

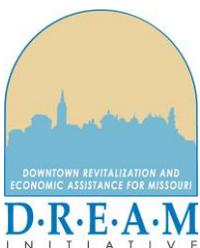
DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION &
ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE FOR
MISSOURI

April 28, 2008

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

FINAL SURVEY
FINDINGS & RESULTS

Chillicothe, Missouri



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FOR MISSOURI (DREAM) PROGRAM SPONSORS:



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SECTION I FINAL REPORT

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

A. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE BUSINESS GROUP:

The following questions were posed to the business group:

General Questions about Chillicothe

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 or go 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 Chillicothe 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? Is there a need/demand for more housing downtown?
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 Chillicothe?

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

08. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Chillicothe. 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 you 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?

B. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE GENERAL GROUPS:

The following questions were posed to the general groups:

General Questions about Chillicothe

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 or go 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 Chillicothe?

Downtown Specific Questions

05. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Chillicothe 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 Chillicothe? 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? Is there a need/demand for more housing downtown?
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 Chillicothe. 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 you 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 Chillicothe to resemble?

C. THE CHILlicothe 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?

The groups described Chillicothe as a friendly, small town with a lot of industry, a good education system, and a strong revitalization effort over the last ten years. Because Chillicothe is in Northern Missouri, people come in from surrounding towns much smaller than Chillicothe for employment, entertainment, and shopping. Chillicothe is home of the County Courthouse, as well. Many participants described Chillicothe as a progressive place where the strong sense of community makes development and change possible and positive.

Most participants indicated that Chillicothe is moving in the right direction. They described the City's long-range plan that was implemented over a decade ago as an impetus for this growth. Specific things the groups mentioned that demonstrate this positive direction were the new large prison in Chillicothe, the repairs around the Courthouse, the wall murals around Chillicothe, the YMCA and aquatic center, and renovations in downtown Chillicothe.

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 Chillicothe are on either end of town, and have major chain stores such as Wal-Mart Supercenter, Hy-Vee, Lowe's, and other "big box" stores.

According to the groups, people come from about a large radius around Chillicothe to do their shopping, mostly chain store shopping at places like Wal-Mart.

Residents try to do most of their shopping in Chillicothe but have trouble finding certain specialty or high-end items in town. For these items, residents travel to St. Joseph or Kansas City, or they shop online. These items include a variety of children's clothing, a variety of clothing for young adults, professional clothing, shoes, craft and scrapbooking materials, art supplies, sporting goods, and other specialty items.

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 number of restaurants in Chillicothe, many of them downtown. Options in Chillicothe include casual dining, chain restaurants, Mexican restaurants, and Chinese restaurants. Participants generally felt that there is a variety of dining options, but that a fine dining option in town, a wider variety of restaurants, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating would be welcome improvements.

For recreation and entertainment, Chillicothe has a large YMCA, which is rare for a town of Chillicothe's size, a number of parks, an aquatic center, a performing arts center, tennis courts, a bowling alley, a six-plex movie theater, and a skating rink. According to participants, people stay in town for most entertainment and recreation, and others from neighboring towns come to Chillicothe for these options as well.

D. DOWNTOWN CHILICOTHE: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT

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

Many participants agreed that downtown Chillicothe is moving in the right direction. They felt that the renovations and beautification efforts downtown have all been positive and will eventually help draw more business downtown. Special events, such as the Strum and Stroll and BooFest at Halloween, draw people downtown, as well. There are a number of building owners doing renovations, and many service-related businesses.

Perhaps the biggest reason, according to the participants, that Chillicothe is moving in the right direction is the execution of the long-range plan and the number of groups collaborating to get things done. The efforts of different groups have improved the streets, brought in new streetlights, beautified the downtown area considerably, and improved many other things in Chillicothe inside and outside the downtown.

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

The business owners cited low cost and location as major reasons they located their businesses downtown. The downtown is on a major state highway, which brings a lot of traffic. The participants indicated, in different points in the discussion, that new businesses might be attracted because of beautification efforts, residential developments, and a higher number of shops in the area. The participants mentioned that, since low cost is such a factor for business owners, an incubator project of some sort, perhaps for antique shops, might be a way to keep this benefit and encourage businesses owners to locate their businesses downtown. Ongoing building repair efforts, strong code enforcement, and monetary incentives are also possibilities for drawing people downtown.

General Public: What are the major reasons you visit downtown? How often do you visit downtown Chillicothe? 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 the courthouse, services such as attorneys, accountants, and banks, a couple of restaurants and stores, and special events. Special events such as BooFest and Strum and Stroll attract a number of residents downtown, and participants felt that those special events provide a great opportunity for businesses to advertise and to draw people in.

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? Is there a need/demand for more housing downtown?

Participants had a few significant concerns about user-friendliness, including parking, one-way streets, and business hours.

The parking situation, as some described it, is a “perceived problem”—people believe that parking downtown is a problem, but in fact there are ample parking spaces in the Square. Some participants noted that business owners, business employees, and courthouse employees sometimes take up all the spots along the street. Some participants mentioned that some people want to park directly in front of the store rather than walking, but if they were aware of all the parking options, they would not have to park more than a block away. In addition, the participants felt that if the downtown had more occupied storefronts, people would not mind walking as much.

The one-way streets were also a major concern in user-friendliness. According to some participants, having one-way streets is more of a problem than a benefit. Participants in every group suggested that two-way streets would make navigation easier, would make parking easier, and would make people more likely to come downtown.

Business hours in the Square, according to the participants, are problematic, especially regarding evenings and weekends. Most of the shops are open only from 8:00 or 9:00 AM to 5:00 or 5:30 PM on weekdays, which makes it difficult for people who have jobs with a regular weekday schedule to shop in these businesses. While those who work downtown are able to shop over their lunch hour, those who do not work downtown cannot. The problem is compounded by the fact that the chain stores in town, such as Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee, are open in the evenings and on weekends. Many participants also felt that downtown restaurant hours are inconvenient. Some restaurants close fairly early.

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

Participants mentioned the radio, the newspaper, the Chamber of Commerce, the Internet, and word-of-mouth as the major ways they get information about downtown business and events. According to the participants, Chillicothe has a strong Internet presence, as the individual groups, businesses, and the Chamber of Commerce all have a lot of information online.

E. DOWNTOWN CHILICOTHE: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Chillicothe. 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 suggested a variety of new businesses downtown, focusing on independently-owned specialty-type shops and restaurants rather than larger chains. For apparel, they suggested men’s and women’s clothing, a children’s store, and a shoe store. For food, they suggested a grocery store for any residents living downtown, a farmers market, and additional restaurants. In other types of businesses, they suggested art galleries, art and craft stores, costume shops for the performing arts, activities for teenagers such as paintball or laser tag, and any other specialty store.

They also focused on adding residents downtown, suggesting that second-story lofts would help fill the buildings, keep a number of people downtown to patronize businesses, and appeal to young professionals and older retirees.

The groups suggested that more park spaces downtown would make the downtown look nicer, provide gathering spaces, and provide spaces for special outdoor events.

They felt that the downtown's purpose is not to compete with Wal-Mart, Hy-Vee, and the other large chains, but to offer a unique experience to customers. For this, many participants felt strongly that small business should be encouraged and that the City should find and offer incentives to potential business owners. They also suggested a business incubator so that small businesses could get a strong start.

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?

Participants were generally pleased with the beautification and improvement efforts in downtown—they were happy with the street repairs, the recent beautification efforts, murals around town, and the building renovations so far. Many suggested that building repair, renovations, and upgrades should be of the highest priority. According to survey participants, sidewalk repair should also be a priority, as some of the sidewalk bricks are beginning to deteriorate.

Green space was a priority. Some suggested a small park downtown with benches and tables, and others suggested more trees, planters, and other landscaping. Participants indicated that greenery makes a downtown area more attractive. A few groups also mentioned some sort of water feature, perhaps a fountain or a waterfall.

Some participants emphasized that downtown should have a cohesive aesthetic, focusing on a quaint and historical look while still being modernized.

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, building repair and renovation, and cooperation between city and county to be the three most important priorities. In attracting businesses, the priorities were to give incentives to business owners, to attract a mix of specialty retail, to attract residents for higher-end second-story lofts, and to attract professional services to fill the second stories of buildings. For building repair, the priorities were façade repair and removal of tin fronts, structural repair or complete tear-down of dilapidated buildings, and second-story repair on buildings that have storefronts. Many participants in the business group strongly felt that cooperation between city and county were key to any downtown improvements, as well.

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

The groups named the following small towns and larger cities as places they admire for various reasons: Atchison, Kansas; Pella, Iowa; Columbia, Missouri; Mexico, Missouri; Weston, Missouri; Liberty, Missouri; California, Missouri; Arrow Rock, Missouri; Jamesport, Missouri; Quincy, Illinois; St. Joseph, Missouri; and the Plaza in Kansas City, Missouri.

In these cities, many participants admired the cohesive look and feel and the mix of businesses that draw people in.

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, but building repair, attracting new business, improving parking, and cooperation between city and county would all help the most.

F. KEY POINTS

Key points about the Chillicothe area:

- ◆ Chillicothe is a friendly small-town with a lot of industry, a good education system, and a strong revitalization effort over the last ten years.
- ◆ Chillicothe is a hub for many smaller surrounding towns for shopping, entertainment, and employment.
- ◆ The community generally feels that Chillicothe is moving in the right direction, particularly regarding the community's willingness to fund new projects and expand existing services.
- ◆ The main shopping in Chillicothe is major chain stores such as Wal-Mart, Lowe's, and Hy-Vee.
- ◆ People come in from all around Chillicothe to do their shopping at the major chain stores.
- ◆ Chillicothe residents sometimes have to go to Kansas City, to St. Joseph, or online to find higher-end shopping or specialty items.
- ◆ Dining options in Chillicothe include casual dining, chain restaurants, Mexican restaurants, and Chinese restaurants.
- ◆ The community feels that there is a variety of dining options, but that a wider variety of restaurants, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating would be welcome improvements.
- ◆ Recreation and entertainment options in Chillicothe include the YMCA, parks, an aquatic center, a performing arts center, tennis courts, a bowling alley, a six-plex movie theater, and a skating rink.

Key points about downtown Chillicothe in the present:

- ◆ The community agrees that downtown Chillicothe is moving in the right direction—the long-range plan, beautification efforts, special events, and building repairs are all positive.
- ◆ Business owners located their businesses downtown because of the low cost and the good location along a state highway.

- ◆ Businesses may also begin to come downtown because of beautification efforts, residential developments, a growing density of shops and restaurants, incentives or possibly a business incubator, improved code enforcement, improved parking, and building repair.
- ◆ People come downtown for the courthouse, services such as attorneys, accountants, and banks, a couple restaurants and stores, and special events.
- ◆ There is a “perceived parking problem”; the community feels that parking is hard to find in the Square, which deters them from patronizing downtown businesses.
- ◆ The groups unanimously agreed that the one-way streets are a problem; two-way streets would make navigation easier, would make parking easier, and would make people more likely to come downtown.
- ◆ 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 would be a welcome improvement, making it possible to eat dinner later in the evening.
- ◆ Local residents get information about downtown from the radio, the newspaper, the Chamber of Commerce mailings and office, the Internet, and word-of-mouth.

Key points about the future of downtown Chillicothe:

- ◆ Downtown Chillicothe should focus on independently-owned specialty-type shops and restaurants rather than large chains; some participants felt that downtown’s purpose is not to compete with large chains, but to offer a unique experience to customers.
- ◆ For apparel, men’s and women’s clothing, a children’s store, and a shoe store would be welcome additions downtown.
- ◆ For food, a grocery store for any residents living downtown, a farmers market, and additional restaurants would be welcome additions downtown.
- ◆ Among other types of businesses, art galleries, art and craft stores, costume shops for the performing arts, activities for teenagers such as paintball or laser tag, and any other specialty stores would be welcome downtown.
- ◆ Small business should be encouraged, and the City should provide incentives and information to encourage small businesses to come downtown.
- ◆ The participants suggested a business incubator, so that small businesses can get a strong start and downtown will be attractive to potential businesses.

- ◆ Higher-end second-story loft apartments and condos would help fill the buildings, keep a number of people downtown to patronize businesses, and appeal to young professionals and older retirees.
- ◆ Additional parks downtown would make the downtown look nicer, provide gathering spaces, and provide spaces for special outdoor events.
- ◆ The community is pleased with the beautification and improvements downtown so far—people are happy with the street repairs, the beautification efforts, the murals around town, and the building renovations so far.
- ◆ Building repair, renovations, and upgrades should be of the highest priority in beautifying downtown; sidewalk repair should also be a priority.
- ◆ Green space and a water feature would also be welcome beautification efforts.
- ◆ The City should aim for a cohesive aesthetic, focusing on a historical look but modernized interiors.
- ◆ Parking and business hours are priorities in improving user-friendliness downtown.
- ◆ Attracting businesses, building repair and renovation, and cooperation between city and county are the three most important priorities.
- ◆ Chillicothe 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 thriving variety of businesses and a cohesive look and feel.
- ◆ Business owners felt that all downtown improvements would help their businesses, but building repair, attracting new business, improving parking, and cooperation between city and county would all help the most.

SECTION II

STUDENT DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: Tell me a little about Chillicothe as a whole.

Getting bigger all the time.

True.

We're always getting new things, new businesses and restaurants.

(unintelligible)...once in a blue moon, there's a robbery or something. But not much crime.

Friendly community.

Everyone knows your name and your family, what you do, what sports you play.

Everyone knows your business.

(laughter.)

The whole community's focused on sports, mostly.

Lots of the community pulls itself together for things like the new prison. We actually raised our taxes to get that here. And without that, the new prison would've been elsewhere.

We have a pretty good tech school here.

Moderator: Is that part of the high school?

Kind of both before and after.

18 surrounding schools come to it.

(noises, unintelligible)

If you go there for high school, you're already halfway done for college.

I came up here for ag.

Business, and mechanics.

Computers.

Health stuff.

Nursing.

Carpentry.

Lots of stuff with technology.

Trade school.

Moderator: How big is it?

A lot of people go there.

Moderator: What else about Chillicothe?

It's a good area, locationwise. You're an hour and a half from Kansas City, and hour and 10 from St. Joe.

You're in the middle of other big cities...

Plus we have 2 highways, 65 and 36.

Also, I would say Chillicothe is really safe. I've never felt in danger in school at all besides Westin...just kidding...I've never worried about danger in the school or the town.

When something does happen, we had an armed robbery two months ago...

It was exciting!

It was a highlight of our year.

I didn't feel threatened. We have each other's backs here.

Moderator: Anything else?

We have the Mudcats during the summer. It's a minor league baseball team.

We've got our new fairgrounds, so lots of trade shows.

They draw people from all over.

Moderator: Do people come to Chillicothe or leave for events and activities?

A little of both.

Small towns come here for the bowling alley and movie theater.

And the Wal-Mart.

(laughter.)

We have the second largest Wal-Mart in the state.

Seriously?

We are the home of sliced bread.

(laughter.)

(many people talking at once.)

We're the first ones to sell sliced bread.

They actually learn that in culinary schools, that Chillicothe is the home of sliced bread.

(laughter.)

We have a skating rink.

Not a very good one.

(many people talking at once.)

The parks, they're fun to go to.

Yeah, we've got nice parks.

Families get out and go play.

And we are getting new tennis courts at our memorial park.

Moderator: Where do you shop?

We have Hy-Vee, Wal-Mart, Piggly Wiggly.

(many people talking at once.)

We travel to Kansas City and St. Joseph a lot.

Yeah, you have to go out of town for clothing and stuff.

Well, we have some here.

Not much.

Well, we're supposed to get a strip mall. They've been talking about it 5 years.

And we're getting Walgreens.

I buy some of my clothes here. We have good thrift stores.

I don't.

Ann Maurice's is good to have if you are in emergency of a nice outfit. It's a chain store like a JC Penney or something.

But it's all for girls.

(many people talking at once.)

There was some guys' clothes but they got rid of it.

Moderator: So most of you go to St. Joe?

St. Joe or Kansas City.

Moderator: Do gas prices make a difference?

You sort of make a day trip out of it, and you usually stop at Wal-Mart too. You compile a whole shopping list.

Moderator: Where do local residents eat out?

El Toro (everyone says it in unison)

Applebee's.

Washington Street.

Yeah.

China Garden.

Steakhouse.

We need a Wendy's.

Yes!

We only have a McDonalds.

We used to have a Hardees.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: So do you mostly stay in town to eat?

Mostly in town. There's no places close.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Do other towns come here to eat.

Yeah (in unison)

Anything around here.

Breckinridge, (other towns unintelligible)

Trenton even comes.

(laughter.)

A lot of Trenton people come here.

Moderator: Does anybody go to Trenton for things?

No, not really.

People come here to work, for jobs and stuff. Even the college students there.

Moderator: What do you do for fun?

Bowling alley, movie theater.

We need a skate park or something, because the skating rink is horrible.

We hang out at people's houses.

Movies and bowling are expensive!

Unless you know somebody who works there.

And the parks close at 10, so you can't go there at night, because the police will tell you to leave.

(agreement.)

I think, we're pretty church-centered, so youth groups have a lot of stuff that kids go to.

After like all the football games, the Y has bashes and stuff.

It would be cool if we had a dance club.

Oooh, yeah.

I think someone should do that!

They should.

The old Wal-Mart, that place is empty. You put a laser tag place in there and a dance place...

I call paintball.

(many people talking at once, agreeing.)

Moderator: Do you ever think there's nothing to do in this town?

Yeah (in unison)

All the time.

We should get mini golf.

Yeah!

(many people talking at once.)

We need some more restaurants on this side of town.

It's because the highway's there.

It would be nice if there's something by the high school.

Like a Wendy's.

Moderator: How big is your high school?

620 kids.

Moderator: Do you use downtown?

What's considered downtown?

Like, is this downtown?

It's like between Sonic and...

It's all businesses.

We only come here if we're going to US graphics.

Getting your hair cut.

That's about it. There's a couple of jewelry stores.

And the library.

And the courthouse.

No one really goes there.

There's nothing to do downtown, fun-wise. You only go here because you have to.

And we have a bunch of empty buildings.

(many people talking at once.)

There should be like an ice cream shop.

Ooh, yeah.

We need a soda shop.

Dairy cream's all the way down yonder.

Every ice cream place in town was out last night.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Do your parents come downtown for anything?

For work.

Like at the bank.

Moderator: Do you go to the coffee house?

Yeah, it's delicious.

It's for all ages.

It's great.

Moderator: People your age go there?

Yeah.

We don't really hang out there much, but we go there.

Some people do.

Moderator: Where do you go to hang out?

Hick's. Our friends work there.

Unless you want to sit outside, you can go to Sonic.

And people go to the Hy-Vee parking lot.

We get so mad. I had to tell all those Yahoos to get out of the parking lot 3 times one night.

(laughter.)

Moderator: You work there?

Yeah. It was me and like 2 other people, and I had to keep asking people to leave.

Why do you have to make them leave?

It's loitering.

(side conversations.)

The cops don't do anything. They just pull in, and everyone goes to Wal-Mart for 20 minutes.

They should do something to the old Wal-Mart building.

I thought they were making that a truck stop.

Dance club, I'm telling you.

I like the new Casey's. They actually have pizza late at night.

(many people talking at once.)

It's like, really far away.

It's inconvenient to get to.

But it's open 24 hours a day.

Yeah, I know!

Moderator: Is there stuff that you used to come downtown to do that you don't anymore?

The skating rink.

The businesses around the square have a festival, and they invite families, and the businesses have candy for them.

Then there's the Chataqua.

Oh, yeah!

Moderator: What is that?

All kinds of businesses come in from all over, and they sell their crafts and food and stuff.

It's an artisan boutique.

Huh?

An artisan is a person who's really skillful, and a boutique is like a...

Shop?

Does a blacksmith have a boutique?

(laughter.)

It attracts like a lot of people.

It's in September.

Moderator: *So, do you have a lot of visitors downtown?*

It's mostly at either end of town.

It's like the business district.

It takes 10 minutes to get through at rush hour.

Or after school.

10 minutes is a long time here.

I really don't like our light system. You can get from Calhoun to Jackson or to Clay, then after that there's no stoplight until 3rd street.

If you're going the right speed, you can hit every single one of those lights.

That's like 10 miles over the speed limit.

If you hit it down by Washington Street...

This is how bored we get in Chillicothe.

(laughter.)

Some people get lost on the side roads.

Hey, I do!

There's so many one-way streets that aren't necessary.

But if you change them to two-way, you can't get through.

Like Dickinson.

Moderator: Do you think downtown looks nice?

They're redoing a lot of it, the rooftops and stuff, and they're making it the way it used to be. Antique.

I think the murals look good. People just come to look at them.

We have a lot of murals.

It adds to the character.

Everyone knows we have murals. That's our thing.

Like they know about the sliced bread.

In October, we're going to have a farmer's market up here on the Square.

Moderator: Does that attract people from out of town?

Some people from Jamesport bring their stuff here.

But nothing like the Chataqua.

Moderator: What else?

It's clean.

It's well-maintained.

Some of the businesses, people sweep the sidewalks. I don't understand why. They're sidewalks!

There's nowhere to park downtown.

Parking is horrible. You have to parallel park to get everywhere.

Or you have to park at State Bank.

(many people talking at once.)

They usually keep a bunch of the trees and stuff, and the flowers are blooming. It looks really good.

Moderator: Do people live downtown?

There's a few.

There's apartments.

There's a few. But they're starting to put a lot more into buildings.

That would be so cool. To live in a loft.

Moderator: Would people want to live in downtown lofts?

I would.

I totally would.

It's a great idea.

Especially if you're trying to get young people in.

And a lot of these old buildings are getting filled up now.

And we do have a small business thing here, it's run by Missouri Northwest, and it permits small businesses to get help setting up a business plan and stuff.

Really?

Yeah.

We have a lot of small businesses.

Moderator: We talked about the future of downtown. What would you like it to be? What sort of businesses would you like to see?

Hick's.

I want to see the fountain put back.

An ice cream place.

(many people talking at once.)

And underground... there's the block, and it's like a basement.

It's like a walk-in basement with a stairway that goes down to the doors.

Moderator: So it was just a basement ice cream shop?

Yeah.

Also, like a New York City pizza place kind of a thing.

Moderator: Why did it close?

I don't know. It was great.

And the gift shop, with all sorts of Christian stuff.

It's like a Hallmark.

It moved away from downtown.

It would be nice to see a place with electronic stuff.

That would be nice.

Radio shack's the only place now.

Or Wal-Mart, and they definitely don't have much.

We used to have a car audio place in town, and we don't have that anymore.

A parking lot somewhere.

(laughter.)

I don't mind walking on nice days, but when it's cold and you want to go to the Boji Stone, you don't want to walk.

The movie theater used to be right up here. People from all over knew that movie theater. It was awesome.

Moderator: What else would you like to see?

A place for kids to hang out that no one would get in trouble.

And that's controlled.

Because the only thing to do in Chillicothe is drink, so we have a lot of drinking. People get tired of the bowling alley and movies.

We need a place like they have on "Friends." With that couch and chairs and a table.

A pool table.

Turn the old Wal-Mart into something.

You're all over that.

Have a dance club, and laser tag, and stuff. It's huge.

Multi-purpose building.

Hey, four years from now, let's do that.

Okay.

I have to get through school first.

Moderator: What else would you like to see?

It would be nice to have stuff that we go to the City for. Gas prices are high, so it would be nice to bring the City to us.

American Eagle.

Some sort of sporting goods store.

If we get a strip mall...

(many people talking at once.)

I don't think we could support a real mall.

They're going to have Lowe's and Applebee's in the strip mall.

(many people talking at once.)

It's SO far!

Moderator: What would you change about the way downtown looks?

More trees.

I mean, it's nice the way it is. They could add, too.

I like the mix of the old stuff and the new stuff. There's State Bank and all those, and then Citizens Bank.

They need a little sitting park by the old buildings.

I hate those.

Like they did there.

They're so pointless.

That could turn into somewhere where the gang people go.

The homeys and the essays?

(laughter.)

Really, this town is safe.

We're all talk.

But I would be scared. I'd be like, "Mace. Chhhhh!"

Moderator: So you're saying more green space?

Yeah.

We need more places that are interactive where people can Chillicothe.

Those stupid cobblestone roads.

I like them.

They're in random spots downtown.

I like them. Maybe they should do more.

But I hate how it's all bumpy when you go over it.

Moderator: Do you plan on staying here, or do you want to get out?

I'm outta here.

I'm to the city.

I'm going to St. Joe.

I'm going closer to St. Louis.

It depends, because I want to start a business, but I don't want to come back to Chillicothe.

Everybody says they don't want to come back, but they do come back.

It's a great family town. When we're older...

It's a good place to raise kids.

You don't get the urban life. Everyone knows everyone.

And it's pretty conservative.

I actually want to come back here and teach.

I want to leave because there's more drama opportunities.

We're both technician oriented, and there's no job opportunities available for us. We have to leave to go to the city. That's the only way to make a living.

Moderator: Are there jobs for other people?

Yeah. It's pretty broad.

All the common stuff. Unless you choose something really abstract.

I wouldn't mind coming back, I wouldn't mind exploring somewhere else.

I think it's good to figure out what's out there.

When I go to Trenton, I get really confused. That whole 5-thing...

We used to have a college here, the business college.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: For a lot of you who moved here, was it because your parents moved back here?

My dad's the principal, but he didn't live here before.

My dad came back here. We lived near Kansas City, but he came back here for a job.

Are you guys kind of glad you did move here though?

Yeah, for the most part. It's just different. I wouldn't want to be back there, just because I'm different and the people I knew are different. And Chillicothe's a good town.

Moderator: Are there any places that you've been that you wish your downtown was like?

Not really? Ours is pretty good compared to other downtowns.

Ours is nice and open.

Have you ever seen Carrolton Square? It's all one-way streets and...

(laughter.)

That's all.

Moderator: Thank you very much!

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SECTION III

CITY AND COUNTY OFFICIALS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Tell me a little about Chillicothe in general. Describe it to me.*

I would have to say it's a very good place to raise children, because of the lack of crime and the good education.

It's a community of people that when they see a need, they get in gear and get things taken care of.

It's very progressive, good school system, good churches, good people of all levels of education and economic status. Just good salt of the earth people.

And we can accomplish anything, as long as the community works together.

And we're far enough away from Kansas City and St. Joe that we have a very good retail base.

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

Definitely the right direction within the last 10 years. Definitely went forward. We've brought new businesses in. Competition is great, because it brings more people to your community. 12 years ago when I was elected, we was going over the sales tax, and it was good, but it started dropping, and the reason it was dropping is that we were losing too many little businesses, but now that's taken a turnaround. There are larger businesses coming. With our progress of new businesses, it draws people here, and the sales taxes went up for the city and the county.

One example, I was at Chillicothe Boot Shop one day, and he said that his customers came for Lowe's or Applebee's, but they stopped in at the Boot Shop afterward.

The small businesses we get will be the niche businesses that fall in between the big boxes, a unique product that will stand out.

Of course the service end of things continues to thrive and grow. That generates money in our community.

I think most of our industrial businesses have stayed consistent, and we haven't lost any of them. If we bring in another small industry in and employ another 100 people, that's big. That's where we've been really fortunate.

Plus the prison. A prison's coming on board in Chillicothe.

Moderator: *What are the main shopping areas for local residents?*

You've got your downtown area, and you got a shopping center at the north and south ends of town, and one not quite at the south edge of town. They're kind of scattered, which is good.

The town has two major highways, and 36 is on the south, and 65... between the two is a major shopping area. That's where the traffic is at.

That adds to the pull factor, being at the center of 2 highways.

People come in from 35 to 40 miles away. There's more draw from the North and East because of St. Joe and Kansas City.

_____ from the small business bureau printed out a report before getting Lowe's here and some of the others, and he'd be a good person to talk to, and he knows what the draw area is for Chillicothe.

Moderator: What dining and entertainment options are popular?

We don't have no big fancy restaurants, but we do have a lot of restaurants. People drive to Chillicothe for shopping and to eat. We don't think we have a lot of nice places, but we got a lot more nice places than a bunch of other areas.

We have about 38 different places.

And we have Mexican, Chinese.

We have a 24-lane bowling alley, a 6-plex theater.

YMCA.

As far as recreation and entertainment, in this 35-40 mile radius, we're probably the only one that has anything.

Even the youth travels to our YMCA.

Plus the performing arts center, which is state-of-the-art, that draws a lot of people in for performances and fine arts.

Concerts.

Two beautiful parks.

And the YMCA, any town the size of Chillicothe would give anything to have one the size of ours. Their membership and activities are unbelievable.

Two golf courses, one private and one public.

A college league baseball team with the Mudcats, and we have a stadium for them.

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

I think the problem you're always going to have anymore, I can remember when all the businesses had a retail business in them, a small business. Somebody owned each business. Well, you're not going to have that no more because nobody can afford to go into business for themselves. And the banks don't loan money on inventory. So, where all the small businesses were, there's offices. An office isn't going to bring anybody downtown except for one purpose.

I think the buildings in downtown is a factor, because they have to bring them up to city code, and moneywise it makes more sense to build somewhere else.

And parking is limited downtown. Downtown has gone from retail to a service industry. The downtown buildings became empty and became services.

Moderator: What are the reasons people come downtown?

City hall.

A couple of jewelry stores.

Banks.

That's where all the events are.

A couple clothing stores.

And a drugstore.

We're probably very fortunate to still have several retail businesses downtown.

And the library.

And the courthouse. It's a county seat, so the courthouse is downtown.

And a lot of your, you don't have a lot of business offices away from downtown. You come to a lawyer...

Accountant, insurance.

But it would be nice to have retail. The more retail you have, the more you're going to draw people to your town. Everyone likes to compare shop.

(agreement.)

You know, with the advent of the fuel economy, to drive 100 miles or 150 to Kansas City and back, that in itself is becoming an expensive little trip. If those retail places were in downtown, people could stay here and leave those dollars in our community...we'd be a hit.

We're also running into the Internet shopping. If you can't afford to drive...

That's not unique to Chillicothe.

I know it's not, but we have to deal with it.

The big box stores with their draw has hurt our downtown area so much. You just can't compete. You can't compete with a Wal-Mart or a Costco. Unless you've got a niche.

A lot of times people who get into small business buy themselves into employment.

We really need our state to get on board with a streamlined sales tax act to collect tax on Internet sales.

Well, your sales tax is pretty fair tax, because when you spend money you pay tax. You don't want to continue to increase property tax.

You have to say that Chillicothe is a farming community. All of our sales and things grow up from farming.

Not as strong as it used to be, but the small farmers have employment in town. We still have that agricultural base. We're moving more away from that, though.

You know, I know that being a small retailer, I know that when you bring a big store in, it hurts small retailers, but we've got a choice—you can either bring them into your town, or you let them build 25 miles down the road, they hurt you twice because they take your tax money. I'd rather be hurt once than twice. If my son wasn't in the jewelry business in Trenton, I would have to close my store when I retire because no one's going to borrow money to buy it. When a big box store comes to our town, we better thank god that they came.

And the more people who come to town...

They go to the theater, bowl, shoe shop.

But if they're the only business in town that has a product, the price can be different too. They have no competition. The competition's important.

Moderator: Let me ask you about the user-friendliness of downtown Chillicothe. Is it easy to find your way around?

I think it is. We have people walk into stores all the time. They can stop anybody on the street. People are very friendly and very helpful.

But you can't miss downtown, because it's right on the highway.

(many people talking at once.)

It's so easy to tell someone how to get somewhere.

At the courthouse, we keep the same map, but my girls and I try to send them down here, because in the Chamber office, there's information galore.

Moderator: What about parking? How is parking downtown?

We could use more parking downtown, but it's not as bad as it used to be.

It depends on if there's court.

Generally you can find parking anytime you want.

The biggest problem is that I want to park right in front of the store. It's a perception. It's all in our head.

You go to Kansas City and you'll walk farther to get from your car to the store, but people here want to park right in front of the door.

We have a problem with businesses' employees parking in front of other people's stores.

At one time, there was a ceramics shop, and the bank was on the corner, and I instructed my officers to park right in front of the bank and then move their cars later, to keep the spots open.

Well, employees are just like customers. They want to park right in front of the store, and that's not good. And the old owner of the Citizens Bank made a parking lot, and no one would go down there and park there. You could build a parking lot, and they still wouldn't go there. I don't think they would.

Parking meters would solve a little of that.

But that would make them park closer so they wouldn't have to walk far.

I don't think it's a real problem.

Moderator: What about business hours and locations?

Well, we tried one time to get the stores to stay open until 9:00. You can go to Wal-Mart, but you can't shop downtown after 6:00.

You know, we tried everything, you know, if the merchants would stay till 6:00 it would be a real plus, because a lot of people get off work at 5:00. I don't think opening earlier would make a difference, but staying open later would make a difference.

(agreement.)

The biggest thing that I see that irritates me is during the holiday season, of all times you need to be open, there is two businesses that stay open every night, and it's the two jewelry stores. There's not another retailer open. Not one.

Our business stays open till 5:30 and you have that 5:00 rush after people get off work.

I think it's something that the community just knows and adjusts to. I know that certain stores close at 5:00, so I need to go before that.

(noise, unintelligible.)

Moderator: Let me ask you about housing. Is there much housing downtown?

No, there isn't.

Moderator: Is there a demand for it?

I would say downtown apartments come last.

Most of what's downtown is federal subsidized.

Most of the apartments from 20, 30 years ago aren't in existence anymore.

Center apartments and the Strand are both subsidized. There's not much demand.

Moderator: Do you see any particular market that downtown housing might appeal to?

Probably young people.

In larger communities, you've got lofts that younger couples are moving to. I don't know if that would appeal to young people.

I don't think it would.

We built condos down here, and they're impossible to sell.

I think it would be tough.

Moderator: How do people in Chillicothe find out about what's going on downtown?

On the Internet.

(many people talking at once.)

A lot of people come into the courthouse say they get it from the Internet.

The paper.

The radio. The radio keeps people posted.

Our tourism isn't just a Chillicothe tourism thing, it's an area tourism thing, so we promote each other. Jamesport and...we cover a pretty good area.

It seemed like the last time I got on the Tourism website, it wasn't as up-to-date as the Chamber's. It's a really good website, the Chamber website.

Moderator: Are there big events that draw people downtown?

Two or three parades.

(agreement.)

The parades really bring them in.

And Chataqua in the fall brings more people to Chillicothe than ever.

But not to downtown.

There's a farmer's market on the west side of the courthouse, and that's a good draw.

We have a BooFest in the fall.

(many people talking at once.)

That brings 1600 kids.

And we have a car show. It does bring a lot of money into our community, even though not downtown.

Anything you can do to promote the community is important. They know where Chillicothe is and they think about it when they want to go shopping. It's important to promote the community.

Moderator: Let's talk about the future of downtown Chillicothe. What kinds of businesses would be a good fit for downtown?

Well, I think any small retail business would be great to have downtown.

I think it's going to be tough for a lot of types of retail businesses to make it downtown, because they rely on volumes. The clothing and shoes market is tough downtown, because you can't generate that much revenue.

(many people talking at once.)

It's very difficult. Some higher margin things, like jewelry stores, work downtown.

(laughter.)

You have to watch it, though. It has to be unique, because if it's not, the big box stores are going to kill them.

Unless there's a designated antique area all in the same place, that would bring people in. It would have to be concentrated that would bring people to... one little mom and pop store of some kind that's retailing any type of product would have difficulty. But if you had several unique...

(many people talking at once.)

An example of that is the Boji Stone. Just because of the drinks and the coffees and the good food, the atmosphere, people love that place.

It's unique.

It's a little different from what we're used to.

We used to have a little ice cream store downtown that sold a variety of ice cream, but they got killed in the wintertime. People would line up in the summer. It was a unique store. You couldn't buy that anyplace else.

Moderator: What about dining and entertainment downtown?

Eating places. We need good ones.

(agreement.)

A good steakhouse. The one we got is good, but another one...

Restaurants are a tough business, but they draw. They definitely draw.

And the ones that have been down on the Square have been shorter than the outer areas. Through the years it doesn't seem like they have much luck.

If you've got a lunch hour and there's no parking, you'll go someplace else.

That's why the Boji Stone does such a good business, because they deliver.

And a lot of people on the Square will walk over there, and a lot of people will park in the back and walk through the back door.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

Downtown primarily now is service businesses. There's not much retail downtown really. There's a wholesale beauty shop, two jewelry stores, the shoe store's going out of business, so...dance and clothing stores...when _____ retires, nobody's going to continue that. A clothing store downtown doesn't generate enough money.

And you've got to put in a lot of hours.

And Friends does so well because she's got two other stores.

You know and a place we haven't mentioned is _____'s little store called Vintage Antiques. That has a lot of crafts and collectibles.

It's got to have a pretty good margin.

Well, she's commissioned out those booths, and she gets a lot of traffic down there.

I have an old jewelry case, and she was down on Washington Street, and she's doing twice the volume downtown than at the other places... I don't like parking on Washington Street, either. At least there's parking downtown.

Moderator: What about parks and recreation downtown? Do you see a need for that?

Yeah, sure.

We don't have any walking trails, but that's a good idea.

People walk in parks.

And people walk in the Y.

Not that anything's organized down here, but you'll see people walking around downtown. But It's not a trail by any means.

Moderator: What sorts of improvements would you like to see regarding the look and feel of downtown?

The sidewalks are in pretty good shape, because the City fixed those. The worst problem is probably the metal siding on the buildings.

We put in a little landscaped green area by the courthouse, and people mention how nice it looks.

A vast improvement.

And there's a lot of planters downtown now. People are really working a lot. Our downtown looks nice. There is some buildings that need a little TLC in them. And we've got one that needs to come down. But...

Moderator: What's wrong with some of these buildings?

I don't really know. There's an old hotel which has been closed for years, 6 or 8 years, and every time the city makes a little bit of noise about doing something, the guy does minimal repairs. The city either needs to condemn the building or force him to do something with it, because it's ridiculous. It's the biggest problem downtown. Another building's got some structural issues. The rest are in okay shape, though.

On the east side, those buildings have a metal façade on them and it covers the original architecture.

The rent on those buildings is not that much. You could just take it down. You could do a conservation easement to redo the façade, but... on one of those, they're getting less than 600 in rent. How are you going to do that? And we've got some money through the Main Street program, but it's not enough to make it work. More than the building's worth.

It comes back to that age factor of those buildings. A lot of them have come to the point where it's not worth it to repair the buildings. It's less expensive to just build something.

Well, most of the old buildings downtown have sat there and held each other up forever. You tear one down and it's like dominos. They were leaning against one another.

They are the history of our community, too, though. There has to be something done to them.

And most people, you can't build...somewhere in Texas, they built new buildings just like the old ones used to be, but that would cost too much. You can't rent it for 300 a month and make it worth it.

Moderator: From the perspective of government, what would you say is the highest priority to put downtown on the path to revitalization?

That's a big question.

It goes back to retail business.

Almost everything's been done. We've got planters and parking and new, old lighting.

You could take a few buildings down around the fringes and create some more parking, like around the library over there. You could create parking over there.

We've talked a little about parking earlier, and there's a perception. You could have a whole parking lot, and people wouldn't want to park there.

Well, you could have that, but we don't right now. There's the one by Ann Street, and it's full.

And across from City Hall.

But the access is not the best... But there's no, if you had some fringe parking. They're spending money on the library, but they have no parking.

They have 6 or 8 spaces there.

There's some that they could do around there. There's a couple buildings in awful shape.

There's not very many vacant buildings downtown.

No, there aren't.

One of the things that creates traffic downtown is our murals. A lot of people come to look at our murals.

We've got 13 murals.

The government relies on sales tax to support all these activities, and the odds of anyone generating a tremendous amount of sales tax downtown is not very likely.

But we could keep everything up in good shape, and it'll keep everything looking nice. We're getting ready to clean up the exterior of the courthouse, and that'll make a huge improvement.

(agreement. Many people talking at once.)

Revenue's going to be generated out of our TIF area, too.

(agreement.)

And it's going to be the bigger businesses. A small business like mine, you can't afford the rent.

Well, that type of business has to generate more volume.

Moderator: Thinking about the other downtowns you've been to, what aspects of other downtowns would you like to see Chillicothe resemble?

It's all been unique. One is Atchison, Kansas, and there are all kinds of unique shops down there. But there's not a lot of open spaces in our downtown, and you'd have to have several.

Westin is another...you can go from shop to shop, and everything is different.

Mexico, Missouri looks a lot like Chillicothe.

What's the population of Mexico?

I think it's about 15,000.

Really?

Moderator: Any other downtowns?

Lot of downtowns on most communities don't have a major highway going through them, and if you're traveling and you have to specifically get off the road...

Liberty's got a square around it.

Maryville now has a bypass.

And you don't take the time to drive downtown if you don't have to.

So that's one of the really strong things for us, is that people have to come through our downtown area.

It looks pretty good, too.

And we do have lots of events that bring people here, so there's opportunities.

And there's a downtown coordinated Christmas effort, as far as lighting.

From one end of town to the other.

We do little sled rides and stuff like that.

Activities in the evening all over downtown. But kind of a waste of time when you've got only two businesses open during the holiday season.

But if there were other businesses... some downtowns have big open vacant buildings that you can change. We really don't have that. We've got a bunch of small buildings here. None of them are very large, and we don't have a big open area next to downtown that you can develop something in.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

...You can run a TIF uptown, but they take a lot of sales tax to work. If you abate property taxes...they're not that high anyway.

We may be in a mode that this area is becoming more service oriented...

If it's going to be service oriented, you'd need small restaurants and jewelry stores and coffee shops...those fit the spaces that we have, too. And we have to look at, it has to be something where you can get the inventory and the sales would match up.

It's limited.

But if you come up with something unique, it would work. Like the Boji Stone.

I think the community's been addressing all these issues. The beautification, the lighting—we're not starting from square one today. We've been at it a while.

We've got to get outside the box, though. Some new ideas. Someone looking from the outside in.

(agreement)

Moderator: Thank you very much.

SECTION IV

RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Tell me a little bit about your community.*

The Chillicothe area is very friendly, wonderful school system...very wonderful to raise a family, a lot to offer in entertainment and jobs, we're a growing city...

What I like about Chillicothe is it's a place that gives you a lot of opportunities, whether you're single, married, with young kids or old kids. The opportunities are across the board for everybody. You just need to look for it sometimes, but it's there.

Chillicothe is a very progressive city, constantly improving its surroundings and the businesses and services.

I believe that Chillicothe is one of the most outstanding cities in the area. We have so much to offer, but I think the main highlight of our city is what we have to offer to our youth—the YMCA, the park, tennis courts, the aquatic center. For the future, you've got to keep your youth here. If all of our students went to college and never came back, we wouldn't have a future. So I believe emphasis should be on young people.

A lot of my friends that come in from Kansas City and St. Louis are amazed. It surprises them that we have the YMCA, the aquatic center, the country club, the golf course, the movie theaters, the bowling alley... we have the security of a small town, but a lot to offer.

We've always been a regional hub. We used to be a retail hub, but we're still a hub for transportation with the major highways, and we make use of our opportunities...

(unintelligible)...we're a big small town. We have everything for us to live comfortably, a full-fledged hospital, full-time fire and police departments...I really like it here because it is a progressive city.

I second that. I moved here, and I noticed, coming from a bigger city, this has probably got more going for it than a lot of the bigger cities. It's good to see people get together and get behind stuff. I was in Southeast Missouri, and the town just threw me off. Chillicothe was a breath of fresh air.

I'm not going to say progressive, but I'm going to call them go-getters. Chillicothe has it all. The thing I like is everybody's so friendly. It's easy to get to know people. I spend a lot of time in Trenton, but it ain't the same. Chillicothe is a different environment.

I second that.

What amazes me the most, I'd like to find another community this size where you can sit out at a park and watch baseball during the day, and then in the evening sit in a 900 seat auditorium and see a concert or a play. We do have it all from the YMCA to our arts council, and I think coming from the school's perspective, the support from the community for all programs is not second to anybody.

When you're talking about things to do in Chillicothe, people don't seem to know about our museum. Anybody that visits us is amazed at our museum, how clean it is, how things are displayed. That goes along with education and entertainment.

I think we need to mention our churches.

(many people agreeing.)

I believe we have every denomination.

We have 25 or 26 churches.

Did anyone mention all our foundations? I've spoken with other communities, and they're amazed. We have foundations, and the generosity of their donations make it possible to do stuff.

Moderator: Do you think Chillicothe is moving in the right or wrong direction?

Definitely the right direction.

(agreement, unanimous.)

Moderator: For local residents, what are the main shopping areas?

Dollar General, Wal-Mart, Hy-Vee, Piggly Wiggly.

You don't really have to go out of town for most everything.

Yeah.

Lowe's is here now. And Walgreens is coming soon.

We've got a clothing store on the north end, Wal-Mart on the south end, and some in the middle.

I do most of my everyday shopping here, but I go to Kansas City once every couple months for craft stuff, scrapbooking, kids clothing.

That's a good point, because when I first lived here, we used to have a neat children's store, and we don't have that anymore. I mean, you can buy things at Wal-Mart, but it's not the neat children's items that specialty stores carry.

I'd like to see more variety in the downtown, where people can shop downtown. That would be cool. Like Sedona, Scottsdale...people don't drive around all day. They walk. I see that missing here. It's set up for it. Nobody's going to move their businesses, but you can't do a lot of shopping downtown.

If you compare us to Kirksville, we don't have all of our population on foot.

Part of our problem is 65 goes through our downtown, so it's not as safe for walking because we have semis going down the road.

But if you move 65 and we don't have the traffic, then our eating establishments might go on to another town rather than coming back into Chillicothe from the outskirts.

Moderator: What are popular dining and entertainment choices?

We have a multitude of restaurants. I think we have 27. The steakhouse, barbecue, Golden Corral, Washington Street.

El Toro.

KFC. We've got steak to barbecue to Applebee's to pizza.

The catfish place.

There's always room for Denny's.

Or Long John's Silvers.

Moderator: Let's get to downtown specifically. What direction do you think it's moving?

The Main Street is a great idea, and it's making progress, but we were 20 years too late getting started. We let things go a little too far. We didn't preserve our Square well. We didn't have a way to do it.

The one building I noticed is, there was this big 2-story iron-front building, and that should've been preserved, but they weren't preserving stuff when I first came here.

I believe through the Main Street program, they've done wonders for the downtown. Saturday, we have our Strum and Stroll, and it brought people in town. We bring them downtown, and it's good for a city to have this, but we have 2 eating establishments downtown, 2 clothing stores, 2 jewelry stores, 3 banks, but where are the people that come downtown going to shop? Are they going to take time to actually shop at those businesses? If the city wants shopping downtown, I don't know if those stores are going to bring in those shoppers. We used to come downtown on Saturday nights, and you'd walk downtown. Now when we come downtown, we're going directly to a single store or restaurant. I cannot tell you, this Saturday was the first time I'd walked around the Square completely.

We used to have a JC Penney and several clothing stores.

Grocery stores. And you'd come downtown on Saturday night. Well, the Boji Stone stays open until 8, but everything else only until 5 or 6. They're all closed when people get off of work.

One thing that hurts downtown is not having a common area. You think of the Plaza or anywhere there's an entertainment district, there's a place where people can gather.

Moderator: *You mentioned a few of the businesses downtown. Why else do people come downtown?*

The courthouse.

The jails.

Legal stuff.

The banks.

Once a week, I take my daughter to ballet class. And the Halloween trick-or-treating, or the Strum and Stroll. The special events bring us down here. A lot of businesses aren't open late, so we can't come down after work. Is it worth their while to stay open late for the few people who might come down? They've got to figure it out.

The common thing that most people say about downtown is a lack of good parking. A lot of time, there's a lot of spots around, but it's always on the other side of the Square. Everybody wants to drive, nobody wants to walk.

We're willing to go to Wal-Mart and have to park at the end of the lot, but... it's just ingrained into our mind, and it's convenience. We've never had to walk a block to get where you want.

You mentioned, you go to Kansas City, and you'll walk farther in a shopping mall...

But if you're going by stores on the whole walk, it's different.

And most places appreciated the walk-in customers. Most of your shops invite people to come in and walk around. I truly believe that Wal-Mart and stuff like that have depleted our downtown area.

People come downtown for the beauty shops.

But they go to their appointment, and that's it.

(agreement.)

If you go to Jamesport, you can park 2 blocks away, and...

Well, there's something to browse.

I lived in Booneville before here, and it's a beautiful city, but the downtown area was blank with empty storefronts. The City tried to fill them up with pictures, but they were empty. There was no life downtown. There was nothing to look at. That's the most important thing to avoid is empty storefronts... Owners should be required to put something in storefronts that aren't rented.

Is all of our buildings full? Except the ones that are having repairs. I believe most of the buildings are filled.

Yeah.

There's that big building.

It's been empty for quite some time.

Right on the corner...they moved to another building across from Hy-Vee.

(many people talking at once.)

They took all the woodwork out of that building.

I do think it would be nice to take a building like that, and just board it up, so the windows aren't open and the pigeons aren't flying in.

It should be used for something. Even if it's divided up.

There's not always a use that's economical, but we ought to have a way of preserving things.

(noise, unintelligible.)

So they just tear them down instead of preserving them.

(noise, unintelligible.)

We have too many cash advance places, and they look bad.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: Is downtown user-friendly? Is it accessible and easy to get around?

Yeah. It's easy to give directions, because we're on a grid. That grid is really good. Other towns are really hard to get around. You know what town I'm talking about.

We've got a way to encourage strangers to wander around, and that's the murals.

The Chamber has a lovely walking map for the murals. The other thing that I think is a little confusing is our one-way streets. I know when they put the one-way streets by the high school, that was good, but now the high school has moved. I think oftentimes when you see a person coming the wrong way on a one-way street, they're from out of town. The streets aren't well-marked, but we have two running north and south and two east and west...I think they could be eliminated.

It's a pain to navigate.

Maybe Walgreens can help change that. Where will their entrance be?

I'd like to see some of the highway signs that show you where the golf course is and where the school is. I know in Excelsior Springs, they have those signs.

Independence has a similar signage system.

We do have those for the hospitals.

We have one for the high school.

There used to be a sign down by Best Western that told you how far it was to the Green Hills Golf Course.

Moderator: *I know there's not a lot of housing downtown, but do you think there's a need or demand for more housing?*

I've heard a lot of younger people looking, they like the idea of lofts, and I think that would go a long way towards revitalization of downtown. Those second stories would be great to get filled, and it would be a source of revenue and pride.

One drawback is on-street parking.

Isn't the Alaska House supposed to be lofts?

That's their plan.

We had that new apartment complex, too. Has he sold any of those?

Part of the problem there is on-street parking.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

Those are expensive.

I think coming in, I think he didn't realize that even housing wasn't that extremely high, to pay that much for a loft. I think the loft apartments would be great, but I'm not sure a teacher could afford to come in and pay \$150,000 for a loft.

You'd be surprised.

I've talked to the couple that's going to tear a couple buildings down to make parking available. So they'll cover that. The guy who took over the old Elks Club building, but he didn't take parking into consideration. So if you're going to do something downtown, you have to take that into consideration. Another thing we should think about is public transportation. Some buses are available, but I don't even know how to get one.

Some of them have set schedules. Otherwise, you call and tell them when to come.

But if you're not a senior citizen...

Anybody can use them. Anybody can ride them.

Moderator: How do people get information on what's going on downtown?

Local ad page. Constitution Tribune. Radio.

The website.

The Chamber has a web page, Main Street Chillicothe has a website with the whole walking tour...

(agreement.)

Commercial ventures put together these web pages that are pretty complete.

We have radio stations.

Also the public access cable channel is sometimes pretty informative.

I am amazed at how many people look at the Constitution online.

I get emails all the time from people who are looking at different websites.

I hear about a lot of stuff through email. Different groups have emails come out, and it spreads like wildfire.

Sometimes we make the 10:00 news in Kansas City.

I think we were featured on a news report, and someone was driving around looking at murals. It was a neat report. We made a good impression.

(side conversations.)

We are usually on the weather map, because we have a weather station.

We do have a very nice airport, which is accessible to small jets. So actually the access to our city is not just by car. We have the airport.

Do they have a car rental unit?

I don't think so.

They might have a loaner to get into town.

Moderator: Let's spend the rest of the time talking about the future. What kinds of businesses would you like to see?

I think we get quite a few people that go to the craft hall. Maybe some of the gift shops that are out farther.

A children's specialty store. But to sell an outfit that's \$50 is not reasonable. You can't compete with Wal-Mart, but still be reasonable. People around here will spend \$20 on a baby gift.

We used to have a nice scrapbooking store.

I heard she left because her husband got a job somewhere else. Her business was thriving.

I'd love to see that.

I think Chillicothe has shot themselves in the foot. The downtown can't have clothing and shoe stores or hardware stores because you've got Wal-Mart and Lowes. You can't compete. You're down to specialty stores now, which takes a lot of the uniqueness. You can't have that stuff because they've got it covered.

The community has to decide between the downtown mom and pop or the big chains.

Wal-Mart is a good thing, but it's going to change your downtown area forever.

I'd like to see a yarn and embroidery shop, maybe with scrapbooking, oil paint. Wal-Mart doesn't carry any of that. I have to go to Kansas City for a lot of that. I think there's a need for that, and we've talked to Wal-Mart about this, and they will not supply us. We do have fine arts classes, but we don't have access to supplies. I knit, and most of us all go to the city to get our yarn and needles. I think it's a shop that could easily take advantage of a smaller store downtown. It wouldn't have to be a large store. I hated to see the scrapbooking shop go out, because it was fun, and she had classes. Maybe knitting and painting could be classes. And I'd like to see an art gallery downtown.

Is there any plans for the gaping hole on the north side?

There's some plans, but they're not announced yet.

People spend a lot of time saying, "Hey, what do you think about a Build-a-Bear?" You've got to multi-market. If you have a craft place, or like an art gallery and the Boji Stone, wouldn't that be a nice partnership. And we have a little place right off of Main Street... (unintelligible). It would be nice to have places downtown. Maybe if people could start marketing with each other, maybe split the rent...

Boji Stone could use a bakery.

I also think more hands-on stuff for kids. I think it would be fun to take my kids to a place where you can make pottery, stuff like that. Some people like that hands-on stuff to do.

Like the ceramics store.

But it's off the path.

What about a good old hobby shop. There ain't a hobby shop in this town.

Not a single one.

(agreement.)

Is that racetrack still down there?

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

Moderator: What kinds of dining and entertainment would you like to see downtown?

Well, there's only one restaurant downtown.

Two.

I'd like to go to a restaurant to spend, say, an hour...I'd like to see some live entertainment.

The Wabash is the closest we have to that.

But that's outside.

I can recall when the Strand Hotel had their restaurant, and they had dinner music. A lot of times, coffee shops have guitarists sit down and maybe just play for tips. It's something that a young person can do, and get some experience...

Have you been to that dinner theater in Macon?

Yeah.

(side conversations. Unintelligible.)

A comedy club would be great.

Maybe it could be a magic show one weekend....

We could've done better before we tore down all the theaters.

I was at the steakhouse last week, and we met upstairs, and when we come down, there was nobody downstairs. If it had some kind of entertainment, maybe it would bring people in. It wouldn't have to be music.

They used to have a piano player.

I don't remember that.

If you did things like that, you might have other businesses shift their hours to later in the evening.

I'd like to see restaurants accent the older buildings. Renovate it, but I think about Old Spaghetti Factory in St. Louis...it would be nice to walk into a nice restaurant and have it look like that.

Wabash has been a big hit.

Yeah.

They took the old train station and made it a restaurant.

That's several blocks away, but they do have bands on the weekend, and it's an outside stage, and they serve liquor. They have quite a crowd.

You need something like that for the evening.

There's a spot downtown where they could do that. That would be a draw for the downtown.

We're working on it.

There are plans.

It's like what you mentioned about our museum. It's a shame it's not downtown. We get people into town, and if you had it downtown...we've got our nice antique shop, a museum, a water fountain...

People want to be entertained. We had our open house at the museum, and we had demos of weaving and spinning, we probably had 150 that afternoon. The next weekend, no entertainment, and you may have 10 there. So the answer to getting people there is to entertain them. I don't care if at the steakhouse, if you put a little restaurant on the sidewalks. I think entertainment is the biggest thing for people. Our Fine Arts theater, the Y, the...everything is the big word entertainment.

Unfortunately, our entertainment stretches away from the downtown. It's pushing north.

A while ago, you mentioned a little park. You have kids out there playing, and maybe you have a little concert, and then you have little shops...

One thing that bothers me about the community is that the social services have all moved up north, out of reach of the people who need those services. I think if they could move them back to the center of town, that would increase walking traffic. The people who work for these agencies would be in the downtown area. When I was in Little Rock, we had all kinds of services downtown.

I think government regulations have moved them out to specific buildings.

The older buildings don't conform to ADA.

I know that Division of Family Services used to be down here, but the government said that you need to have so many square feet of...

I'm just thankful that the library is still downtown. There was a movement to move it, because people thought it was too old to fix up. Now they're going to remodel it and keep it here.

Moderator: *Let's talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do you see room for improvement?*

I thought they made great strides at the courthouse, changing it around and adding green space, but I do think we need more of it.

I agree.

I think the sidewalks are pretty good, because over the past few years, they rebuilt them.

And some of our buildings need to be painted, cleaned up.

I mean, you can make it look however you want, and it wouldn't be an eyesore.

I think Washington Street itself is pretty dirty. I don't think it's clean. The street is filthy, the windows along the street are filthy...you've got all these brick things that are filthy.

Where's our street cleaner?

Good question.

They come out by my house.

Could you send them downtown?

They may stay out of Washington Street because it's a highway.

I do have to compliment the city on their hanging baskets.

When you talk about our downtown, a waterfall would be good...I'd like to see us someday get that.

A fountain?

Yeah, and more flowers.

You ever been to Pella, Iowa?

The other thing I noticed, when they did those corners with the bricks, they used the wrong kind of brick. But there is a street brick that won't deteriorate like that.

We had an awful lot of brick streets, and they pulled most of them up. There's only 2 sections.

Some of those brick streets can be very nice looking, but it has to be the right kind of brick. The kind they're using on these corners just doesn't hold up.

Now the courthouse is using concrete.

It looks nice.

The best part is the other side of Washington Street, but the bad side is the east side of the Square. Mismatched buildings. And then we really need a building code to build back in these empty spaces. You need to build something that doesn't look totally out of place, as the Citizen's Bank does. It's a nice building, but it doesn't fit.

But looking forward, you can't force a building owner to fix up something, but we need to encourage them to either fix it up or tear it down and build something.

There was a building they had to condemn.

A fellow in St. Joe bought a building, and the pigeons were all flying into it, and someone asked what he did with all the pigeon poop, and he said they put it in bags and moved it to the second floor.

I think the Lambert building, we discussed it at our mural committee meeting, and if the windows were closed up and painted... maybe a profile of something in the window to spruce them up, just to make it more appealing as you're driving by it.

In St. Louis, they did that with one of their walls.

They talked about that in the big city of Trenton once, painting downtown so it looks like stores.

And 3-D artists are amazing.

Somebody has to pay for it.

Moderator: Thinking about other towns, where have you been that you'd like to see downtown Chillicothe resemble?

Columbia.

California, Missouri. There's some things around the courthouse Square, and they did some real good work. The 2nd stories were available for rental, and all the storefronts had something in them. It changed the whole atmosphere of the town. These small town areas, in the 19th century, they were a good idea... Jamesport is the only town I know of, and maybe Rocheport, do quite well by specializing. I don't think it would be wise for us to be an antique city.

Arrow Rock.

Yeah. Those are quaint little historic towns, but Chillicothe is a different atmosphere. It's a different city, and it's commercial. And if you want to attract people, you need something to bring people to the city. Entertainment, commerce, retail, advanced education. That's one thing that upstairs could be used for, commercial training programs. Maybe ITT schools or whatever. There's plenty of space where that could be done. That would bring in students and faculty. There's all kinds of things that don't really take a lot of major change.

It's hard for some people to move their business here, because the code laws are pretty strict, and it becomes too expensive.

It's nice to have old buildings, but they are expensive to maintain.

Moderator: What are the highest priority in downtown Chillicothe moving forward?

They've done a good job in starting to maintain the look and preservation, storefronts and signage, but you go a block either way and it doesn't look as good. You've got to be able to move that out.

We need to bring businesses here that people want to shop at. The browsy places or the coffee places.

I know there's not a code around town, but the buildings should be maintained. The sidewalks swept, the beautification of planters...to make downtown more attractive. They're going to clean the courthouse this year. They have tried to maintain the clocks on the courthouse so they're the correct time. I have just driven around the courthouse and looked at the buildings, and I can see some that need even a touch of paint. There's a beautiful building with the eagle sitting up on top of it...that's a beautiful building, but whoever owns it is not maintaining it. It needs a fresh coat of paint on the front. Things like that, that if you let em go...

Main Street offers the tax credits, and all the building owners know about them, but you can't force them to participate.

I don't think you can really say there is one specific thing that we could do that would change the whole thing. It has to be several things that come together. You might have a starting place, but I think there's more than one thing. Everything we've talked about would be a part of it.

You need to get the business owners and the building owners to buy in. If you even have one eyesore, that's what people are going to remember. You need to get the buy-in... (unintelligible.) You're going to have to customize that to each building or business owner, to make sure the inside and outside are kept up.

A good example of that is the block on Washington between Jackson and Webster. We had 2 or 3 businesses that put up awnings, and others wanted to do it. If you get it started, then you can get something done.

How do you advertise events downtown, other than the whole strip advertising...

(laughter.)

I think it's tacky. We used to have a sign on the corner of the courthouse where they used to put the festivals or something.

(many people talking at once.)

If you're driving on Washington Street, when do you have time to read those advertisements? I think there ought to be some other way. We have to advertise the things that are going on, but there surely is some other way.

(side conversations. Agreement.)

I think we should regain our motto of “the city in the country.” We are a city, but we’re not like Kansas City or St. Louis. We’re nestled in the countryside.

What about our sliced bread?

(laughter.)

Moderator: Thank you.

SECTION V

BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Describe your community to me.*

I moved here 2 years ago from California, and it's the most dynamic community I've ever been to. People believe in it, they put their money where their mouth is.

I think we're probably (noise, unintelligible)...

It's a good rural environment, you know your neighbors, the parks and recreation are very good, and a lot of amenities are available for a town our size. YMCA, bowling alley, movie theater...

We're one of few communities our size that put together a long-range plan 15, 20 years ago, and saw it through.

We've got good food.

I think the community has always been progressive. They don't want status quo... (unintelligible).

From a bank standpoint, we have 4 locally owned banks.

And going to the banks, they made a hit with me. When I was closing from California to here, the money would've stayed there for 2 weeks before we were able to transfer funds, but our loan officer here walked the check across the street. That's personal service. Same day!

(many people agreeing at once.)

Moderator: *What else?*

I'll give you a little anecdote. Chillicothe is...if I came home, left my car running in the driveway, one of three things would happen. The car would run out of gas, a neighbor would turn it off and bring me the keys, or they'd turn it off and leave the keys in it. I don't think a lot of people in this town lock their doors. They don't worry about it.

It just seems like anything they take on, whether they're trying to raise money for someone with cancer or a sick child or the YMCA renovation...

The YMCA's expansions have all been paid for by the community.

I think we always exceed expectations of outsiders, whatever that may be, whether it's economic development to individuals.

There's a family that's only been here a year, and a tragedy came up, and people just came out of the woodwork.

I think culturally, too, we're pretty much there, we've got it. For a town our size, we have a performing arts center, a fine arts program, our schools. We've got about everything we need in a town this size. I'm really proud of the performing arts center.

It's great.

(agreement.)

It's as good as most communities'. And we wouldn't have gotten the symphony if not for it.

We had good feedback at _____'s house, and she met the Missouri Arts Council...

When there's a political race, we get almost everyone here, for one, donations, two, we're a thriving small town.

We're not afraid to stand up. Like, the prison. What can we do to keep it? The community got the land and the infrastructure to keep it.

They were going to close our existing prison, and we said we wanted another prison.

They said it was a done deal, it was gone, and the City purchased the land.

It helped that some of those politicians had been up here earlier.

Our county was ranked 3rd in the nation for the best rural place to be. And that was because we're so progressive and innovative.

The guy that runs the Wal-Mart here picked this place because he wanted to be back in Missouri, but he picked this one because he knew about all the expansion with Lowe's, Walgreen's, was coming down the pipe, and he liked the idea that we have all these outdoor activities, especially hunting, and they knew that this was a good place to be. He chose this out of 3,500 stores he could potentially go to. And he loves it here. He says he'd like to retire from this store. That's part of the inner workings of the community.

The community economic development... well...

Moderator: Where do people shop?

I think St. Joe is closeby, there's a nice mall there, and Kansas City...but I do most of my shopping there.

(someone entering, noise)...other places' downtowns are really small because everybody travels.

I think a lot of people still shop here.

I think whenever anybody has an opportunity to get stuff here, they do. I bet that's most of it.

Moderator: Are there any areas that people are forced to leave for?

People would like to see more varieties of retail.

That's one of the areas that we need to attempt to recruit. I don't think we've really attempted to recruit them.

Do you mean more higher-end retail?

We ought to go to another community that has a thriving downtown and find out what works there, and then recruit.

I sat in on a thing in Jeff City, and they gave us tools, but we need to have a community that will support it. We had a JC Penney, but they pulled out, and that definitely had a negative effect on our community. For us to get one of those guys now, it would be hard to do that, so...we support our community better now than when Penney was here. Then there was a lot more people going out of town. But if you need something you can't get here, everybody goes to the City.

There are some brands that are really looking for retail mature downtowns.

(many people talking at once.)

I don't know who those companies might be...whether we could attract them here or not, I don't know. A lot of places don't want to be at communities with Wal-Marts.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Is there enough dining and entertainment?

We have a lot of eateries.

Five years ago we didn't.

I think we're missing the market for upper-level fine dining.

Part of the plan for downtown would be to have 1 or 2 more restaurants downtown. It would be nice if we could stick the depot downtown.

Well, it's close to downtown.

Sebastian's is a good example, the food was good, but it was out of the way.

Moderator: What changed five years ago?

Well, from what _____ was talking about with the YMCA and the golf course and the Supercenter, the momentum continued.

We got the Wabash really because we recruited them.

It's a barbecue place.

We have El Toro.

We need more upper... but quite honestly, I don't think it could make it. Many of us would eat there, but for high volume and low margin...

Well, when we had our country club, we had our restaurant, and it was all paid for, and the guy refused... my point is it would be nice if we did have something, but even the bowling alley tried to have upper-end food, and they weren't really going to sell that.

Moderator: What about entertainment options?

A lot of people come here for entertainment. We have 6 shows.

The movie theater, the bowling alley, the recreational facilities...

We have...because of where we're located, people come because of attractions here.

The golf course has packages to visit Chillicothe.

(many people talking at once.)

Because we are a hub for the region, we do have places that don't have immediate stuff there, so we do tie it in quite a bit. Whenever you get somebody staying here, that's \$170 per day.

I saw two buses packed with people here, and they were going to the Mormon thing, but do they ever stop...it didn't look like they were going to spend a lot of money in our community.

Sometimes they stay here...

These are sometimes people who don't have a lot of money.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Let's change focus and talk about downtown. Do you feel the downtown is going in a positive direction?

If you were here 5 years ago, you'd see remarkable improvement from where it was. We have a long way to go, and we're making a lot of progress. And this DREAM initiative is important to us. If you would've looked at the Strand Hotel a few years ago, it was a dump. And now...

(many people talking at once.)

If we could do more of those, we have a couple more big buildings, and we could do some big-time projects. If we could get people to live downtown...and we have 2 restaurants downtown, and we could have more. A third one that could serve breakfast and lunch, maybe, and you could attract people to live on the second floor of these buildings.

(people agreeing.)

And even look at what this looked like 5 years ago...

The downtown, helping business owners and building owners put on fronts, that's the kingpin. The money is there to help you out to do things.

That's a start, but there's still so much to be done.

(agreement.)

Stairs are a problem...

The ADA is really...

If, though, you have a set of codes that treats historic buildings differently, then you can still do what everybody would like to do, but you have to have a separate set of codes. That'll eventually get done.

And not just for stairs, but for electric...this stuff is historic, it's old.

Moderator: Do you think there's a desire for housing downtown?

I know some older people that would like to, but as younger people come into town, right now there's no choice.

Younger people want yards for their kids.

No, I mean younger than that. Young couples or singles. If you look at some of those buildings at Kansas City, young people live there, but they turn over.

If you had a modest amount of people downtown, if you were able to renovate, even for office type spots...I bet you could get professionals that would be interested in that.

(agreement.)

Moderator: For those of you that own a business downtown, why did you choose to locate it there?

I opened my pharmacy 6 years ago, and we needed to be on the highway, and the building was vacant. It had been a pharmacy from the late 1800s and had closed in the 70s. I really thought that we would be temporarily downtown and moving to where the Hy-Vee is, but we discovered that it's a heck of a good location. It's a block off the main drag.

We did it for visibility. There's always parking with the courthouse and there's always activity.

The more we have, the more draw we have. There's no retailers, though, because they don't have the draw. If we have the draw for anything, it helps the whole downtown.

They have the HNTB study, and in that study that you have, they listed a whole host of people that we needed to have downtown, so I would hope... just like _____ should be downtown, a little restaurant, or a paint store...there's certain things that should be downtown, and we need to

attract them with a financial package as an incentive. Some of it comes back for the building owners. But it's got to be some kind of package. There's got to be money available for renovations, and then attractive leases, and then...Wal-Mart put a supercenter here because they knew they could draw here. There's people here. That's the direction we need to go if we want to get the young people back to live in this community. The way we get the young people to want to stay here is if they happen to be involved in a family business or nest with dad and mom. There's got to be a reason.

Good family living is a good reason, and a lot of people move back here for that.

My nephew moved back from Blue Springs, and they moved back because they wanted to raise their kids here. You know everybody's folks here. This community's small enough that...

Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? How about business hours?

The customers would like 6 in the morning to 9 at night, but the traffic flow...

They've been trained to accept the hours.

One thing I hear is that the hours that used to work for the working man's society worked then, but now that most households have both man and woman working, that woman might not have even a 30-minute lunch break...maybe it is necessary for one night a week to be open till 6 or 6:30 to accommodate the American lifestyle now.

My opinion on that is Lowe's, Wal-Mart, Target, wouldn't be open as late as they are unless it was feasible. Either we don't have what they want...that's why the downtowns are all dying. Wal-Mart can stay open later, have good lighting, have good parking...downtown's going to have to have that stuff to make it accessible and enjoyable. The City's going to have to come on board to have viable parking spots.

One of the things we could do is buy into this deal and get some help, and it's not unlike buying a couple lots and recommend to the business owners downtown that they designate that for their people. We tried to do that for the courthouse, and it was met with resistance. It's not unlike what they do on the Plaza.

Just like the parking lot of Friends.

But that's supposed to be for state bank only.

(many people talking at once.)

If we could make some of these one-way streets to two-way, a lot of this could be alleviated. You would have a whole different perspective. Because of the way downtown is set up, if you want to go to Model Cleaners, you've got to navigate. Otherwise you waste your time.

I don't think one-way streets are valid like they used to be.

(agreement.)

We've got to slow down the traffic downtown, too.

Moderator: *You said something about parking and lighting. Is your downtown not well lit?*

I don't think they're bright enough.

We have good atmosphere with our lighting, and I don't think safety is a big problem...

Because nothing's open after 5:30.

I guess we don't know how it's going to work, but...(unintelligible)...if we want people to come, we've got to stay open, and everybody has to do it. I fought the parking situation for years... Wal-Marts and all have done studies that if they can see your building, they'll park far away...we have to deal with that mentality. And lighting...

As long as the courthouse is downtown, we're going to have people downtown. Attorneys, accountants...we just have to be able to strategically place people downtown, but we need a strong downtown. Really, the downtown is kind of the core of the apple, and if we don't have a solid core, we don't have communities on the other sides of town.

I agree with you, that the stores that are off the Square, if you had them on the Square, it would really be better.

My experience, as a block and half from downtown, the previous owner said, "Everyone knows we're there," but people forgot that we were there. We have a downtown thing called BooFest, and thousands of kids walk our perimeter to get candy, and we had 5 people come from downtown to our building. No one would make that extra step.

Jamesport suffered that same thing. If you wasn't downtown... during tourism season, people wouldn't shop outside the perimeter of downtown. Until they started connecting those shops... I mean, here, Wabash will be considered downtown eventually.

(agreement.)

There needs to be places in between. You've got to go from the center corridor, as a strong core.

Look where Walgreen's is now, and that's close to downtown.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: *How do you communicate to people about your store and about downtown?*

I think a lot of the events, the BooFest, that's one thing, we had a Strum and Stroll over the weekend...we have to have more and more of those events. When I first moved here, we had carnival stuff...

(many people talking at once.)

I suggested to our visitor's bureau that we have a movie on the Square for residents to come, free of charge, and those are the kind of events that you do outdoors and people come and sit and watch.

They're doing one in the park.

If you could get the high school jazz band down here...

(many people talking at once.)

The first thing they started a week before school, and the street was closed Sunday through Sunday for the carnival, and people stopped coming into my business. But the Strum and Stroll, I love this. It got people downtown, and they left town with a good taste in their mouth.

And the streets weren't closed.

People have a good time.

(agreement.)

I think the Car Show is excellent.

If you're familiar with Pella, Iowa, they have a bandstand downtown every Friday night, and people are all down there. It's inviting to people, they can ride around and walk around... I was hoping that they'd put some grass back in by the courthouse.

You get a whole group of different people at Wabash.

This was every week.

Quincy, Illinois has a similar thing every Friday night. And they have their Farmer's Market the next morning.

We've got buildings down here that could be revived. If you go off the corner of the courthouse, that pulls right into your downtown area... (unintelligible).

(agreement.)

We also notice some thing about these vacant buildings. Some of these buildings will be saved.

(agreement.)

There's a lot of infrastructure things...we're redoing our library here, and you're not going to be able to see a lot of the stuff on the outside. A lot of it's electrical, plumbing...it's just old. That's a lot of our buildings.

Right.

You spent a zillion bucks redoing your building years ago. Those zillion bucks then are 10 zillion bucks now.

The courthouse did the same thing, too. Our community is progressive enough that they knew...there was no way to install what we would install in our homes, the heating system in the courthouse, so to keep it true to its historic...they put in a geothermal system. It cost a lot of money to do it right, but it's cut their heating bills in half.

Supposedly after the first year it's supposed to improve even more.

(many people agreeing at once.)

Our community is willing to restore what we have and think outside the box.

You're talking about, there's options, but where is the parking?

My skating rink would have to come down.

(many people talking at once.)

50 percent of people parked downtown work there, and park in front of other people's buildings. We need to fix that. I went to City Hall and tried to get them to change it... we already had our things in place, but we need to enforce it. The parking's here, but you have to be accessible and there has to be movement.

I know that was an issue of ours. As we got busier, every spot was...there was a few guys who would walk down from the police station to their businesses. But everybody that parks in most of the spots works down there. I think if there are additional lots off of the Square for people who work there, and that'll have to be a "police yourself." If everybody gets on the boat, it won't be an issue.

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

Children's. Affordable, reasonable clothing for children. Unless I want to go to Wal-Mart, I have to go to the City.

Sporting goods.

Your only option now is Wal-Mart. I get stuff online. We're very sports-minded in this community.

The downtown, and I'd love to say there'd be retail, but my dream is if you had every second level...if you're able to occupy second levels with professionals and first levels with services and retail, that would be great. If you really look around, my opinion is, go down and look at the main floor in a lot of buildings, they're great, but the second floors are...

You don't want the cheap renters and...

I know there's challenges because they're old buildings, but if you go back to a DREAM...if you're able to take the second floors and put professionals in there on a long-term basis, that would make the biggest impact on downtown. If you're able to do that downtown in a visible area...

When you say professionals...?

I'd love to sit here and say retail, but I think that's challenging.

My experience with our two residential units above our office, and my experience was having the residential was a nightmare.

That's the reason I said more professionals.

When it's residential, you hear their living.

(agreement.)

My dream would be...you heard about DREAM, and if we could do a pilot project with DREAM assistance, one of the ways we could accomplish...we'd take a building downtown, either Main Street or CDC, take an existing building and make the first level retail or something, and develop the upper floors to turn them into condos... but you've got to have the money.

But I think it would be easier or more realistic to think that you could have more business professionals moving downtown rather than condos.

You can get the money to do...

(many people talking at once.)

I'd like to see the downtown area be specialty shops. Candy shops, family-owned shops... something different. It's not a chain store, it's one-of-a-kind. Piece of Cake down the street, or Francine's...they'd move down here if it was viable. They move out because of traffic. There's no reason to move into a dead downtown. By building it back up, your rent will build back up from there. The idea is to start building with the idea that you get one structure, put a nice face on it, and get some specialty shops, but you've got to entice them. Ideally...it would be hard for me to come down here and see a huge chain store.

There's a community close to Memphis, and they wanted to draw artists, and they'd remodel a downtown unit and say, "we'll give you residential space with your gallery." If there's a specialty shop we'd like to recruit, that might be a way to entice them.

If you live above the store, you don't have to put up with the upstairs residents.

Back to the dream, my dream would be to get rid of the eyesore and to get rid of buildings around there to make the parking for people to live in the Leaper. I think that hinders anyone from looking downtown. The old Leaper. It's a cancer.

If we were able to have cleaned it up as it sat vacant...but we weren't able to do that.

I'm not blaming anybody. But that's my dream. If it's either torn down or something else go in there...but if it is bought and fixed...but there are adjacent buildings that can be taken down for parking. I, as a business owner, would never have chosen downtown to invest in because of this cancer.

In addition, we've done a fantastic job with façade renovations, but there's still buildings with tin on the front of their buildings, but that takes a lot of money...there is a good chance that the building would still be in good shape underneath it. But people are scared, but that is definitely one of my priorities. We need to give people the incentive to want to take down that tin.

(agreement.)

Or just take the street where the antique, and maybe make that a project there, turn a whole half-block into an antique area...

Incubator type thing.

If we had a museum downtown, that would be an additional draw to downtown.

(agreement.)

I do agree that we have no lack of traffic downtown, and I hope we never get bypassed... our problem is not our lack of traffic, it's that we have to get them to stop downtown.

I have great traffic in my store. They need to buy more things, but...

We need interesting, charming businesses that will pull them in. Like home town pharmacy.

People who come to my store, they're women, but a lot of them come from the traffic.

(many people talking at once.)

They need to have more choices downtown...

...you need an anchor, whether it's a museum or an anchor store or a reason, a nice little park area.

Moderator: Do you need more green space downtown?

Oh gosh, yes. Other towns have lots of green space.

The green space, there's a lot of spaces in other towns that don't get used.

Green space is a park, though. But there's a fine line between turning into space that has to be maintained and having a parking lot that looks good over there. You can't just tear down the Leaper and make it a viable place to play, but... a lot of that other stuff could be torn down for park areas. Again, you might need a draw next to it.

Do we still believe an anchor is needed downtown?

You could do clusters. You could do a cluster of... one feeds off the other.

If we had a fudge shop.

An ice cream shop.

(many people talking at once.)

That is true, but that goes back to ease of parking. If I put a golf shop or something that would draw... people always talk about stupid parking. It would scare you how many people circle and decide to come back another day. Parking is directly related to my sales.

(agreement.)

And trying to get there before 5:30 is impossible.

(agreement.)

Moderator: I have one last question. What's your highest priority that the City can do for you?

We're going to lose our Main Street designation if the City doesn't get on board financially. We were told by National Historic District 5 years ago that we're one of the only communities in the US that's not being funded by their city. We have a new board member, and she's going to go down with our director and tell the City Council that we're going to lose it if they don't get their head out of their you-know-what. You know, we're only getting \$5000 in in-kind labor from the City.

Water and flowers.

(many people talking at once.)

Right now they're paying 3% of our operating budget. And they need to pay 30%.

We have the same problem with our utilities.

They profit from it.

And they need education. Just like the codes. No, all in all, they need to be educated.

We have our own utility here, but they act like they don't belong in this community. And we should not have utility lines that go up and down that are distracting the beauty of our community. They should be put underground.

Our sidewalks right now, you saw how bad they look, and it's a safety concern too. It's horrible, because your feet on that loose brick.

And some of that is basic fixing.

They put in the wrong kind of brick.

They didn't do their research.

When HNTB did their study, they wanted to put a little median strip between Washington and Locust with parking, and the City street department came back to say the street's 1 foot too narrow. They just didn't want to do it. They're not forward thinking people.

They didn't want to work together.

We should have a unified government here anyway. It should be city and county together. That would be a real priority. Everything would be better that way.

Being a new person in town...they've got tennis courts all over the place, and they're expensive. They've got to get their priorities straight.

The flowers are fantastic. People always comment on how beautiful the downtown is, and they take care of them. It's excellent for downtown.

The next big project in this community is a brand new hospital. There will be a new hospital on the north end of town.

Moderator: Thank you very much.