

# FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

## FINAL SURVEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

CITY OF CARUTHERSVILLE, MISSOURI

June 13, 2008



**D·R·E·A·M**  
I N I T I A T I V E



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FOR  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. FINAL REPORT .....	1
A. Questions Posed to Business Groups.....	1
B. Questions Posed to General Groups .....	2
C. The Caruthersville Area.....	3
D. Downtown Caruthersville: Describing the Present .....	4
E. Downtown Caruthersville: Looking to the Future .....	6
F. Key Points.....	8
II. DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT.....	11
III. ELECTED OFFICIALS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT .....	23
IV. NEW RESIDENTS AND STUDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT .....	31
V. DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT.....	47

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## SECTION I FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted four focus groups in Caruthersville, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the Caruthersville community in regard to the downtown area. The four groups included the following: 1) downtown business owners, 2) new residents and students, 3) elected officials, and 4) more downtown business owners. Participants of all four groups are from a variety of backgrounds.

This report summarizes the responses of the members of all of the groups to the posed questions. Attached are the complete transcripts of the four meetings. In all cases, names and other identifying remarks have been omitted.

### **QUESTIONS POSED TO THE BUSINESS GROUP:**

The following questions were posed to the business group:

#### **General Questions about Caruthersville**

01. Generally speaking, how would you describe this area to someone visiting from another city? Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?
02. What are the main shopping areas for area residents? From how far away do people come to do their regular shopping (groceries, household items)?
03. What about dining and entertainment options? What are popular choices for local residents? When friends or relatives visit from out of town, where do you take them?

#### **Downtown Specific Questions**

04. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Caruthersville is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?
05. Why did you choose to locate your business or make an investment in property downtown (or not in downtown, for other business owners)?
06. From what you hear from your customers, how “user-friendly” is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they’re looking for?
07. How do you communicate to your customers about information about what’s going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation) or with your own business? How would you like to be communicated with regarding what is going on downtown from the City of Caruthersville?

## Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

08. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Caruthersville. We'd like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...

- Additional/types of businesses would you like to see downtown?
- Dining and entertainment?
- Parks and outdoor recreation?

09. Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?

- Street repair?
- Landscaping/beautification?
- Green space?
- Building repairs, renovation, upgrades?

10. Of all the potential improvements we've just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the city?

11. What could the City do to help your business thrive or keep your property values strong over the next few years?

12. Would you be willing to support a "special business district" in which an additional sales tax would be collected that would provide services specifically for downtown?

## QUESTIONS POSED TO THE GENERAL GROUPS:

The following questions were posed to the general groups:

### General Questions about Caruthersville

01. Generally speaking, how would you describe this area to someone visiting from another city? Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?

02. What are the main shopping areas for area residents? From how far away do people come to do their regular shopping (groceries, household items)?

03. What about dining and entertainment options? What are popular choices for local residents? When friends or relatives visit from out of town, where do you take them?

04. What kinds of recreation are popular with local residents? What kinds of opportunities are there to participate in these activities in Caruthersville?

## Downtown Specific Questions

05. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Caruthersville is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?

06. What are the major reasons you visit downtown? How often do you visit downtown Caruthersville? Is there anything that you used to do downtown but now do elsewhere or vice versa? Why?

07. How “user-friendly” is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they’re looking for?

08. How do local residents and visitors get information about what’s going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation)?

## Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

09. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Caruthersville. We’d like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...

- Additional/types of businesses would you like to see downtown?
- Dining and entertainment?
- Parks and recreation?

10. Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?

- Street repair?
- Landscaping/beautification?
- Green space?
- Building repairs, renovations, upgrades?

11. Of all the potential improvements we’ve just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the city?

12. What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* Caruthersville to resemble?

## THE CARUTHERSVILLE AREA

**Generally speaking, how would you describe this area to someone visiting from another city? Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?**

Groups described Caruthersville as an agricultural town with a strong sense of community. Caruthersville is within easy driving distance of larger cities such as Memphis and Jackson, Tennessee, and Cape Girardeau, Missouri. It was once the home of the Brown Shoe Company, and when Brown Shoe left in 1995, even though a riverboat casino came in at that same time, the town lost jobs and much of their economic prosperity.

The participants had mixed feelings about whether Caruthersville is moving in the right or wrong direction. Many participants felt that Caruthersville is moving in the wrong direction, while others feel that it is at a standstill and is not moving at all. They feel frustrated with the many plans for improvement that never become a reality. They also feel frustrated that the high school was destroyed by a tornado two years ago and is still not rebuilt.

A few participants pointed out the planning to improve streetscapes as a move in the right direction. They felt that if the community came together and worked together more productively, Caruthersville would move even further in the right direction.

**What are the main shopping areas for area residents? From how far away do people come to do their regular shopping (groceries, household items)?**

The main shopping areas in Caruthersville are the Wal-Mart, local grocery stores, and a sporting goods store. Most people, however, do much of their shopping in Jackson or Memphis, particularly clothing shopping, gift items, specialty foods, and other items that are not available at Wal-Mart. The downtown area does not have much shopping, but does have the town's sporting goods store.

Many people do much of their shopping on the Internet. It is more convenient than driving to Memphis or Jackson, and they value the variety and the low prices they find online.

According to the groups, people come from neighboring towns to for the casino in town, but they do not stay around to shop.

**What about dining, entertainment, and recreation options? What are popular choices for local residents? When friends or relatives visit from out of town, where do you take them?**

There are a few restaurants in Caruthersville, including fast food, pizza, barbecue restaurants, and a downtown restaurant called Twister's. Participants like their current restaurants, but feel that a wider variety of restaurants, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating would be welcome improvements.

For entertainment, Caruthersville has parks and a casino. The riverboat casino is a major draw for people from surrounding areas, but these visitors usually come in, gamble, and leave without visiting the rest of Caruthersville.

When friends and relatives come to town, participants take them to see the river and perhaps to a local restaurant, but often they go to Jackson or Memphis.

**DOWNTOWN CARUTHERSVILLE: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT**

**Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Caruthersville is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?**

Participants generally felt that downtown Caruthersville is either not moving or moving in the wrong direction. They agreed that the planning for nicer streetscapes is a small future move in the right direction, but feel overwhelmingly that the empty buildings, the loss of businesses, and the lack of variety downtown is detrimental.

The groups felt that progress is slow in the development of downtown Caruthersville because of a lack of businesses and incentives for businesses to come in, an unwillingness on the part of existing building owners to renovate their facilities, a lack of incentives for people to buy and rehabilitate old buildings, and a “bare” and “abandoned” look and feel of the downtown area.

**Business Owners: Why did you choose to locate your business downtown (or not in downtown, for other business owners)?**

The business owner focus groups cited tradition and the affordability of existing buildings as the major reasons they have located their businesses downtown.

**General Public: What are the major reasons you visit downtown? How often do you visit downtown Caruthersville? Is there anything that you used to do downtown but now do elsewhere or vice versa? Why?**

The groups mentioned a few reasons that they visit downtown, including churches, the post office, Grizzly G’s Sporting Goods store, services such as lawyers and insurance agents, and the banks. The participants felt that there are not many reasons beyond basic services to visit downtown.

While the casino is located on the river near the downtown, the local residents do not visit the casino very often--it is more for visitors than residents. Some participants suggested that the casino could offer residents more, just as the downtown could offer casino visitors more.

When asked why they visited downtown in the past, the participants mentioned that downtown used to have shopping and entertainment options such as clothing stores, shoe stores, and affordable gifts, movie theaters, children’s stores, a J.C. Penney, a Sears, and a variety of restaurants. They indicated that with these options gone, there are few reasons for residents and visitors to come downtown.

**How “user-friendly” is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they’re looking for?**

The participants’ major concern about user-friendliness involved business hours, and minor concern was about parking

The business hours in downtown Caruthersville, according to participants, are problematic, especially regarding evenings and weekends. Most businesses are open only until 5:00 PM on weekdays, which makes it impossible for people who have jobs with a regular weekday schedule to come downtown for services unless they do it over their lunch hour. Weekends are another problem, since residents often have free time to shop on weekends and shops and restaurants are often closed. The problem is compounded by the fact that large stores such as Wal-Mart, as well as malls in larger cities, are open in the evenings and on weekends.

The participants also felt that restaurant hours could be more convenient. Some restaurants close fairly early. They suggested that options for a later-night entertainment and dining would be welcome, especially for people who drive in to visit the casino and want to get something to eat before or after their casino visit. This, the participants feel, would make downtown much more user-friendly.

The participants had minor concerns about parking in downtown Caruthersville. The parking situation, overall, is currently not a problem because not many people visit downtown and there are plenty of parking lots. However, there are a large number of handicapped spots on many blocks, which some suggested makes it difficult for some people to find a spot where they are looking for one. In addition, the lack of painted lines designating the spots creates problems when drivers park too far from each other.

**How do local residents and visitors get information about what's going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation)?**

The local radio station, the newspaper, and the Internet are the major media through which people get information. The participants feel, overall, that they are aware of what is happening downtown.

**DOWNTOWN CARUTHERSVILLE: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

**As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Caruthersville. We'd like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What additional types of businesses would you like to see downtown? Dining and entertainment? Parks and recreation?**

The participants felt that getting new business downtown was of the utmost importance to make downtown Caruthersville thrive. They suggested a variety of new businesses downtown, focusing on creating a mix of specialty shopping, dining, and entertainment options for all ages. For shopping, they suggested men's and women's clothing, a children's clothing store, a shoe store, a jewelry store, and other specialty-type stores. In dining, they wanted to see a larger variety of restaurants, a coffee shop, a fine dining option, and dining with a view of the riverfront. For entertainment, the groups suggested a movie theater, a skate park, and a bowling alley. In recreation, the participants felt that a park or an outdoor park/beer-garden would be a nice addition, as it would add green space and give parents a place to bring their children to play.

They felt that the downtown's purpose is not to compete with Wal-Mart and the other large chains, but to offer a unique experience to customers. While they felt that options downtown should be affordable for residents, they acknowledged that rather than competing with Wal-Mart, the downtown area should work to become a destination with unique shopping, crafts, and arts. They specifically cited visitors to the casino as a target audience, posing the following question: When visitors come into Caruthersville for the casino, how do we make them stay longer?

**Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do think there needs to be improvements in the following areas: street repair, landscaping/beautification, green space, and building repairs, renovations, and upgrades? Is there a need/demand for more housing downtown?**

Many participants felt that there is a long way to go in beautifying downtown Caruthersville. Of the highest priority is either fixing or tearing down and rebuilding the buildings that are in disrepair. Participants suggested that the number of vacant buildings and buildings in disrepair

make people feel a little unsafe, particularly at night. Many buildings have unstable roofs and are in danger of collapsing; the groups emphasized that structural improvements are necessary as a part of beautification. The groups acknowledged that this is difficult for individual building owners, but if incentives and help were available to help building owners, it would become easier.

In discussing building repair, the groups brought up the idea of code enforcement. Code enforcement is also of high priority in creating an aesthetically pleasing downtown area. Currently, there is trash and fallen shingles from buildings on the streets. Enforcing laws about garbage removing, building repair, and other related things would help the downtown aesthetics immensely.

Another very high priority in improving the look and feel of downtown was attracting new business. No matter how beautiful the downtown is, the participants felt, without the buildings being occupied, it will still feel abandoned and empty. Filling the buildings, while important in drawing people downtown, is also important in improving the aesthetic of downtown.

Landscaping and lighting were also important in the beautification of downtown Caruthersville. The groups suggested greenery to make downtown more colorful. This, they felt, is a complement to the building repair that needs to be done. While they expressed that landscaping and lighting are of less overall importance than building repair, they are still important.

The groups also felt that more housing downtown would be welcome, but is not of a very high priority currently.

**Of all the potential improvements we've just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the city?**

The groups considered attracting businesses and repairing or rebuilding the buildings as the two most important priorities. In attracting business, retail stores, restaurants, and entertainment were all priorities. In improving the buildings, the groups felt that buildings that can be salvaged should be, and ones that cannot should be torn down and rebuilt as a new structure.

**General Public: What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* Caruthersville to resemble?**

The groups named Dyersburg, Tennessee; Hardy, Arkansas; Jackson, Tennessee; Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Washington, Missouri; St. Charles, Missouri; and Paducah, Kentucky.

In all these cities, the participants admired the thriving specialty businesses that bring people in and keep them there. In some cities, they admired the cohesive look, the "heritage" look. They especially admire the small towns of similar size that have managed to revitalize their downtown areas.

**Business Owners: What could the City do to help your business thrive or keep your property values strong over the next few years?**

The business owners felt that all downtown improvements would help their businesses, especially attracting other businesses to the downtown area and offering incentives to building owners to renovate buildings. Both of these things would help attract customers.

**Business Owners: Would you be willing to support a “special business district” in which an additional sales tax would be collected that would provide services specifically for downtown?**

The business owners would not be supportive of an additional tax. They felt that the economic recession and the low income of residents would make them resistant to an additional tax.

**KEY POINTS**

**Key points about the Caruthersville area:**

- ◆ Caruthersville is a rural, agricultural town with easy access to larger cities in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Missouri.
- ◆ Brown Shoe Company left Caruthersville, and even though a riverboat casino has moved in since, the town has not fully recovered.
- ◆ Caruthersville, according to community members, is either moving in the wrong direction or is currently stagnant; however, some plans for streetscape improvements are a small step in the right direction.
- ◆ The main shopping areas in Caruthersville are the Wal-Mart, the grocery stores, and a sporting goods store, but most residents travel to other towns or rely on the Internet for much of their shopping.
- ◆ Dining options in Caruthersville include fast food, barbecue, Twister’s (which is downtown), and other casual places. They do not currently have a fine dining option.
- ◆ The community feels that there is a variety of dining options, but that a wider variety of restaurants downtown, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating would be welcome improvements.
- ◆ Recreation and entertainment options in Caruthersville include local parks and the casino, but many people travel to other towns for shopping and entertainment.

**Key points about downtown Caruthersville in the present:**

- ◆ The community feels that downtown Caruthersville is not moving yet in the right direction; many buildings are in disrepair, and some businesses have recently closed.

- ◆ The community is concerned about a lack of incentives for building owners to renovate their buildings and the scarcity of businesses downtown.
- ◆ Business owners located their businesses downtown because of the availability of space, unless they had been located there for a long time, in which case tradition keeps them there.
- ◆ The community, according to the participants, visits downtown primarily for the banks, the post office, and other service-related business. While there are a few stores downtown, shopping is not a major reason people visit downtown.
- ◆ More people would visit downtown more often, according to the groups, if business hours were more convenient, there were more businesses, and the buildings were in better repair.
- ◆ Parking is only a minor issue in the present, but with expansion and development, the participants fear that the parking situation will get worse.
- ◆ Downtown business hours are inconvenient for people whose jobs have regular weekday hours—expanded hours during the evenings and on weekends would be a welcome change.
- ◆ Expanded restaurant hours, particularly at fine- or casual-dining restaurants at night to attract the casino-going crowd, would be a welcome improvement.
- ◆ Local residents get information about downtown from the radio, the newspaper, and the Internet, and they feel fairly well-informed.

**Key points about the future of downtown Caruthersville:**

- ◆ Downtown Caruthersville should focus on attracting affordable specialty shops, restaurants, and entertainment options; the participants felt that downtown's purpose should be to offer a unique experience to customers, not to compete with Wal-Mart or other chains.
- ◆ For shopping, clothing stores, shoe stores, a jewelry store, and any other specialty stores would be welcome additions downtown.
- ◆ For food, a coffee shop, an outdoor café, a fine dining option, and a variety of additional restaurants would be welcome additions downtown.
- ◆ New businesses should be encouraged to come in, and old businesses encouraged to renovate their buildings, through incentives to renovate.
- ◆ Building renovation, code enforcement, and filling the empty buildings are all of the utmost priority for the beautification of downtown; improved landscaping is also an important goal.

- ◆ Additional housing would be welcome downtown, but is not of high priority.
- ◆ Downtown Caruthersville should aim for a cohesive look and feel that will attract visitors coming into town for the casino.
- ◆ Caruthersville can learn from a number of cities, small and large, about ways to improve the downtown area; the participants focused on downtowns that have a cohesive look and feel and downtowns that serve as a “destination.”
- ◆ Business owners felt that all downtown improvements would help their businesses, but attracting new business, incentives for building repair, and more effective code enforcement would be the most helpful improvements.
- ◆ Business owners would not support a “special business district” with an additional sales tax.

## SECTION II

### DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

**Moderator:** *Tell me a little about Caruthersville in general. How would you describe it?*

It's a community of caring people. We had a tornado, and it's amazing how people came out to help each other.

**Moderator:** *What else would you say?*

We need economic development badly. We need a new school desperately.

As far as being a businessperson, if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere.

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

The economy here is not up to par, and when things are bad anywhere else, they're really bad here.

It's economically challenged.

(agreement.)

It's a low-income county.

We could probably go somewhere else and be more successful, but this is our home.

We work extra hard, because we have to. To stay here. To be with our family, send our kids to school, go to church...

And we've got lots of competition.

It's mainly ag-related, too. This is a farming community. With automation in the fields, there's less people around to do the work, so people move away to find job.

The town has never recovered from Brown Shoe closing in 1995. Brown Shoe was husband and wife, families, everyone worked there. And it was a livable wage. It was the life of the town. When the boat came in, it was great, but it was a different kind of job. It's not the same.

It wasn't a job that a regular Joe could fit in with.

It's more specialized.

**Moderator:** *For local residents, where do you go for typical household shopping?*

I try to stay local, but I still end up spending \$2000 out of town every month. With the advent of the interstate... on a Saturday, you'll see a lot of people going to Jackson, Tennessee.

You can get there in an hour and fifteen. Jonesboro, Arkansas, too.

Gas prices might change that.

That makes the majority of people getting out of Caruthersville...there's nothing here for people for entertainment...

You go to eat, make a day of it, and shop out of town. They do their grocery shopping out of town. A lot of people go to other towns just to grocery shop. They eat while they're there, they have entertainment.

**Moderator: What are popular places for entertainment and dining? Where would you take out-of-town visitors?**

There's lots of eating establishments. It depends on your mood.

There's no chains, though.

And there's not places you can eat anytime you want to.

On Sunday or Monday, you're out of luck.

There's places on the weekend that are open, but they are open for a limited amount of time.

Monday night's the worst night to eat.

My husband opens the little Pizza Heaven, and we're open 6 days a week. You've got to have one day off.

That's just one restaurant, though. I can't eat pizza 15 times a week. You can't eat the same stuff over and over. At one time, you could eat steak and lobster in Caruthersville. But now, you can't do a lot of that.

This is not a metropolis, though. This is a small town.

But other small towns do fine.

The bottom line is that it's really hard to make a living here.

(many people talking at once.)

I think you have to realize that a lot of us have the funds to go out and eat more than Caruthersville as a whole. You don't have as many people that have that income. It's not an option for a lot of people in this town. If we had a steak and lobster place, a lot of the town won't go there.

But people drive from everywhere to go to a good restaurant. I see probably 5 people from Caruthersville when I go to work. 90% of my customers are not from here. I want to see something that brings people in and keeps people in Caruthersville. The biggest problem I have is keeping people in town. They've got to go out of the way to get fuel. The difference in the way

the town looks coming in on the 2...and the type of stuff we have on the street, and the problems we have everyday. People say it looks worse now since the tornado than it ever has. The streets are growed up in grass, we have no city maintenance, the tractor-trailers don't have a thoroughfare. We need to not worry so much about residents. We need to bring people in from out of town. We're economically challenged here.

***Moderator: Is downtown Caruthersville moving in the right or wrong direction?***

It's at a standstill.

(many people agreeing at once.)

We've had several buildings just fall down.

That's the only way they ever get torn down.

I think utilities is that one reason people can't go out to eat. The utilities is outrageous.

***Moderator: Why did you choose to locate your business downtown?***

Roots.

Inherited.

Walking distance from a lot of the population. We contemplated putting a building up, but a lot of our clients are walking traffic. When we were trying to locate here, we had a hard time. \_\_\_\_\_ made it work for us to be down here.

I think if some of our buildings were in better condition, there are people that would come in. But they need so much work, that by the time you fix one up, you could build something new.

***Moderator: What are the main reasons people come downtown?***

Banks.

Government services, post office, county courthouse.

Pay cable bills.

A couple auditors downtown.

Drugstores.

***Moderator: Are there things you used to be able to do downtown that you can't anymore?***

Yeah. Shoes, clothes. Wal-Mart took it all away.

You look at the retail businesses... there's only 2. Everything else is offices.

In 2006, our sales tax was a million dollars less than the neighboring county, and we even had a tornado.

When we lose a business, nothing takes its place. We had a gas station that closed, and now it's an empty station.

(unintelligible...)

We just lost a gift shop that had been there for 30 years. The original owner died, but the family didn't run it the way she used to. Maybe everything's just kind of going down.

We're trying to make it, then stuff like that happens.

Depressing, depressing, depressing.

(side conversations)

We bought our store in 92, and there were businesses all around. And then Brown Shoe closed, and now I think we have 2 businesses downtown.

We had 2 jewelry stores.

And where the paper office is, the gift shop...

I was surprised when they were no longer there.

Another big problem we have is work force. What industry we have, they can't keep people working for them. Education, work ethic.

I hear people saying "we want jobs," but the companies want people who want to work. Barely half of our population has a high school diploma.

They upped the minimum wage, but I hear people say, "I was making this much when I was working 3 days, but now I only have to work 2 days." How can you run a business when that's the thinking?

**Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown Caruthersville? If someone's getting off the interstate, is it easy to find downtown?**

Yes.

You can't really miss it.

(agreement.)

**Moderator: Is it easy to find what people are looking for? What about parking?**

They always complain about no parking, but there's more parking than customers to use it.

***Moderator: What kind of complaints do people have about parking?***

There's more than enough parking for the customers, but people complain.

People want to park right at the front door.

It just depends on where they come from. If they come from bigger cities, they're used to having to find a place to park.

When you go to Wal-Mart, you have to walk.

It would be nice to have the problem of having to find a place to park.

We have some huge parking lots. There's plenty of parking by the post office and by Grizzly. We're the only place open at night, so it's easy to park at night.

***Moderator: Are business hours convenient?***

The people that come from out of town, there's nothing open in the evenings. Most people that come for the casino, they come when they get off work.

We get some business from people from out of town...we've had quite a few people that stop in after the casino or before. That's been a benefit to us.

That's great, because I really didn't think the downtown benefitted at all from the casino.

That's been a benefit to us.

You get as much out of the casino as you put in. If you want customers, you have to work to get them. We get a lot of them. We run promotions with the casino, where if they come in, we give them \$10 worth of tokens. It does two things. For the people that wasn't going to go to the casino, they will now. The casino doesn't get enough from the town or the Chamber. Everybody wants to suck everything they can from them. They haven't taken anything from Caruthersville, though. They've only given. If you don't work it, people aren't going to just stop. When people first come into town, it looks like trash. And then there's a security guy out there, so all people want to do is get to the parking lot. No matter which direction you go...it has its problems every direction. We need to police the drunk people internally... we have characters that walk around, cuss at people, move garbage cans... we've got to draw a line somewhere.

These are typical problems of any towns.

There's no county ordinances.

It's always been that way.

We couldn't get by with that in city limits if code enforcement officers enforced it.

(agreement.)

People see turned over trailers with weeds all over it.

We got a couple individuals that could move a lot of their trash out of the way. One guy has a bunch of dilapidated buildings downtown.

There are buildings with roofs caving in.

**Moderator: Let's talk about housing downtown. From what you know, is there a demand for more housing downtown?**

If there was something here to appeal to those people, there would be. If there were grocery stores and restaurants... as it is now, there are some second stories where people live above their businesses.

Yeah.

**Moderator: How do you communicate with your customers about what's going on downtown or with your business?**

We do a catalog and a couple postcard mailings. Internet.

(many people talking at once.)

The 7:00 news in the morning.

There's a lot of ways to advertise in this town, that are very affordable. You're not going to hit the surrounding 5 counties, but you'll get the people in town. Baseball games and other things...you'll get something out of that.

I think sponsoring ball teams is a good way also. And in older days, the radio used to say who was sponsoring it. That was a good thing too.

There's some mornings that we actually get people coming in to get donations for their projects. There's more stuff going out than coming in.

(many people agreeing at once. Side conversations about people who ask for donations.)

Generally, they're not school-affiliated.

**Moderator: What about communication between you and your businesses and city officials? Is the communication good?**

What aspect?

**Moderator: Do you get the kind of information you need from the city?**

Well, the Chamber...

Well, I mean, it depends. If you're wanting to know what projects the City's doing, you can call. And the Chamber, I've been there and done that. It's just another charitable organization. The Chamber does not help the downtown community. The focus of that type of stuff needs to be more in bringing customers as a team for certain events with the downtown merchants...there's not a whole lot of us. We work for the Chamber, we raise money to help beautify the city, but making something look nice doesn't bring customers.

***Moderator: Let's talk a little about where you'd like to see downtown go in the future? What kinds of businesses would you like to see?***

Clothing. Women's, children's.

I'm all about a good wine and cheese business.

There's no place for nice clothing. There's only Wal-Mart. That's why people go out of town.

A shoe store.

Hardware.

Yeah.

And you can't buy kids shoes in town.

We got shoes, but not a good selection.

One of the places I mentioned earlier that went out of business was a place that had knickknacks and beautiful stuff. Wal-Mart's got a lot of that. But we want to create a little bit of a nightlife, a wine tasting and cheese, and maybe shrimp and crawfish... on some weekends, have a jazz band and have people come downtown and enjoy wine and cheese. And in the afternoon, have tea and coffee for ladies and desserts. We're thinking about fencing in an empty lot and having a little garden so people can sit out on the patio. So that's kind of our plan.

Sounds good.

But we decided that downtown needs something, and we think this might help boost it.

There might be a lot of people out there like you, but the buildings...

We were fortunate to get our building. We'd looked at all these caved-in buildings, and then we lucked out with ours.

One of the buildings was bought and caved in, and now it's just an empty lot. Buildings have to be in the hands of the right people.

We want to come in and create a Bourbon Street atmosphere. We want people to enjoy themselves. We go to Ste. Genevieve to have fun. They've got all kinds of candy shops and wineries, their hardware stores and shoe stores.

Do they have a Wal-Mart?

No.

That may be why.

**Moderator: What else would you like to see?**

There might be a few that aren't appropriate for families.

A steakhouse.

How about a movie theater?

That would be nice. That would be something to do.

About 20 years ago, someone wanted to buy the stadium and make a 2-picture theater. That would've been neat.

That would be awesome.

(agreement. Side conversations.)

**Moderator: What about parks and recreation? Is there a need for more of that downtown?**

No. We've got a nice complex for that.

We used to have stuff at Reynolds Park. There used to be a swingset and stuff.

(many people talking in the background.)

It wouldn't be a draw, I think.

**Moderator: What about the look and feel of downtown? Streets and sidewalks, for example?**

The streets and sidewalks need it, but I think it's coming.

Some streets aren't bad.

I've seen a lot worse.

The streets are fine.

\_\_\_\_\_ 's going to do that treescape, though, right?

(many people talking at once.)

Whoever decided to put Bradford Pear up and down 4<sup>th</sup> street...they're ugly trees. They just go crazy. It's bad.

They're not going to put trees on this section.

But 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> looks pretty rough. You've got to maintain stuff if you build it. It costs a lot to maintain a building. You've got to tuckpoint and seal and paint.

(side conversations.)

***Moderator: What about landscaping, building conditions, and other things? What are the big priorities for improvement?***

Those little cutout things that stick out of the alleys.

That was dropped.

Good.

But, it was brought up before...if the city council doesn't change the thoroughfare down Ward Avenue, that stuff won't last. When they put the new streetscape in, the trucks will tear everything up. Look at anywhere where the tractor-trailers come by...any corner. We need a separate truck route. They hit the buildings, they run over the curb, they hit the trees. If you want to spend money to make something look nice, the trucks will ruin it.

(agreement.)

...it took 2 years to get them to take all the signs off of...there's no requirement that you have to have 36 handicapped parking spots that don't get used, plus 20 signs in front of the businesses. This stuff doesn't ever get done.

So there's a plan for 36 handicapped spots?

We even had a bus stop in front of Grizzly. We cut the signs down...

So, before we do any work downtown...

(many people talking at once.)

We're having problems now that were a problem 10 years ago... we can go back to the property behind the store, we'd made arrangements to buy it already, but it was cheaper for me to cut out and run... people are begging for people to bring their businesses somewhere else. People that try to do stuff run into problems. People don't like change, and they'll spend more time arguing about rules... It looks ridiculous for us to have a business with a rear building up to once side, and people argued whether there was an actual alleyway back there.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

...we can't all work together...

You're talking about Hodgepodge, though. Hodgepodge did not have one parking spot there. All the spots were handicapped on the side and in front.

But you know why they had handicapped parking there?

(many people talking at once.)

You don't have to have handicapped parking on every corner.

She should've at least had one spot in front of her store.

(people agreeing.)

All the city council has to do...it doesn't have to be there unless the city wants to keep it there.

(agreement.)

Let's have 1 or 2 handicapped parking spots. We don't need as many as we have. The banks already have them in the parking lot, so why put spots all the way across the street for the bank? But we keep focusing on those things, but we should focus on the way it looks coming into town and other big things. They'll nitpick about the parking spots and the awnings...you can drag that awning thing out a long time. We wasted 5 years arguing about the awnings.

***Moderator: As business owners, what is the most important thing the City could do to help your businesses thrive?***

One thing...we're not used to the City really helping us out.

Yeah.

The City gives us services, but that's about it. You find your own customers.

You know what they do in Dexter. They've got a shopping strip center, and the Chamber has some real money. And they have an incubator program, and they give budding businesses a place to start. It gives people a start. It's so hard to start a business.

Even if we had people ready to open a business, they'd have nowhere to go.

It's true. We need to have the buildings.

You don't have an option.

Are the lots not for sale?

I don't think they are.

(many people talking at once.)

What about the 2 buildings that are going to be torn down Saturday?

You can buy those.

I think they're still for sale.

(side conversation about a specific person.)

Say you wanted to build a building on a lot, you're going to have to see that the buildings around you are tucked in. And people aren't willing to spend the money to do that.

(agreement.)

You don't want to build your building next to theirs. If you want to build a building, you don't want to build on someone else's building.

A firewall in between, yes.

(agreement.)

New paint would be so nice on some of the buildings.

(many people talking at once.)

There's 2 or 3 churches in retail buildings uptown.

That should've been an ordinance.

One of them rents a church, and they rented it from another church.

But that's temporary.

Still.

***Moderator: I just have one more question. How would you feel about a special business district with additional sales tax to support downtown specifically?***

No more taxes.

No.

What's getting ready to happen is the property taxes went up so much... and knock on wood, probably 3 or 4 places will probably be gone in a few years.

***Moderator: Is there anything else you want us to know?***

I think the issue with the downtown is that the most decent properties are available, but there's not a price you can buy them for.

I think the City could take care of that.

I agree.

All you need to do is just go for it. Politicians are always worried about getting reelected.

That's why we don't expect to get any help from the City.

But I think code enforcement is the single biggest problem. When I was on City Council, we burned down 200 houses. Things got better and better. You can tear down and tote buildings now, but people should do something about the buildings.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

*Moderator: Thank you very much.*

## SECTION III

### ELECTED OFFICIALS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

**Moderator:** *Tell me a little about Caruthersville as a whole. What kind of place is it to live?*

A small, rural river town. The farm economy is the lifeline. We have about 6700 people. It's friendly, quiet, rural. Mostly rural.

I think they're one of the largest employers for the barges. They're always hiring. (noise, unintelligible.)

We don't have any more safety issues than any other small rural community. People would be just as safe here as anywhere, and have just as good a life.

The downtown area itself is like many small communities over the years, with the changes in people's shopping styles and with malls. The downtown has deteriorated as far as retail businesses. We'd like to see what would fit and see what we could do to revitalize the downtown area.

We have a large number of churches that are well-attended.

(noise, unintelligible)...recreation centers, libraries.

I think as far as the downtown area, there's a riverwalk. We've always had a lot of people who walk at the river for the scenic overview, and I think that's something that could be strongly...(noise, unintelligible)...and that could be a draw.

**Moderator:** *Would you say that Caruthersville is moving in the right direction or wrong direction?*

We're moving in the right direction, I think. (noise, unintelligible)

We have a number of service clubs, and they're all very active in the community.

**Moderator:** *What are the main shopping areas?*

Wal-Mart.

(unintelligible noises, people talking in the hallway.)

**Moderator:** *Is Caruthersville a shopping draw for other communities?*

Not really. Maybe... (noise, unintelligible static in the recording)

**Moderator:** *When people come in from out of town, where do you take them?*

Roundhouse.

(laughter.)

(noise, unintelligible)

We talked about, several years back, we talked about redecorating and fancying up the downtown.

**Moderator: Let's talk about downtown. Is it moving in the right or wrong direction?**

I think we've seen that the downtown utilization of the property is for professional lawyers, doctors, insurance agents...more service related rather than retail.

And storage.

And a major problem is a single property owner who has multiple properties and is using them for personal storage.

**Moderator: What other reasons do people have for visiting downtown?**

To go to the river.

Yeah.

**Moderator: Are there things that you used to do downtown that you don't anymore?**

Shop.

Yeah.

Clothes shopping.

**Moderator: Anything else?**

Hardware store.

Shoe store.

Yeah, shoe stores.

(many people talking at once.)

**Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? Is it easy for people to find downtown?**

There's not definite signage, no.

(noise, unintelligible)

If they're going to the casino, they pass through.

The only thing with the casino is, what else could they do while they're here?

**Moderator: Is it easy for people to find that out, what they can do in Caruthersville?**

(many people talking softly at once, unintelligible)

**Moderator: Is parking convenient?**

Unfortunately, that isn't a problem.

(laughter.)

The city has several parking lots available for public use, and what have you. No restricting parking on Ward Avenue, but we do on 3<sup>rd</sup> street.

**Moderator: What about business hours and location? Are they convenient?**

Mostly, the downtown shuts down at 5:30, 6:00. The only places that stay open are the drugstores.

(agreement.)

And the working people have to go someplace else.

**Moderator: What about streets and sidewalks?**

We're working on it.

(many people talking at once.)

We just agreed to a plan.

Most of the streets in the downtown area are in pretty good shape. Those were developed as a result of the casinos coming into town 15 years ago. Ward Avenue is getting redone through a program, and we'll be doing some streetscaping, sidewalks, gutters, vintage lighting...throughout the city, though, we have some significant street improvement needs. City Council has moved into the program for streets throughout the city, based on grant dollars and city funding.

**Moderator: What about housing downtown? Is there any housing downtown?**

It's very minimal. We have a couple of stores that do have housing on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, but I can only think of two or three.

**Moderator: Would you say there's a need for more housing?**

That's been one of the thoughts was, that if some of the unused buildings could have the upstairs converted to residential, it would bring people downtown to live and stimulate some retail growth. That's being considered.

***Moderator: What kind of housing would you like to see?***

Part of this plan will be to do a housing inventory, but the tornado put us in a position where we did a lot of evaluating of properties, and we have made significant progress in removing dilapidated structures as well as working with Rural Development for new homes to be built. Our housing inventory is not in bad shape, but we have a lot of substandard houses and Section 8 housing that lends itself to complications of maintenance and upkeep. And those pretty well surround the central business district.

***Moderator: How do local residents get information on what's going on downtown?***

The media.

Newspaper and radio.

(many people talking at once, unintelligible)

I do think the Chamber of Commerce tries to keep things posted on the City's website.

Those flyers, too. Some of the business owners...

***Moderator: Are people generally able to find out what's going on downtown?***

I think our radio station does a pretty good job.

(many people talking at once, unintelligible)

As far as in the downtown area, there's only 2 major functions, the chili cookoff and the Meet on the Mississippi. The attendance to those functions, the advertisement and promotions is good. Anytime we want to do a live promotion, the casino is helpful in putting that information out in their mailers, and that reaches a lot of people.

(noise, unintelligible)

***Moderator: Let's talk about the future of downtown. What kinds of businesses would you like to see in downtown Caruthersville?***

Children's shops and things like that.

Shoe stores.

We did have a business that just went out that you could go to for gifts.

Most of us sit here and talk about how it used to be and what we remember, and I'd like to see... it's going to come down to the local community supporting whatever goes in down there.

(many people talking at once, side conversations.)

...a nice place to eat...

...A movie theater...

But we have to deal with what we have, and space and properties are available...

The big problem is that one property owner, too.

Yeah.

(many people talking at once, laughter.)

**Moderator: Is that a local owner?**

Yeah, local.

**Moderator: Are there other businesses that would be a good fit?**

(many people talking at once.)

...an old-timey photograph store or something...

...A good clothing store...

I think my understanding is that it's going to be an inventory, it's going to specifically ask what type of businesses local residents would support. Though we're frustrated with the one property owner, the City has property that's available for new development. It's been my experience that because of the lack of ongoing maintenance to the buildings, it may be more practical to build from the bottom up. That's going to be addressed too, through the DREAM initiative, to learn the condition and safety of those buildings, that might be an issue in rehabbing those buildings.

(cellphone ringing.)

**Moderator: What about dining and entertainment?**

There used to be a place at the riverfront where you could eat out, but we don't have that anymore. I'd like that sort of thing again.

We've had some good places.

(many people talking at once, unintelligible.)

If we could capture just 15 or 20 percent of the visitors who come to the casino, most of those folks would make a tremendous impact on the retail area. You won't see a lot of people buying a mattress, but they will stop to eat or in specialty shops. We have to look at an entertainment type of district with eateries and novelty shops to support the visitors, too.

(many people talking at once. Agreement. Multiple side conversations.)

We had several older homes in this district that could be made into bed and breakfasts. It would enhance that property, and it would serve a need. It's within walking distance of the river.

That's really something I've talked about too—my husband worked for the highway department, and people would stop and ask to see the river. We take the river for granted, but it's a draw. I mean...

I think the City Council has made a very bold move, and that was to approve matching money for riverfront development, and the City will have \$150,000 invested in developing the plan, and that'll create quite a few improvements on the riverfront. Expanding the walking trail, a new boat ramp...what we're trying to do is to draw to the river as that asset...it's one of the few places where you can still drive down and stick your foot in it if you want to. It's an asset.

(many people laughing, talking at once.)

**Moderator:** *Let's talk about the look and feel of downtown. What needs to be done about improving the look and feel of downtown?*

I suppose it gets back down to code enforcement. I would like to see not allowing any boarded up windows. That lends itself to a real negative connotation. And the storefronts need to be modernized. You can still have an old heritage look, but awnings and that sort of thing could really make the downtown shine.

**Moderator:** *What kind of look do you want to see for downtown?*

I like historic.

Some of the old buildings have some unique architecture, but obviously in the 60's, people were rehabbing with metal. But I like the heritage look.

(side conversations.)

**Moderator:** *Thinking about other downtowns you know of, which ones would you like to see aspects of in Caruthersville?*

Paducah has a wonderful riverfront, and their downtown is really nice. They have awnings, tree-lined streets. I don't exactly like their main street for here, but I do like having spaces for parking and...

Paducah.

Paducah's the one that I, more...

St. Charles.

Yeah.

It is beautiful.

(many people talking at once.)

Washington, Missouri has done some improvements to their downtown area. And it's kind of contagious. Washington started it, and did some...

(noise, unintelligible)

*Moderator: Is there anything else that you think is important for us to know?....No? Okay. Thank you very much for your time.*

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## SECTION IV

### NEW RESIDENTS AND STUDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

**Moderator:** *Describe the Caruthersville to me.*

I'd say there's not a lot of natural beauty, but the beauty's in the people.

We believe in home town and community.

A lot of good people in the community, and you have your problems like anywhere else, but they're something we're addressing and trying to work through, and with a little help we'll get through.

Caruthersville is a good place to live, but doesn't have many places to shop or movie theaters or anything like that.

**Moderator:** *What would you tell me if I wanted to move here?*

I would say that the school is strong, we have some really good teachers in our system, we graduate good students that have gone on to do some remarkable things (unintelligible).

The teachers, outside of all the technology, you still have a personal relationship with your child's teacher. Easy to contact, willing to work with you.

**Moderator:** *Anything on the negative side you'd tell me about your town?*

Not a lot for kids to do outside of school.

Which is something that we're working on. There's a couple of programs. One of the local churches has an after-school program with arts and crafts, interpretive dance...there's almost 60 kids in this program. And Lincoln University is sponsoring a summer program. They're having Health and Fitness, Foreign Language, Computers...

(unintelligible)...kids weren't in any hurry to leave. They were really enjoying themselves. But because of funding, that had to be closed. But if we could get something like that going again. And when I was a kid, Caruthersville had movies. Caruthersville had a drive-in. Now we don't have movies.

We'd probably got the best recreation center between Memphis and St. Louis.

I like it, because it's small. From a student's perspective.

I think it's the best of both worlds. I want to come back here, but I want to go out and experience something new.

(agreement.)

**Moderator: When people do their shopping, where do they go?**

People don't stay in Caruthersville to do their big shopping. Not for clothing or any kind of apparel. You go to Cape Girardeau or Memphis or Jackson.

Internet. We shop on the Internet.

But it takes the money out of our community, so you're not putting money back in and the community dies for lack of funding. We're putting our money into someone else's community, and our buildings are closing down and our downtown looks desolate.

**Moderator: What do you stay in town to shop for?**

Wal-Mart.

Everyday needs.

Grocery stuff. There's a grocery store.

(unintelligible...static on the recording.)

**Moderator: What else do you stay in town for?**

Hunting and fishing stuff is available at Grizzly G's.

That's one of the biggest active businesses there.

(many people talking at once. Someone walking in and everyone greeting her.)

**Moderator: Even with gas prices, do people still drive an hour out of town?**

The rising rates of gas is making it a past thing.

I haven't been for a while because of gas. We used to go out of town much more.

**Moderator: Do students still drive that far to shop?**

We don't ride the loop as much.

There's a lot more carpooling instead.

**Moderator: What is the loop?**

Just driving around town.

It's figuratively called the loop.

***Moderator: Where do you dine out?***

(many people talking at once.)

We go out of town.

We've got a few good restaurants.

The franchise we have is Sonic.

(many people talking at once.)

***Moderator: Where is that?***

Don's Hamburgers. Little bitty place, but it's good.

(many people talking at once.)

...Twister's, oh yeah...

***Moderator: Do people mostly stay in town to eat?***

No, if you want something more than fast food. We go out, mostly.

Dyersburg, mostly.

(many people agreeing.)

***Moderator: How far is Dyersburg?***

20 minutes.

We have good barbecue here, but we'll drive out for that too.

(agreement.)

***Moderator: What about entertainment?***

We leave.

(laughter. Agreement.)

We have a camera on 4<sup>th</sup> street, and we find ourselves just watching it.

(laughter.)

***Moderator: What type of recreation do people do?***

(many people talking at once.)

The schools...(unintelligible).

As far as going out, there isn't anywhere. Well, there is, there's some places you can go.

(many people talking at once.)

The children's basketball court.

**Moderator: Do people hunt and fish?**

Oh yes.

Yeah.

We've got a little sports complex off of the casino.

Baseball and softball.

**Moderator: Let's talk specifically about your downtown. Do you feel it's moving in a positive or negative direction?**

It's sliding downhill. Negative.

I haven't seen much change in the last few years as far as growth. More buildings and businesses closing.

(many people agreeing at once.)

There isn't anywhere close, as far as a park for kids that live on this side. You've got to go all the way to the other side of town. There isn't a close park.

**Moderator: What else about downtown?**

Slow.

As far as retail business...

If you look in some windows, you'll see that there's no roof.

... overall, a depressed economy... (unintelligible)

**Moderator: Is the riverfront used at all?**

Yes.

Chili cookoff is usually there. Festivals. The use varies.

(unintelligible)...

People can't get off and shop.

No one's mentioned the Casino, though.

We can't afford it!

And you've got to be 21.

(many people talking about the casino at once.)

I'm told that it's mostly out of town people.

Yeah.

(agreement.)

My impression is that it's not nearly as bad as a lot of people thought, and it's not as good either. A lot of people thought it would bring in a lot of business, and it has brought in jobs, and it's put money into the city, but as far as helping the businesses, people go to the boat and leave town.

It's a combination of nothing to shop for and the mentality.

**Moderator: Do you feel safe downtown?**

Oh, yes.

In the downtown area, it's not a problem.

**Moderator: What are the major reasons you all go downtown?**

I don't go downtown.

It's part of the loop.

If you're just walking around town, you end up down there. Just walking through. Nothing catches your eye, though.

**Moderator: So there aren't any restaurants?**

4<sup>th</sup> street.

Pizza.

Twister's is down next to the courthouse.

**Moderator: So there's not many?**

Nope.

**Moderator: To bank?**

Yeah, banks.

They're all down there.

(agreement.)

**Moderator: And it looks like a lot of the churches are down here?**

Yeah, we've got a good bunch of churches that work real well together.

**Moderator: Is there anything you used to come downtown for that you can't anymore?**

(unintelligible...)

My grandmother talks about how there used to be a JC Penney's and a Sears down there.

There used to be 3 hardware stores, 4 pharmacies, 3 theaters, a couple of women's clothing places, men's clothing places.

My grandmother says that on Saturday nights, you couldn't get through downtown. It was like New York. I can't imagine.

(agreement.)

And the population is much smaller now.

**Moderator: What has caused the population decline?**

People have just migrated.

The Interstate highway.

For most of the small towns, it's not unusual.

(agreement.)

What we need is one of the niche market, like a town like Cartersville.

**Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? Parking, navigation?**

It's easy to find my way around.

Parking's easy. There's a lot of parking lots and nothing down there to do.

**Moderator: What about business hours? Are they convenient?**

If you go to them, they are.

If the hours were better, people might go to them...(unintelligible)

The banks are open until 5 only on Fridays, and it's hard to go there.

Wal-Mart's more convenient.

I'm from Dallas, and I'm used to the banks open until 5 everyday and then open on Saturday.

**Moderator: Is downtown well-lit?**

Yeah.

And it's patrolled.

As far as I know, we've got a good police department, sheriff's department.

I live right here, and in our neighborhood we communicate with each other, and we know what's going on. We've got a good neighborhood watch. We look out for each other. That's why our neighborhood hasn't been taken over by crime. I had a light go out right by my house, and I called, and they put a new light bulb in.

That's the beauty of small towns. You can call. That's one thing we take for granted.

**Moderator: What about the look of downtown?**

It needs some help.

With all the empty buildings, it needs help.

(agreement. Laughter.)

I really think the riverfront could get some beautifying. It needs a facelift.

(agreement.)

There's always people down there looking at the river. There's always cars parked there.

There was talk of making it a pedestrian walkway. Saying you can't drive down there.

(many people talking at once, agreeing.)

**Moderator: What else about the look of downtown. Is it clean?**

It looks tired. It looks like the spirit is gone. You've got people beaten down.

It's clean, but it's a bare kind of clean.

**Moderator:** *Let's dream a little about what you'd like your downtown to look like. Let's talk for a second about the businesses you'd like to see downtown.*

A movie theater.

A skating rink.

I'd like to have some franchises come in, Payless shoes or something, and offer us an opportunity to shop here at home.

Jewelry store.

(unintelligible)

I think some franchises, and some other niche market stores.

I think something real progressive.

(agreement.)

Grizzly G's is wonderful, and they do great Internet business. So we're able to take advantage of that.

A few years ago, we had three businesses that drew people from out of town.

**Moderator:** *What other kind of businesses would you like to see downtown?*

Shoes and clothes, jeans. Something.

There are a lot of times you have to go out of town to find what you're looking for. You go to an area where there are lots of stores.

(agreement. Unintelligible.)

A strip mall would be nice.

Yeah.

People would really come in.

I wish we could have a Barnes & Noble.

That would be good at night, too, for students. Somewhere to hang out.

(agreement. Many people talking at once.)

We need a high school. The tornado tore down the high school.

You're not going to have a downtown until you have a school.

We lost 60 students because of the tornado, and that's a lot for a small town. A school gets so much money from each student.

If, when they do build the school... (many people talking at once.)

...have a trade school...

I would love to see us have some type of...either healthcare or a factory. A lot of people travel to work in a factory. If we could get some company willing to build a factory here, we could bring people to our area.

I think you'll find more entrepreneurship.

(agreement.)

Unintelligible.)

**Moderator: Do you have a coffee shop here?**

Not somewhere you can just go in and hang out.

(agreement.)

There's not a place to find job placement for students, in work study programs. If we had businesses like that that we could give students the opportunity to work in... at Barnes & Noble or Foot Locker.

Not to mention, once you graduate, there's not many options for jobs here.

Wal-Mart.

(agreement. Unintelligible.)

The niche markets downtown...

I think that Wal-Mart gives good revenue to our city, and what if the niche market didn't make it? Why not keep Wal-Mart and add these as well? I would still shop downtown for those other things that Wal-Mart doesn't have. We need to acquire all we can for our city. I would really like to spend my money at home, but I can't.

(many people agreeing at once.)

We could use a hospital here. We have good doctor's clinics and stuff, but they're small and contain. We could use a bigger facility. If you have a serious heart attack, you've got to travel at least 10 minutes.

And once we have a new fire station, the old one could be turned into a 24 hour ambulance station. That would help. That's a rumor, though.

**Moderator: Nobody mentioned new restaurants.**

I'd love that!

I'd like Chinese, Mexican.

We need good restaurants. I like home-cooked food, but I also want to be able to go to an Applebee's or an Olive Garden.

(many people talking at once.)

There's nowhere to eat on a Sunday, and we always have to go out of town. I want to go somewhere I'm comfortable, and everything here is a ma and pop restaurant, but I'd like to have a nice franchise restaurant.

A few years ago, we had the Chaparral, and they drew from all over west Tennessee and Arkansas. (noise, unintelligible)

Do you think the Chaparral was the predecessor for some stuff over in Dyersburg?

Yes.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

Wasn't there a new restaurant coming in downtown?

A wine and cheese place.

**Moderator: What about entertainment and recreation? Anything other than a movie theater and a skating rink?**

Arcade.

Bowling alley.

There used to be a bowling alley here.

(side conversations.)

A lot of college towns get the second-run movies. Maybe something like that.

We need the flow, though. We need the population. How do we draw from other towns? Good food brings people...

Let's face it. We don't have the population we used to have.

It comes right back to...if we don't have a school system, no one's going to come.

(agreement.)

Most of our teachers have Master's degrees. We've got good teachers.

(unintelligible side conversations about teachers and schools.)

A lot of high school dropouts.

There's nothing for them to do, but they drop out. I don't understand.

There's nothing wrong with the education that makes them drop out. They have a lack of motivation inside themselves.

A high teen pregnancy rate here. Highest in the state of Missouri.

STDs also.

We could prevent it if there was a positive place for students to be, to get motivated outside of school.

That needs to be taught also. You can't teach it in school.

(agreement.)

***Moderator: What would you want your downtown to look like?***

I'd like to see activity at night, and feel comfortable going in and out of buildings.

Businesses in all the buildings.

(many people agreeing at once.)

You know how they have trees up and down 3<sup>rd</sup>. That would make a difference downtown.

The boat has made several streets look real pretty.

I think about the little ones, and I'd like to see a really nice park area, a duck pond, a fountain, a foot path. I've been dreaming. A nice walking trail would be great also.

Have you been on this trail?

I have a couple times. I take my girls, and since they can't ride their bikes, I can't walk a lot.

That trail could go throughout the city, too.

We've got three kind of parks. There's a real good one at there, and the fairgrounds, and one by City Hall.

We have some buildings come down. When you drive by, you see a building and you see an empty space, and it saddens me. It looks like we're losing a piece of our community. I'd like to see these building owners donate the building to someone that wants to put something in there, and allow them to go in and refurbish the building, and establish some type of business. All these buildings are disappearing, and nothing's coming up, and it just looks bare. It looks so empty. It doesn't look good.

It's just cheaper to build farther out than to tear down and rebuild. They should give tax credits.

(unintelligible)...

I'd like to see some businesses downtown.

It would be nice if you had a restaurant on the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> floor looking over the river.

***Moderator: Do you have any residential living downtown?***

Yes, there are some apartments.

Some are in pretty bad shape.

***Moderator: Do you think people would be interested in residential space?***

Yeah!

Especially if there's a restaurant down there.

We had a funeral home down there, and it fell down from the earthquake.

***Moderator: What about murals?***

Oh, yeah.

Anything to do with the arts would be welcome.

Cape Girardeau has some beautiful murals.

We have everything we need right here.

But everyone's too busy figuring out what they can get out of it. They don't want to step up and do it.

(many people talking at once.)

There's a lot of talent in this town, just waiting to be discovered. If there was something that drew the talents out of the teens, that would give them something to do, and it would make people stay in town or move back rather than leave.

(agreement.)

And we should start working on technology... we should start incorporating what's out there, maybe as a tornado warning system.

A bed and breakfast would be good, too.

Oh, yeah.

(agreement.)

Or a spa.

(laughter.)

A hotel.

***Moderator: I have one last question. Are there any other communities you admire?***

Hardy, Arkansas.

I think the river makes it.

Highland...There's another instance where they had a flood, and they're already having a festival.

They have momentum.

Music playing.

And they've routed all the big truck traffic away from downtown.

They bounced back from their tornadoes and their floods. They had a lot of outdoor music playing, and the arts.

(unintelligible.)

***Moderator: Any other cities?***

I really like Cape. What hospital is that? Southeast. I love the park across from it. They have a miniature statue of liberty.

Oh, and I love Southeast.

(many people agreeing.)

I believe Caruthersville can actually...Cape is really growing. Every time I go, there's something new, it's really growing. They put that foot out there and got it done. If we try to get things going, we can start growing.

(agreement.)

We've got to give our kids a life here.

And a new experience instead of the same old stuff.

Caruthersville is not very diverse, when you think about it.

We need to get people exposed to better ways of life... (agreement, unintelligible). I've come back, hoping we can make a difference. People move back home, and they want to find homes. People can live here a lot easier than other places. We're 90 miles from anywhere, but if we can entice these people that want to move back...

(side conversations.)

We've got several young families that have moved back recently.

Are you ever surprised when that happens? I'm happy for them, but I wonder why they're coming back here.

I believe it's that closeness and that security.

If you talk with young people that grew up here, they loved it. They have great memories of the town, schools, churches, everything.

My daughter grew up here and went to Mizzou. She lives in Kansas City, and she loves coming home, but she leaves again because there's nothing to do.

(many people talking at once.)

It's a lot cheaper to live here.

And when you're 25, you want something to do on the weekends. You want to go to a movie or a concert or the theater. And the drive to her is nothing. Everything is Interstate.

(microphone dropping.)

I wish the boat could offer more entertainment. I think that's one of their downfalls. They don't draw *this* community. People travel from everywhere to come to the boat, but we can't get people from our community there.

(many people talking at once.)

Hotels here, too. We need a decent hotel.

If you look in the past, you look at the... (many people talking at once, unintelligible)...I think we need to get our own people on committees, and they need to come to these meetings and get the job done.

I think that our administration is moving in our right direction at the school district. I think it's moving forward.

(people talking at once. Side conversations about trailers being used in schools rather than permanent buildings.)

...people in the rain...

...switching classes across the street...

...having to stop traffic is extremely dangerous...

...we're late to classes because of funeral processions...

***Moderator: Thank you very much for coming.***

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## SECTION V

### DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

**Moderator:** *Describe the Caruthersville area as a whole to me.*

Quaint. Small town.

Cute little small town that's losing a lot of their business.

Very agriculture-centered.

Small town by the river.

**Moderator:** *Is it a safe town?*

It seems to be moving in the wrong direction.

I think there's a perception that Caruthersville's not a safe place in certain areas. It just seems that everything that's on the local news...I'm not sure that a lot of communities don't have similar things occurring, but... some of the issues may be more significant than other areas, but it just seems...

**Moderator:** *Do people stay in town to work?*

Seems like a lot of people travel.

(unintelligible--furniture being moved.)

**Moderator:** *Is there a lot of industry here in Caruthersville?*

Most of it is out of the community. If you're in town, you're with the school, city government...

Hospital, casino.

(unintelligible...background noise.)

**Moderator:** *Anything else about the area?*

Poor school system.

There's no high school.

Our high school system was damaged by the tornado two years ago, and we've been struggling. We're still under reconstruction, and there are students in trailers...

**Moderator: So, is population on the decline?**

Because of the tornado, there have been some improvements, but there areas that have gone down a lot. That's the case in several places.

Our zoning enforcement is not...being enforced.

We've got businesses downtown that are damaged and...deteriorating, and we've got one building that fills the street with shingles whenever the wind blows. If you drove around town, I'm sure you saw the appearance...we talk about beautification, but we've got buildings that are just being used as storage space. There's trash, dilapidated cars in lots of housing.

Anyone comes in down the highway, it's covered with trash that way.

(agreement.)

**Moderator: Let's talk a little about where you do your shopping. Do you stay here or leave?**

A lot of people go out of town. Any kind of clothing that you can't buy at Wal-Mart, you've got to go out of town for it. When you're shopping for your children or your family.

Groceries, the majority of people shop here. We have a number of grocery stores. Clothing people go out of town for. We have lots of liquor stores.

(laughter.)

**Moderator: Where do you go out of town?**

Memphis, Jackson.

Jackson, Tennessee.

Dyersburg.

**Moderator: Do any of you stay in town?**

Even for appliances and hardware, Dyersburg. We've got two lumber yards in town, but if you need a substantial amount of stuff, you go out of town.

(agreement.)

We shop on the Internet.

(agreement, unintelligible.)

**Moderator: How far is Dyersburg?**

20 miles.

I don't think a lot of people know about the sales tax there.

**Moderator: Do you just truly not have businesses here?**

We truly do not have them. There was a time when people went out just to be somewhere different, but now it's a necessity.

In Kennett, there's a couple ladies stores that my mother shops at... (unintelligible). We've suffered the same issues and problems that other towns have suffered. That coupled with an increase in Wal-marts has hurt the downtown region. But one of the positives is that we're agriculture-based economy, and that future is positive... (unintelligible)...this is a farming community, largely, but we've lost population and retail to the city.

**Moderator: You mentioned hunting supplies and groceries. What else do people stay in town for?**

There is a men's clothing store here. If I can buy something there, I do.

I'm a little embarrassed to say that I don't know what the status is on the gift store...I understand it's closed but it's going to reopen as a different business.

I heard it's going to be a wine and cheese place.

(noise, unintelligible.)

I think their traffic influenced it...

I think what it all comes down to is why would you go there when I could drive to Cape and buy clothes for my kids, eat at a decent restaurant, and buy gifts in one trip.

**Moderator: Where do people go out to eat?**

We've got one restaurant called Twister's, and they're usually pretty busy...

They're closed on Sunday. People get out of church, and they want to eat out.

Most places aren't open at night and on weekends.

They're all very casual. It would be nice to have a nicer, upscale restaurant.

One thing we do have is the casino. People come in from all over for the casino. It's a big draw for the community, and I don't think we've leveraged that as a community.

That's one of the challenges we've had is the need for improvement at the restaurant. That's one thing that's really impacted the business. That's one of our goals is to improve the restaurant to something that's a little more upscale, where you can go on a date or something. The other part is just a refurbishing of the property, with the casino being rebranded. Probably include a new façade, a new lobby, improved restaurant and bar. All those things need to be updated. I think that will help. We do have a lot of people coming into town, and we need to leverage that to benefit the rest of the town by making them make additional stops.

Well, when people come into town, they pass a bunch of trash on their way in.

That's one of those things we talked about with the long-term plans...(unintelligible)

I think any new businesses need to be unique. It's got to be something that's going to attract their eye if they're going to the casino. We had our store draw from that. Sometimes they'll see us, and make a point of coming in an hour earlier. But again, you've got to be open.

(many people agreeing.)

Make them stop in downtown when they past. A lot of businesses used to be open on Saturdays and Sundays... (unintelligible)...

The boats were stopping in, but stopping and not being able to buy a drink or look in a store, they never come around anymore.

***Moderator: River traffic?***

Yeah.

(many people agreeing at once.)

The river is a tremendous asset.

As an agricultural community, we're not as affected by recessions.

One thing that's really hurt us is the horrible economy. There's fewer manufacturing jobs.

***Moderator: Do local residents use the restaurant and bar?***

The locals don't utilize the restaurant. It's an issue with the casino. You can't go in and eat and get back to your job in time to make it an option. Going forward, we're looking to make some modifications so it's an option for the local customers. And speaking of driving in from Poplar Bluff, people often want to stop somewhere on the way in.

Locals use the bar, though.

Yeah.

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

We have one conference, and that's the highest attendance we've ever had. Not everyone stayed here, but they came to town. They gambled, they drank, ate, watched people gamble.

We've done a little bit of that, but we haven't really made the food service really pull it off. That's one thing we could do, if we get them here...then if we have other things in the community.

We get a lot of calls for people wanting to have a conference, and trying to find a facility is difficult.

(person talking, unintelligible, too far away from microphone.)

**Moderator: Do people just not dine out much, or are they driving?**

They're driving out of town for it.

(unintelligible.)

**Moderator: What do people do for entertainment?**

Casino.

We don't have movies.

There's nothing else to do. If the Casino has a concert, that's about it. It's really embarrassing to tell them, "well, we've got some nice parks." No skating rink, no bowling alley. Absolutely nothing.

There isn't anything for youth to do in the evenings, unless they play baseball or softball. It adds to the crime problem, if they're bored.

(agreement.)

I mean, every Saturday, the courthouse is loaded up with kids. There's nowhere to go.

(agreement. Unintelligible.)

It would be great to go to a park and swing on a swing.

**Moderator: Let's focus in on downtown. Do you think downtown is headed in the same negative direction that you feel the community is?**

It's like all downtowns. People need to work on their properties to keep them nice. How do you handle that?

Regarding the streetscape project, they're working on Ward Avenue. Sidewalks and lighting, trees. It's Phase 2, and then the riverwalk is going to go all the way from the riverfront to 7<sup>th</sup> street.

And the awnings, too.

You've got several people downtown that are interested in doing something.

You're in a quandary because there are people interested in buildings down there, but you've got the concern of investing that much money in a building in what is a dying downtown retail district and have any hope of getting their money back. Something needs to make it a break-even

proposition. You'll see it over and over in downtowns. I always drive by breakout communities-- it amazes me, that little Charlene, Tennessee. Little tea room, kids club...it's in the middle of nowhere. People are driving from here some 35 miles to get to this little specialty shop. This is just as easily a destination, but you've got to have something to come to. But who's going to put the business in? If someone were to go to a bank and ask for a loan for a children's shop in Caruthersville, it's not going to fly. It's a gamble. And it's the same gamble on the side of the prospective business owner and the landowner. Hopefully we break out and somebody says, "I'm going to build this business..." We need to start building up back our downtown.

(agreement...person talking too far away from microphone, unintelligible.)

We've got 3 blocks with 4 retail businesses. One sporting goods, a drugstore, a pizza store, and a men's store. That's 3 blocks. We need retail business. What happened with retail business we had, some of it was people were in bad health and didn't have family that wanted to keep that business going. Typical small town.

The shoe store across the street. He had national awards. He was an artist. He did an outstanding job, and people from all over the region came in. When he was retiring, he wanted to find somebody to take over the business, and he didn't find anybody.

(many people talking at once.)

It's a different...economy's changed, society's changed. It's not local like it once was. I don't think you'll ever see downtown Caruthersville come back in a traditional sense. It's going to be quaint. It's going to be anchored by the casino, and it has to have streets that you can walk on, and shops that you can shop at.

You're exactly right.

It'd be nice to have some cute signs and things outside.

(many people talking at once.)

We just had a crackhead throw a brick through a window and beat and rob two older ladies just a few blocks from here. It was truly random. The guy said it was because it was the first house he came to. The first time somebody gets mugged, that's over. It's not coming back. Whatever the explanation is, it'll be out, and Caruthersville will be that place where people got robbed. We've got to have...I don't know what the answer is, but we've got to have enforcement. People who are gambling, older adults, they don't want to have to share the sidewalk with anyone who creates terror in their eyes. Whatever we do, it's going to have involve some pretty serious police involvement. Maybe it's not a lack of enforcement, but you open the newspaper and that's all you see. Violent crime. Murder and rape here and Steele. It's like New Orleans, it's like Bourbon Street. People go there because it's safe. You've got to feel safe and enjoy yourself and pay money to visit a community, and not be concerned about safety.

Even from the state's perspective, we've got a riverboat that generates millions of dollars, and they see a town with a population of 7000, but two-thirds are not working. You've only got 2500 that are income-producing folks. We're trying to compete with towns our size, but we should be with towns a third of our size.

The safety issue is a lack of code enforcement. It tells people that we really don't care... (unintelligible.)

What will it take to achieve...how do you get the codes enforced?

(unintelligible)...city council...

(many people talking at once.)

...his attitude is, "don't pick on me." You've got to be fair and widespread in enforcement. Everyone's got to know the law, and it's got to be enforced equally.

The house closest to the casino, vacant house, the city police were there and I don't know what they found, but all of our customers saw it. Is there any way they're going to walk past there to the downtown? No. We've got to clean up that connection if they're going to make that walk. That area connecting to downtown has to be a focus.

Parking downtown during business hours is a real problem, too.

If the buildings didn't get dilapidated...it's a problem that's occurring over a number of years, but I hope we're nearing the end of the planning stages and nearing the action phases.

(many people talking at once.)

And there's one landowner...I think that's unfair, to some degree...

I think it's a cop-out.

It's too easy to say that the buildings are old. Enforce the codes. You've got to encourage some investment down there, and if the problem is that you've got crime occurring, the solution is find it, clean it up. I bet it increases your draw. We all keep working on our own little projects, and it comes around. The city's got this project that's absolutely key. New streets, new sidewalks. Then you start looking at new facades and dressing these things up. But we've also got to have some private individuals willing to step up.

***Moderator: Why did you choose to locate your business downtown?***

It was in my best interest to have it located downtown, close to the banks, and to be able to buy an existing building.

It was available. I rented it first, then I bought it.

As a retail business, I'm from Caruthersville born and raised, and that's primarily why I'm here, because my family was here.

(many people talking at once.)

**Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? Parking, lighting, navigation?**

It's not poorly lit. They're working on it.

**Moderator: What else?**

The issue of business hours. A lot of the downtown has changed from retail to service-oriented businesses.

We have doctors, attorneys, CPAs, insurance...

**Moderator: Is there adequate parking?**

For now, yes. Parking lines would help, even now, though.

It probably would be a problem if there were more retail stores.

(agreement.)

**Moderator: We've talked about the present, but what would you like to see in the future of downtown? What kinds of businesses would you like to see downtown?**

Right now, there has been a lot of junk stores and antique stores, and we need specialty shops, but we need them to be open. People aren't going to come for anything usual--it's got to be something special.

I'll agree on the antique stores. I have friends who want to go to the one that's never open. If you had a real antique store, it would do well...

(unintelligible.)

...there was no set hours...

There was two or three...

There was a few of them.

**Moderator: What other kind of businesses?**

A real antique shop, not just a junk store. Like you'd find in Hardy, Arkansas.

Again, that's one of these things that tends to attract other antique stores. It's not competition--there's a synergy that develops in having more than one.

I thought about a specialty gift store.

We need a gift store, and with this one shut down, there is no other place to get a gift or a card.

I envision kind of a Hallmark store.

And another big request is postcards, and there's no place to get anything like that.

If we're dreaming, a restaurant would be great. We've got the deli, but Saturday or evening...we do have some restaurants that are closed when people are out.

The one across the street from me, we need something like that...more directed toward youth.

To make a retail work downtown, it's got to be specialty. You've got to have somebody willing to come in there and work hours other than 8 to 5, and to really be that business. If you want to make any money, you've got to be involved in it.

Everybody wants to own a restaurant, but nobody wants to run one. It's hard work, and if you're not personally invested, it's just not going to happen. Any business is a huge undertaking.

***Moderator: What other type of businesses?***

A movie theater or something that could draw kids.

A beer garden.

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

We have a number of wine gardens that are being utilized. How do you have a beer garden without attracting a fairly unsavory crowd?

(many people talking at once.)

I think a small park in the middle of downtown, with little benches in. And if you have a downtown festival, a band could come in and play. It could be a beer garden.

I don't think that's the direction to go. I think we've got enough empty space. We need some retail space. We need some combination of private and public investment, something that is a turnkey facility. Rather than doing \$80,000 worth of renovation, you could just rent and move in.

(unintelligible)...there's one place in there, I'd be curious to know how many square feet it is, but it's a store that's full of people's booths. You go through a maze of things. There are specialty purses, artifacts. The people there run everything through the cash register at the front. If we had a building big enough that someone could take the risk to buy it and to lease out the little booths, they all kind of share in the overhead.

It would be a flea market.

I think it was more upscale. This was good quality stuff. This wasn't people's leftover.

(noise, unintelligible.)

I don't want flea markets and Tae Kwon Do instruction. But the antique place in downtown (town name unintelligible), and it's gone from the downtown of my childhood with stores all over... and the parking there, it's just... and they're that much closer to the smokestack than we are.

But they're all going to Wal-Mart.

I don't think this is a trend you can buck. It has to be a quaint little town.

I think that \_\_\_\_\_ hit on, it's got to be something organized. I don't believe, if somebody gave us the money, do we have the people that would sit in those stores all day long to keep them open. The dedication to be there when you only have one customer. You've got to have people who will come in and stay there, and not close at 3:00 or 2:00 because they only had one customer.

**Moderator: How do you want your downtown to look? Green space or murals or anything?**

(unintelligible)... we talked about murals, for example, on the sides of businesses. We offered it to a high school arts class. I have one big huge catfish on the back of my building...

(laughter, many people talking.)

We need to have somebody that will follow through. They still haven't finished it.

(laughter.)

**Moderator: Is there anything the city could do to help your business thrive that they're not currently doing?**

Right across the street for me, trash piled up, buildings falling down and sitting there forever, ceiling tiles falling into the street. The City hasn't done anything to clean these things up. Code enforcement. The City does things, but only if you complain. Where my business is located and my clientele, that's my biggest gripe. Trash across the street.

Some communities around the bootheel do an extra sales tax, and that helps with cleanup and dilapidated houses.

Sounds good...

(unintelligible)...if you start ripping up streets and sidewalks, people will have renewed sense... if you hit a dead end with somebody, you've got to keep going back. You have to keep going back and trying...(unintelligible)...we're going to have to deal with the downtown. You can't unring bells. You just have to start doing stuff. How long have we been looking at artist's renditions of downtown? I'm sick of it! Give me some concrete and asphalt! I've seen all the pencil and paper I want.

(agreement.)

It's the same crap we've been talking about for ten years.

(agreement.)

The majority is code enforcement, and that starts with having a decent looking city proper. You can't say, "clean this up," when the city won't pick the trash up. If they don't put the trash in the back, pick it up anyway! Everybody here is interested in doing it, but pour some asphalt, pour some concrete.

(agreement.)...

The school has sat for 2 years without anything done. Pour some concrete for the school. People in other towns hear about it, and they see that you've built houses all around it, but you can't rebuild the school in 2 years? We have to say, "let's do it."

I've been to school board meetings, and the only people who show up say, "I don't want my taxes raised." And that's who the school board is listening to.

(agreement.)

*Moderator: Thank you very much.*