 - Student run business
- Historic Tourism (Jessie James Bank/museum; Liberty Landing; Mormon)
- William Jewell student presence
- Liberty Schools
- Community/Business/Corporate sponsorships
- New investment
- Outreach
- Public/private partnership

SPECIALTY BUSINESS

- Grocery store
- Additional restaurants
- Boutique (non-chain) stores
- Book store with merchandise attractive to William Jewell students
- Antiques
- Post Office annex
- Children (apparel; exercise; toys)
- Bike store/running/fitness
- After 5:00 pm
- Downtown gift card/restaurant pager system
- Art Galleries
- Additional one-time events (Ju Ju type)
- Entertainment

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Franklin Street
- Curb/street/brick crosswalk rehab
- A streetscape plan for the core area/review existing plans
- Wayfinding signage for core area
- Widen sidewalks around square – alter parking if needed
- Public restroom
- Additional parking/future structured parking
- FREE WiFi
- Bike friendly
- Electric Charge Station
- Handicapped accessible

- Electricity hookups easily accessible for events (part of infrastructure)

PLACEMAKING & DESTINATION

- Improve streetscape
- Wayfinding signage
- Branding for downtown
- Visitors center
- Local tour/trolley
- Open after 5:00/standard hours
- Flex space for entertainment uses (ice skating/mini golf/concerts)
- Movies in the Park
- Revolving public art sculpture program

REDEVELOPMENT/DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- City/County land exchange partnership
- Attract new development/new leasable space
- Complete inventory/assessment
- Roof top space/uses (zoning)
- Obtain long-term financing programs
- Incubator space for start ups
- Develop City/County owned space
 - East Kansas Ave parking
 - County parking areas south of Mill (together with parking structure)
 - Property between Franklin and Kansas at Prairie
- Courthouse space utilization
- Façade redevelopment
- Outdoor restaurant seating within sidewalk area

FUNDING/INCENTIVES

- Hotel/Motel Tax
- Chapter 353 Tax Abatement for downtown
- Bonds
- Creation of venture capital
- Business incubator for business training/start up space
- Land exchange to spur development
- Adopt a block/street program
- Façade improvement program/grants (signs/facades)
- Community Improvement District
- Historic Tax Credits
- Tax Credits
- Revolving Loan Fund
- Neighborhood Improvement District

ATTACHMENT C

WILLIAM JEWELL PARTICIPATION NOTES

William Jewell students:

Mark Perez
Chris Stathos
C. Taylor Brown
Matthew Walje

The City's Downtown Task Force asked for input and insight from William Jewell students on the lack of "presence" in the downtown. Three questions were asked of us:

1. What would bring William Jewell students downtown?
2. How often would students come downtown and would you spend money?
3. What are three pluses and minuses about downtown and/or experiences downtown?

Responses were:

- The history of Jesse James was critical to attractions downtown and should be marketed more.
- A "reloadable" purchase card, similar to what the students use for food on campus, should be explored to allow students to purchase goods, maybe special discounts for students. Somewhat like a gift card that parents or students could reload electronically.
- The downtown and streets leading to downtown must be lighted better. It was dark at night, especially since students walk to downtown when they do come.
- Wider sidewalks on Mississippi Ave and Kansas Street (students don't like walking along Franklin due to the condition and existence of the multi housing at Missouri). Mississippi is the most traveled by students as it is the connection to the dorms.
- Los Compas is the most popular place for students now. It is friendly, fun and inexpensive. Other restaurants have good food but were felt to be not inviting for students. Mill Street Deli is also very popular with students.
- Signage would help around the downtown. Many students do have cars. It was explained that students want to show their parents that there is a "place" for them to go to at night, close so that driving is not an issue. They are wanted to be able to take their parents somewhere when they do visit.
- Types of stores the students felt would help bring them downtown (current stores are not appealing to students):
 - Late night pizza
 - Sports bar friendly for students and alumni (Karaoke)

- Supplement store, most students on campus are athletes as well.
- Some type of mixed recreational/concert/event space
- Frozen yogurt/Smoothies
- Book store (recreational read/used textbooks/ability to sell used textbooks) in combination with Jewell clothing store.
- Tanning salon
- Small theater, two or three screens
- More green space was desired.
- Wider sidewalks around the downtown for seating and tables to allow for café dining/coffee shops.
- More off the square shops to widen appeal of things to do and see.
- Allowing only retail and restaurants on the first floor of buildings.
- Do allow for some chains to locate downtown. Make sure it's a mix a boutique and some chain stores.
- Maybe market Liberty as the "Home of William Jewell".

ATTACHMENT D

ACIR REPORT

Applied Civic Integration and Redevelopment (ACIR) is a group of four William Jewell College students functioning as facilitators between the College and the City of Liberty with the help of Kurt Pycior. ACIR was intentional in its branding by choosing an appropriate name that fit its mission. As college students performing real-world analysis and research on Liberty's Downtown revitalization, the word "Applied" fit perfectly. "Civic Integration" came from the idea of bringing the City of Liberty together as one community through this revitalized Downtown core. The final piece, "Redevelopment," is crucial because the task force is not starting from scratch with this project. Instead, it is trying to use existing structures and attractions to Downtown Liberty in a different way to draw both residents and tourists alike. In addition to the ACIR name, our group also chose "Hill-to-Hill Revitalization Initiative" as the project name to roughly reflect the scope of our boundaries and allude to our eastern and western termini: William Jewell College and Liberty Junior High School.

Initially, ACIR set out to accomplish four major tasks. First, it established a brand through the creation of a logo which incorporates iconic images of both William Jewell College and the City of Liberty. Second, a survey was created to gauge student feedback and suggestions for what would best engage students with Downtown Liberty. Third, quotes for Square-wide WiFi were explored as a result of a perceived need from both the Downtown Task Force and ACIR. Finally, the idea of a William Jewell Alumni Task Force was presented to Mr. Kent Huyser, Executive Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving, and is currently in the process of being formed.

ACIR is a supported entity of the College and an ongoing project under the supervision of Dr. Kelli Schutte, chair of the Department of Business and Leadership; and Dr. Gary Armstrong, chair of the Department of Political Science. As an incentive for participating in this project, the four students have

received four credit hours for the 2011-2012 academic year and a new iPad to assist with various objectives assigned to them.

It is ACIR's ultimate goal to create an alliance between William Jewell College and the City of Liberty in order to foster redevelopment initiatives and build a college-town atmosphere. For example ACIR has put forward the following proposal: a well-lit and inviting thoroughfare between Jewell and the square, a gym/fitness/supplement facility downtown, a coffee shop, a frozen yogurt bar (like Yogurtini, or Lemon Tree), a bar that caters to Alumni and students of Jewell, sale of Jewell apparel in a franchised coffee shop, painting the water tower with Jewell's name, a system of discounts or integration of the "point" system between Jewell and downtown merchants, a social name for the downtown district to assist in branding (like the Plaza, Zona Rosa, or Westport), tanning salon, concert/theater venue, gas station, and recognizable stores that do not infringe upon the small town atmosphere.