

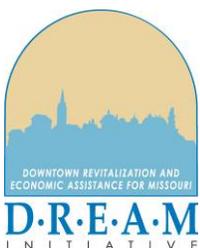
DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION &
ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE FOR
MISSOURI

August 20, 2008

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

FINAL SURVEY
FINDINGS & RESULTS

Clinton, Missouri



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE FOR MISSOURI (DREAM)
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SECTION I FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted four focus groups in Clinton, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the Clinton community in regard to the downtown area. The four groups included the following: 1) new residents, 2) downtown business owners, 3) city staff, and 4) elected city and county officials. 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 complete transcripts of the four meetings.

A. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE BUSINESS GROUP:

The following questions were posed to the business group:

General Questions about Clinton

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 Clinton 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?

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

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

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 Clinton?

Downtown Specific Questions

05. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Clinton 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 Clinton? 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 Clinton. 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 Clinton to resemble?

C. THE CLINTON 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 Clinton as a friendly small town with a sense of community, good healthcare, a quality education system, and many nearby outdoor recreation opportunities. All of these features, according to participants, make Clinton a good place to raise a family.

Clinton is the county seat of Henry County and a regional hub for surrounding rural towns for employment, as well as for shopping at large chain stores such as Wal-Mart. Since Clinton is about a one hour's drive from Springfield and Kansas City - both larger cities with more shopping and entertainment - residents generally feel that they have access to the luxuries of bigger towns while still being able to live in a smaller environment. The Downtown Square is, according to participants, among the largest in the country (perhaps *the* largest), and it is bustling with professional offices related to the courthouse and with a modest amount of retail business.

The participants felt that Clinton is moving in the right direction. The Square is being renovated and has been aesthetically improved, Clinton is building a new high school and a new airport, and the population has grown slightly over the last ten years.

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 area in Clinton is at the East Junction, right off the highway coming into town, and includes major chain stores anchored around Wal-Mart. Downtown is mainly a service area but does have some retail, and some participants call it the second-largest retail area in town, admitting that it still has a long way to go.

According to the groups, people come from about a 60-mile radius around Clinton, to do their shopping at Wal-Mart, and some tourists from Kansas City stop through Clinton on their way to the Lake.

Many residents try to do their shopping in Clinton but have trouble finding certain specialty or "high-end" items in town, or have trouble finding adequate selection in town. For these reasons, residents travel to Kansas City or to Springfield or shop online. These items include a variety of men's, women's, and children's clothing, shoes, jewelry, 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 Clinton, many of them Mexican, fast food, or chain restaurants such as Applebee's. There are a few locally owned restaurants that residents visit, but the participants overall felt that there is not enough variety for dining in Clinton. Many visit Kansas City when dining out for special occasions or to find a larger variety of dining options.

Participants said that they would welcome a fine dining option in town, a wider variety of restaurants, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating.

For recreation and entertainment, Clinton has a museum, a six-plex movie theater, a bowling alley, an aquatic recreation center, two golf courses, and plenty of outdoor recreation within a short drive to parks and lakes. Construction is under way on renovating a historic movie theater to turn it into a live theater, as well. Many people, however, travel to Kansas City for entertainment, especially for higher-end nighttime entertainment.

D. DOWNTOWN CLINTON: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT

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

The groups, overall, generally felt that downtown Clinton is moving in the right direction. The Main Street group and the City have aesthetically improved the Square, there are a number of thriving professional businesses downtown, and buildings are being renovated and improved.

In recent years, however, there was the collapse of a major building, the Elks Lodge, and it housed thriving businesses such a drugstore, a coffee shop, and a computer store. Many of these businesses are coming back after the building is rebuilt. The collapse has raised safety concerns for some residents about downtown in general.

Participants also felt that there is a lot of unrealized potential that would make downtown Clinton move even further in the right direction—adding more retail and entertainment is of the highest priority. Other priorities included adding a variety of residential space, improving building facades, cleaning up the backs of buildings and the alleyways, and adding aesthetically pleasing public parking to anticipate for the growth of 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, a large amount of available space, tradition, and proximity to the courthouse as major reasons they located their businesses downtown. The participants indicated, in different points in the discussion, that new businesses might be attracted in the future if the City focuses on residential developments and on attracting a higher number of shops in the area.

General Public: What are the major reasons you visit downtown? How often do you visit downtown Clinton? 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 and banks, a few stores such as Dollar General and the old drugstore (which is coming back to downtown in the new Elks building), the museum, and special events. Services were the biggest reason people visit downtown.

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

The participants had only a few concerns about user-friendliness. The major concern was business hours. Other concerns included traffic navigation, safety, and the future parking situation.

The business hours in downtown, according to many participants, are a significant problem, especially regarding evenings and weekends. Most shops are open only from 8:00 or 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM on weekdays, which makes it very difficult for people who have jobs with a regular weekday schedule to shop at these businesses. The problem is compounded by the fact that the chain stores in town, such as Wal-Mart, and the malls in Kansas City and Springfield are open in the evenings and on weekends. Participants also felt that restaurant hours are inconvenient, as few restaurants are open late. The groups suggested that, as more retail comes into downtown, these shops should at least make an effort to stay open until 6:00 consistently, although many feel that ideal business hours would be 10:00 to 7:00 instead of 8:00 to 5:00.

Traffic navigation around the Square, according to participants, is difficult for newcomers and visitors. The traffic lanes are not well marked, and the navigation is not intuitive. There are some intersections that have an “implied” stop sign—residents know to stop at these, but visitors may not.

Building safety, or the perception of safety, was also an issue for some participants. Since the collapse of the Elks building, many people perceive downtown buildings as unsafe. Building repairs and renovation, in addition to beautifying downtown, would help give residents the feeling of safety while walking in to the buildings.

Parking is not perceived to be much of a problem, but might become a problem as the Square gains more businesses. Participants brought up the issue that business owners, business employees, and courthouse employees sometimes take up most of the spots along the street, which is currently not an issue but might become one if the downtown continues to grow.

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

The participants mentioned the newspaper, the radio, the Chamber of Commerce website and mailings, the Internet, and word-of-mouth as the major ways they get information about downtown business and events.

E. DOWNTOWN CLINTON: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

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

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 more men's, women's, and children's clothing, more shoe stores, and more jewelry stores. For food, many suggested additional restaurants, including fine dining, Italian food, a wine lounge or beer garden, and a variety of casual dining options, all with later business hours and possibly outdoor seating. Other types of businesses suggested was a bookstore, a coffee shop, a meat shop, a small grocery store, a sporting goods store, a drugstore (which is already going in), and any other specialty shop. Some also suggested having an "anchor store," a large store to draw people to the Square.

For entertainment, many in the focus groups felt that a variety of restaurants and shops with later business hours would be a good start. They also suggested live music, art shows, and other semi-regular events to draw people downtown for a fun experience. One group suggested bringing retrofitted trolleys into the downtown for transportation, but also to make the downtown experience more entertaining.

Many participants focused on adding to the residents of downtown, suggesting that second-story lofts would help fill the buildings and keep a number of people downtown to patronize businesses.

Some discussed that the downtown's purpose is not to compete with Wal-Mart and other large chains, nor is it to compete with the larger malls in Springfield or Kansas City; it is to offer a unique experience to customers. For this, the groups felt strongly that small business should be encouraged, and the City should find and offer incentives to potential building owners to fix up their buildings into usable retail and office spaces.

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?

When asked about the look and feel of downtown, participants responded with overwhelming pride, agreeing that Clinton has a beautiful, aesthetically pleasing Square. Further, many felt that Clinton's Square is much more attractive than other small towns' downtowns.

Suggestions generally focused on giving downtown a historic and cohesive look and feel while making it still feel safe and modern. They suggested that building repair, filling buildings with retail businesses, improving the alleyways and the backs of buildings, and filling vacant lots with parks, parking, or buildings should all be priorities.

Building repair was perhaps the highest priority, since some participants felt that residents perceive old downtown buildings as unsafe after the collapse of the Elks building. Some in the groups felt that building owners should be given incentives to fix up their buildings.

Generally, though, the groups felt that Clinton, aesthetically, has been moving in the right direction. They were all proud of the improvements concerning streets, sidewalks, signage within downtown, and the overall aesthetic.

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

Most in the groups felt that attracting retail and entertainment businesses should be the highest priority, and that all other improvements should work towards achieving this priority. Other priorities included building repair and improving the infrastructure for drainage, both of which would also help attract new businesses, according to participants.

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

Many participants felt that Clinton should be the example for other communities, and felt that the aesthetics of Clinton are exceptional. They mentioned a number of downtowns whose mix of businesses they admired: Carthage, Missouri; Warsaw, Missouri; Zona Rosa in Kansas City; Springfield, Missouri; Washington, Missouri; Arrow Rock, Missouri; Branson, Missouri; Parkville, Missouri; Butler, Missouri; and Mesilla, New Mexico.

F. KEY POINTS

Key points about the Clinton area:

- ◆ Clinton is a friendly small town and a good place to raise a family, with a good sense of community, good healthcare, a good education system, and many nearby outdoor recreation opportunities.
- ◆ Clinton is the county seat of Henry County and a regional hub for surrounding rural towns for employment, and shopping at large chain stores such as Wal-Mart.
- ◆ Clinton is about an hour's drive from Springfield and Kansas City.
- ◆ The Clinton Downtown Square is among the largest in the country.
- ◆ Clinton is moving in the right direction: the Square is being renovated and has been aesthetically improved, Clinton is building a new high school and a new airport, and the population has grown slightly over the last ten years.
- ◆ The main shopping area in Clinton is at the East Junction, right off the highway coming into town, and includes major chain stores anchored around Wal-Mart.
- ◆ Downtown is mainly a service area but does have some retail.
- ◆ Many residents try to do their shopping in Clinton, but have trouble finding certain specialty or high-end items in town, or have trouble finding adequate selection in town; they seek these out in Kansas City, in Springfield, or online.
- ◆ There are a number of restaurants in Clinton, many of them Mexican, fast food, or chain restaurants such as Applebee's.

- ◆ Many residents visit Kansas City when dining out for special occasions or to find a larger variety of dining options.
- ◆ Residents would welcome a fine dining option in town, a wider variety of restaurants, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating.
- ◆ For recreation and entertainment, Clinton has a museum, a six-plex movie theater, a bowling alley, an aquatic recreation center, two golf courses, a live theater currently under construction, and plenty of outdoor recreation within a short drive to parks and lakes.
- ◆ Many people travel to Kansas City for entertainment, especially for higher-end nighttime entertainment.

Key points about downtown Clinton in the present:

- ◆ Downtown Clinton is, overall, moving in the right direction: the Main Street group and the City have aesthetically improved the Square, there are a number of thriving professional businesses downtown, and buildings are being renovated and improved.
- ◆ There was a building collapse of a major building, the Elks Lodge, and it housed thriving businesses such as a drugstore, a coffee shop, and a computer store; the building is being rebuilt. The collapse has raised safety concerns for residents.
- ◆ There is a lot of unrealized potential that would make downtown Clinton move even further in the right direction, including adding retail and entertainment, repairing the few things that are still in need of repair, and anticipating for the growth of downtown.
- ◆ Business owners cited low cost, a large amount of available space, tradition, and proximity to the courthouse as major reasons they located their businesses downtown.
- ◆ Residents visit the Square for the courthouse, services such as attorneys and banks, a few stores such as Dollar General and the old drugstore (which is coming back to the Square in the new Elks building), the museum, and special events.
- ◆ The business hours downtown are a major problem, since many businesses close at 5:00 on weekdays, making it impossible for people who work until 5:00 to shop downtown.
- ◆ Traffic navigation around the Square is difficult for newcomers and visitors; the traffic lanes are not well marked, and the navigation is not intuitive.
- ◆ Since the collapse of the Elks building, many people perceive downtown buildings as unsafe.
- ◆ Parking, currently, is not much of a problem, but might become a problem as the Square gains more businesses.
- ◆ People get information about what is going on downtown through the newspaper, the radio, the Chamber of Commerce website and mailings, the Internet, and word-of-mouth.

Key points about the future of downtown Clinton:

- ◆ Downtown Clinton should focus on independently owned specialty-type shops and restaurants rather than large chains; the participants felt that downtown's purpose is not to compete with large chains, but to offer a unique experience to customers.
- ◆ For additional apparel businesses, more men's, women's, and children's clothing, more shoe stores, and more jewelry stores would be welcome additions to the Square.
- ◆ For food, the community would welcome additional restaurants, including fine dining, Italian food, a wine lounge or beer garden, and a variety of casual dining options, all with later business hours and possibly outdoor seating.
- ◆ In other types of businesses, the community would welcome a bookstore, a coffee shop, a meat shop, a small grocery store, a sporting goods store, a drugstore (which is already going in), and any other specialty shop.
- ◆ An "anchor store" may help to draw people downtown.
- ◆ The community would welcome entertainment options such as live music, art shows, and other semi-regular events.
- ◆ Retrofitted trolleys might help with both transportation and entertainment downtown.
- ◆ Second-story lofts would help fill the buildings and keep a number of people downtown to patronize businesses.
- ◆ The community feels that Clinton has a beautiful, aesthetically pleasing Square.
- ◆ Downtown Clinton should maintain a historic and cohesive look and feel while still feeling safe and modern.
- ◆ Building repair, filling buildings with retail businesses, improving the alleyways and the backs of buildings, and filling vacant lots with parks, parking, or buildings should all be priorities.
- ◆ Attracting retail and entertainment businesses should be the highest priority for downtown Clinton, and all other improvements should work towards achieving this priority.
- ◆ Building repair and improving the infrastructure for drainage are also priorities, both of which would also help attract new businesses.
- ◆ The community feels that Clinton should be the example for other communities, and feels that the aesthetics of Clinton are exceptional.
- ◆ The participants admire a few downtowns with eclectic mixes of businesses: Carthage, Missouri; Warsaw, Missouri; Zona Rosa in Kansas City; Springfield, Missouri; Washington, Missouri; Arrow Rock, Missouri; Branson, Missouri; Parkville, Missouri; Butler, Missouri; and Mesilla, New Mexico.

SECTION II

NEW RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Describe Clinton to me.*

I'd say it's a small town.

Yeah.

Small town, got a lot of small businesses here in town. If someone's looking for probably some higher-end shopping, they have to go to Springfield or Kansas City for those types of things.

I get the sense that it's growing residentially, but I don't see a lot of other business ventures down here.

Moderator: *Would you say the city's moving in the right or wrong direction?*

I'd say the right direction. This is a very active community and Chamber of Commerce and businesses, a lot of charitable organizations and fundraising things. A lot of activities that center around businesses and charities. Very active.

...(unintelligible)...probably moving in the right direction. I don't know what the plans are.

Moderator: *Is there anything that surprised you about Clinton?*

I just haven't gotten used to such a small town. It's really different than what I would've expected. Even though Lewisburg is a pretty small town, it's got a different feel. I didn't expect Clinton to have that small town feel, because it's not tiny, but it does. Everyone knows each other.

It still has a small town feel to it. I think I was surprised by a couple things. The college graduate type folks, professional folks that were here in the town. The other towns I've been in were typically all blue collar. Here there seems to be a lot of people that had grown up, went to college, and then came back here to work. There doesn't seem to be an exodus of people. My hometown, everybody left and didn't come back...(unintelligible).

Moderator: *Where do people go for everyday household shopping?*

Everything's on the corner of 7 and 13. Wal-Mart, Ace Hardware, Goody's... Country Mart across the street.

A couple gas stations, too.

That's where the restaurants are. There's hardly anything on the Northwest side of town. Even the Aldi's is closing down there. But if you want to get something that's not at Wal-Mart, you have a hard time, unless you shop online.

Clothing is pretty limited. A lot of your everyday stuff is Wal-Mart. I haven't been in downtown stores that much, maybe 2 or 3 times for jewelry and paints.

Moderator: What about dining and entertainment?

There's not a lot going on here. Applebee's is about as upscale as you can get, and that's Applebee's.

Yeah, a couple restaurants there, but... restaurants from a downtown perspective, there's one up there. You know, there's 2 country clubs in town. For my business, I've used the country clubs in town.

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

I think they're trying. I mean, they're rebuilding a couple buildings that have fallen. Most of the storefronts are full. There's something in 'em. What their efforts are, I don't know. I don't know how hard they're trying. I went up to Square 109, a restaurant down there, about a week ago just to try it. It's doing a lot better than other Squares in small towns like these, especially since the highway intersection is so far from it. This Square seems to be doing okay. Not a lot of destinations, though. A couple restaurants, haircuts, jewelry, but there's not evening entertainment or anything like that.

Moderator: Why else do people go downtown?

History, maybe.

There's a museum down there, the Rotary Club, sometimes there's business activities there. I guess, just from an appearance standpoint, they've done well with keeping it clean and the buildings don't look run down. I guess, do I know the overall plan? No. I don't know that, being a first-year resident, but... it's just... like a nice restaurant to go out to dinner at, there's not...

I don't know what's been tried in the past, and they may have tried and it wasn't supported. There used to be a Mexican restaurant on the Square.

Now it's out by Applebee's.

There used to be a theater down there, but the theater's moved down by the highway.

Moderator: What about the user-friendliness of downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient?

Yeah. I mean, I've never had any trouble. Parking's okay, and...

Parking's fine. I don't know, the hours are hometown hours. If you want to buy paint at 8:00 at night, you're going to go to Wal-Mart. You've got to make a point of going over there during their times. Maybe the Dollar General is open, but how often do you go there?

Moderator: What about signage and navigation? Is it easy to find stuff and get around?

I didn't have any trouble finding it, but I was looking for it, but as far as coming in, cutting through and taking a look at downtown, there are signs that point to the downtown. I can't picture people getting too lost. Do I think there's a lot of people that cut through to visit the downtown? Not unless they're staying at the lake and want to come into town for something.

Moderator: One of you mentioned a building collapsing recently. Do you think that gives you any pause about the safety of downtown?

I don't know... I would've thought after that, there've been some structural...I hope somebody looked at it after that to see if the bricks were still... but I guess, no, I haven't thought about it too much.

Moderator: Switching gears, do you think there's a need or demand for housing downtown? I know there's not a lot of it right now, but is there a demand?

I don't sense the demand. I think there might be a market, though. Somebody could sell, if you had maybe a place, a grocer that was close, within walking distance. I think you could sell something up there.

It's possible.

I mean, people like those loft apartments in most other cities. I don't see why they wouldn't go around here. Except that usually there's something else that's there that's worthwhile to live close to.

Moderator: Let's talk about other things you might want to see downtown. What kinds of businesses would you like to see downtown?

I think dining would be a good type of business to be down there.

That's what I think. I mean, most of the retail stuff I can live with. If there were... I don't know. I don't buy clothes that often, but if there were something besides Wal-Mart and Goody's, I'd appreciate that. A restaurant would be okay.

I don't know about the, if you looked at the tourism that comes down to the lake, and said, "What do those people do in the evening while they're here for entertainment?" There's a whole bunch of people that pass through here. I don't know how much traffic is going to Table Rock or Branson, but there was probably quite a bit for Truman Lake, and if there was a big demand for that, it would be antique stores or ice cream parlor type things. I don't know if there's that big a demand for something like that, though.

Maybe you wouldn't want to see it, but they could turn it into an outlet mall.

Yeah, like the Osage Beach area, where people go after being at the Lake all day.

Yeah, you've got the theater and a couple restaurants.

There was a place I lived in Texas, the town was right on a lake, and the downtown was a Square, and they had a great sit-down steak restaurant, a little winery, ice cream parlor, two theaters, one was a restored theater from the 1800s with live shows. If I was comparing it to a revitalized downtown, that would be a good mental picture. They had trams that brought people down there. They had a museum, just like what we've got.

Moderator: What about the look and feel of downtown? Where are your priorities in that area, whether that's street repair, green space, building facades?

You know, the courthouse lawn is pretty basic, and you could gussy that up a little bit. Some of the lawns could be prettied up, but the road is fine.

There's a few buildings that are not as consistent in architecture. Some are brick, some are a little bit different.

Something that sticks in my mind is that electronics shop.

Yeah. But the courthouse is well kept and nice, and the streets are well paved. I just think that staying with a consistent look, as far as appearance, is important...the place in Texas, they kind of kept maybe not really a Western-type look, but signs had to be consistent-looking, and it made it nice.

Moderator: Are there other towns that you'd like to see Clinton more closely resemble?

I was just trying to think of small town Squares, and I can't think of one that's any different than what Clinton is. It kind of fits the mold. They're all kind of like that, in various states of repair...

In Missouri, this one's probably one of the better populated...you know...

Moderator: Thank you very much.

SECTION III

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *This is my first time to Clinton. Describe it for me.*

I sell Clinton. Clinton is a very nice small town. We have a lot of activity in our senior citizens group. We're very proud of our downtown, especially at Christmas. We'd like to have a little more retail. We'd like to see the whole community, not just downtown, work together. We have a nice hospital.

If you were looking to move here, it's a great place to raise a family. Nice distance from Kansas City... if you like to hunt and fish, this is the heart of it. We have golf courses. We're building a new school.

I'm always amazed that people come from far and wide to retire here.

Well, if their kids live in Kansas City or Arkansas, it's halfway between.

It's 80 miles from Kansas City.

Moderator: *Do people commute to Kansas City from here?*

Yes.

And we have 4-lane highways both ways, all the way from Kansas City to Springfield.

Largest and one of the nicest Squares in Missouri.

Largest Square west of the Mississippi.

A little bleak, but...

It's on the rebound.

Moderator: *Where's the main shopping area for Clinton residents?*

I think for retail, you're maybe too close to Kansas City.

We have Wal-Mart, unfortunately, and that's good and bad. Wal-Mart offers products, and we all need them. They have the Super-Wal-Mart, but we also have a grocery store. We shop in town for a lot of things, but we also go to Kansas City often.

The main retail center is where Wal-Mart is. There's several shopping centers plus the Super-Wal-Mart, plus the fast food chains. Plus, both grocery stores are at that intersection. And probably the second-largest shopping area would be the Square.

Moderator: Do people in Clinton stay here to do their shopping?

There's a lot of leakage to Kansas City and to online shopping.

We also draw in people to the community to shop, and in healthcare.

We draw as far as Springfield.

And with the Courthouse downtown, we still draw a lot of people downtown.

We have a large marketing area. I've sold houses to people who were thrilled to have a Wal-Mart in town.

Remember what we'd be without a Wal-Mart.

Exactly.

I've had people tell me that they're 40 or 50 miles away from a Wal-Mart, and they make that trip all the time.

There's a lot of shopping in Clinton online, too. People shop the Clinton website.

Moderator: Is there any specific type of retail that people have to leave for?

You can't buy a shirt larger than a 3x. There's certain specialty...

And variety.

We have a Goody's store, and I was amazed at the number of women that shop there.

The stuff's not bad, is it?

No. I think it's kind of like Penney's.

(agreement.)

I'm sorry we lost our Penney's store.

Moderator: Why did you lose it?

(side conversations.)

...They downsized...

Somebody else is picking up that space now.

Moderator: What about dining options?

(laughter.)

If you like Mexican...

We have plenty of fast food.

We don't have a place that's really nice.

We tried one...

They went a little overboard.

People like to drive distances.

We could still use a higher-class restaurant.

Something in between.

Yeah, it was a little pricey to go all the time.

(many people talking at once.)

We have all the dining establishments that we can support. We've had many different people that have tried to do nicer-end restaurants, and it has not worked. People go to the chain stores and the Applebee's.

Where do you go for prime rib?

Rock Village.

Moderator: Do people go to Kansas City to eat out?

We've got several nice places that serve good food.

A lot of people go to Warsaw, Warrensburg, Sedalia, Kansas City.

In 20, 25 miles, there's a lot.

We probably eat out more than 99% of the people here, 5 or 6 nights a week. We don't go out of town except sometimes. We do Applebee's and Mexican restaurants daily.

I guess I'm the one that wants more variety.

A lot of people come to Clinton to dine.

Moderator: Are there enough nighttime entertainment options?

We have a new 6-plex theater.

It depends on what your expectations are.

There is not that much entertainment, and what we've always lacked is anything for our children to do. We have a bowling alley, but it's just very limited.

We've got this community center.

A skate park.

Well, that's true.

Moderator: Could you describe the trend of downtown?

One of the buildings on the Square collapsed a couple years ago, and a few businesses were lost... a drugstore, a sporting goods store, a computer place, a coffee shop...

There was 6 storefronts.

Some have moved, and some are rebuilding. Some folded.

They're rebuilding with 3 new retail establishments. I think they all will be rented.

There are some vacant buildings on the Square, though.

Not very many.

When we moved here, the whole west side of the Square was empty.

After the collapse, it went through a turndown, obviously. It seems to be, as the Elks rebuilds, that's going to be a nice facility. There's going to be a clothes store...

An antique store in the Square, as well...going in soon... and there's a new frozen custard place going in.

We all think that once this complex is complete, these retail places will revitalize the Square.

They're also going to have a nice banquet facility.

And we're building a new jail.

Which is in the downtown area.

It took us 10 years to improve the school, and the jail went just like that.

Moderator: Are there safety concerns for other buildings?

I think they tried to do a study of the buildings... I don't think it's...

An engineer came in and inspected the structures, and gave every building owner a checklist, and there wasn't any huge problems.

Moderator: Why did the one building collapse?

Years of moisture.

Moderator: Why did you choose to locate your businesses downtown?

Cheaper rent.

We bought an existing business there. It's been there since the beginning.

Our first business was the law business, and we wanted to be close to the Courthouse.

My wife wanted to buy a 100-year old building.

_____ might have a different perspective, because he moved away from the Square.

Our store had been downtown for 15-some years, and I moved it a year ago to a different facilities. Our living accommodations are combined into one now. Leaving the Square was the hardest part of our decision. But we're about 2 blocks from the Square right now.

About 4, 5 years ago, getting a building on the Square was hard to do. Occupancy was 100%. You don't have to look back too far to where it was the thing to do.

In the 60s and 70s, it was the hub.

And in the 50s.

Until the Wal-Mart started developing, everything was downtown.

(many people agreeing.)

After the collapse, there seemed to be a downtown in the business, but the economic downturn started about that time.

There's about 6 or 7 on the Square that are open.

Maybe 90% occupancy?

If you're just counting 1st floor.

There are some upstairs businesses, though.

Have you climbed those stairs lately?

Moderator: Do you have any residential living downtown?

A couple apartments, lofts.

Yeah.

Not a lot.

(agreement.)

Moderator: *Would there be an interest?*

Yes.

But the cost of refurbishing the second story...

I'm thinking lofts.

Yeah.

It would cost a fortune to refurbish them, though.

There's nothing downtown in the evening to make someone want to live down there.

It's just like, maybe if there were people upstairs, there'd be more things downstairs. Coffee shops or something.

We basically put in a loft apartment in the back area above our shop, but now the cat lives there.

In the evening, there was nothing for you to do?

When the Elks gets back, it'll be better.

We haven't mentioned museum and theater and that type of stuff.

The Rotary Building, on the Square, is used as a rental facility, and that brings a lot of people downtown, as does the old bank building across the street that belongs to the museum. It's also a rental hall.

Do we still have bus tours that stop at the museum?

Yes. We have a wonderful museum. Bus tours come down, so if we could play on that.

And if the theater ever gets finished, it's right down the street. It's an old movie theater being renovated into a live theater.

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

The city spent a lot of money on signage at the major intersections to direct people downtown, and the Chamber has signage on the highway. There's signage to direct people to the historic Clinton Square.

I don't know if they could find it or not.

There could always be more, even in town, to direct people downtown.

(agreement.)

There was talk about how could we get the exit coming directly in to the Square, which would be neat, but...

And I've heard 100-plus time, "I've been in Clinton all my life and never come downtown." And when they get downtown, they're pleased with the streetscapes... we need to get them off the beaten path.

In Kansas City, people always say they stop at McDonald's in Clinton on the way to the Lake, and I tell them they need to come downtown. There are lots of excuses... maybe there needs to be some kind of attraction.

We do have our community festival downtown.

Moderator: Does that bring in a lot of surrounding communities?

Yeah.

I think it's something people come back for, too.

Moderator: Do you hear anything about business hours? Are they convenient?

No.

No they're not.

That has been beaten around forever.

Which is why _____'s store became vacant in the first place.

There's probably less interest in extending business hours, because there's not as much retail. They used to try to stay open late at Christmastime, and...

If it's going to be open, you have to make a long-term commitment. People have to get used to the stores being open.

If you work until 5:00, you can't get to a store that closes at 5:00. And you go to Wal-Mart at 10:00 and are amazed at the people that are over there.

Small stores, we couldn't afford to stay open.

I've heard both sides of the argument, and I don't have a good answer.

The flexible hours that people have today...all of our blue-collar people work at 3:30 or 4:00. I started closing on Saturdays, and I haven't missed a bit. And my staff loves it.

You didn't lose business?

No.

You know, when you go to Kansas City, those stores don't open until 9:00 or 10:00. The other side of the coin is, they're open later, but...

So, do you think it would make a difference to stay open later?

I think until 5:30 works well. If you get off at 5:00, you still have time to come in. For some types of business, you don't need to be there at 8:00 AM. But you've got to stay open until 5:30 so people that get off at 5:00 can come in.

That hour at the end of the day is more important than at the beginning of the day.

We get a lot of people that want to come in and pick their stuff up at 5:00 and after it, engraving and awards and trophies... if somebody gets off work at 5:00, they want to be able to come in at 5:15.

I'm sure in that business, it would be helpful.

Whatever business you've got, you've got to adjust your hours for the people, not for you. We've been through that being open on Saturday, and in the holiday season, it's fine, but the rest of the year, forget it. I mean, being open until 8:00 at night. But when you've got Santa Claus sitting there, you're there for the kids.

Moderator: Is there enough parking downtown?

No. You have too many employees parking on the street.

When I had my store downtown, there was only 10 feet behind the store to the alley. There wasn't any way to park behind.

If the employees weren't parking on the Square, the Square would be pretty dismal.

Now, that's somewhat different when the Elks was there.

The Elks is putting up a parking lot at the back of the building.

On the west side, the problem we had was the Courthouse. You had them shutting off that parking lot all the time, and the employees parked on the Square.

In general, there's plenty of parking.

Yeah.

In the Square, there's plenty of parking, as a whole. I don't think there's a shortage at any time.

I would like to see the parking against the curb enforced. I have a rule that none of my employees park in front of the curb, to leave it open for customers.

We do the same thing, but people on the other sides of us don't...

Parking in front of your own front door is pretty stupid... but we used to have a 2-hour parking against the curb. I think that most business can be conducted within 2 hours.

Do you want to change the traffic pattern, too?

(laughter.)

The street in front of my store is 4 feet narrower, there is no parking lane, but people pull up and stop there. They block the westbound lane.

Moderator: How do you communicate to your customers?

Newspaper, both of them... radio... word of mouth, we've found, is probably better than either one of those.

We use newspaper, radio, a mailing list.

Yeah, direct mail.

Moderator: Does anything advertise the whole downtown?

Yeah, in the newspaper.

Sometimes they try to target other communities or Kansas City.

We've done the Kansas City Star.

Yeah.

In the antiques store, we have ads and different publications.

I have my own website.

Me too.

And the Chamber website.

Moderator: Let's dream a little about the future of downtown. Are there additional types of businesses you'd like to see downtown?

I'd like to see more retail. Now, define retail. We've got dress shops, and we'll have a drugstore, men's clothing, coffee shop, a shoe store...

Dollar General is so busy.

Yeah, they are so busy.

They're really a very good mix, what's on the Square. We have clothing, barbershop, coffee shops, restaurants, lawyers...

We used to have more variety. We used to have 3 dress shops.

We don't have a grocery store downtown.

We used to have lots of shoe stores.

I'd like to see us loop around the edges of the Square.

Around the corner.

That's where parking gets to be a problem.

But I'd still like to see it grow that way.

We don't have as many as we used to, but we have jewelry shops and stuff, but we don't have a grocery store. A specialty grocery store would be neat.

You've got to be careful about how specialized you are.

But you can't compete with Wal-Mart.

We need a bookstore. I really think we need a bookstore.

There's a Christian bookstore that just came in. But I know what you're saying.

Just a small bookstore, new or used.

I miss the used bookstores.

Yeah.

We don't have a hardware store on the Square. We used to have a couple of them.

Yeah.

(many people agreeing.)

An appliance store.

Moderator: So you're thinking of more general stuff rather than specialized stuff?

I don't know how you could do a grocery store downtown, with parking.

That should be a specialty type thing.

If we could come up with a destination store.

This thing at Shelby's could be a destination, if handled right. There's going to be a car parts store on the Square...

(many people talking at once.)

Like Precious Moments in Carthage...people come from all over the place to buy those trinkets. It's a huge draw.

Moderator: No one's mentioned any kind of dining downtown.

There are a lot of restaurants downtown right now.

(laughter.)

Well, there are. Sorry, there are a lot of places to eat downtown.

The kids are hung up on coffee these days, and a coffee shop open after hours would be good.

The coffee shop closes at 4:30 or 5:00.

(agreement.)

We need a little coffee shop that serves deli sandwiches, something simple, that's open late.

Has anybody been to the Yum Yum Tree in Jeff City? Something like that.

(many people talking at once, agreeing.)

...we have one, a block off the Square...

...you don't have much parking there...

Moderator: What about the look of downtown?

I think the Main Street organization has made it very attractive, with coordinated awnings and colors. I think it looks great.

We do have special zoning. We go through a committee to get approval...

One thing that we really need is, on the East Junction, that's a monstrosity for senior citizens. They pull out every which direction, and it's really a mess. If we could attract seniors with a niche market...there's nothing on the west side of town, and a draw for those people.

You want a trolley car?

I would love to have a trolley car?

Yeah.

I think it's something to put on the list.

What would it take to get to the trolley tracks?

The cobblestones are under the blacktop.

But what are you going to do when you get the trolley tracks?

Put a trolley on them!

No. You put trolleys on wheels.

We finally got the bicycle trail downtown.

Moderator: Anything else you'd want to change about the look of downtown?

It's a big part that Main Street's worked hard on. It's pretty in place.

There's a few more storefronts that need to be refurbished. And get rid of all our metal awnings.

We're way ahead of most downtown squares.

Absolutely.

We've got a courthouse yard, and that's all green space.

And they've got those streetscapes.

That's added a lot.

Moderator: I only have one last question. Are there other downtowns that you admire?

I think other towns would say "Clinton." I'm sure there's a lot of downtowns that have little things we'd like to have.

Little specialty shops, like Washington, Missouri and Mt. Vernon...some of those.

Arrow Rock.

They just have specialty stores.

Art galleries and stuff. They have restaurants at night and strolling...

But some of those are river towns, too.

Who do you want to cater to? If you want the tourist industry, it's one market, and for residents, it's another.

Why can't we do both?

We could play on tourism a lot more than we do. There's not any souvenirs right now, except the museum.

And that's another thing I'd like to see changed. If we could get the museum open on Sundays, or to get them open 12 months out of the year...

The historic part of it, and the...with the gas crunch, we're looking at destinations, and if we're going to appeal to tourists, we need to give them something to come to, and Clinton could be a day trip.

I realized after making a trip to Zona Rosa yesterday that parking is our greatest asset. They had no parking along the business area. We have ample parking, and we even have room for more businesses downtown.

Yeah, it's nice, and it's the big loft apartments and retail and theater...

I had a gift certificate to a specialty store, and we found the store, and where do you park? I thought it was inconvenient.

I think we're just on the verge here of really rebounding. Once the north side of the Square is complete, those places will be occupied. I think we're going the right direction.

I think we need to attract the people in Clinton and the surrounding area. It could be our own businesses that are lacking something to attract them. We can't draw the local people the way we can draw people from outside. It would be amazing if people from Kansas City and Overland Park come here to shop, but the people in Clinton don't shop here. I don't know what it is that's turning the local people off. Maybe it's just that it's Clinton and we want to go someplace else. I see a lot of business in our shop from Kansas City and Overland Park, out of town people...

That's the way it is with antiques, too.

Is some of that due to a local contact of some kind?

We need to know what causes that.

It's usually people on their way to Springfield or the Lake, or their husbands are coming here to hunt. It's day trips people are making.

But people here don't patronize our businesses.

We had an ad campaign around Christmas to try to get people to shop here before going to Kansas City.

You've got to look inside to see what causes that.

You can't offer the variety. You go to Zona Rosa, you've got 11 men's clothing stores. You can't offer that here.

I think gas prices will help us a lot. People will stay home.

But we shouldn't rely on that, though. If we could identify why people are leaving, that would be even better? I think there have been studies in the past, but... I think there's, it's amazing...and there's been several of our types of stores, gift stores, home décor, ladies apparel, that have closed in the last few years. And that hasn't had a real extreme positive effect on business.

There's something to having more of those to draw more people with more variety. Used to be 5 jewelry stores...

Moderator: Thank you very much.

SECTION IV

CITY STAFF DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

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

I think one of the misconceptions is that we're a retirement community.

Our age is higher than the state level, but we're building a school, and the community's progressive in providing services for citizens.

We're probably one big industry away from being really successful. We seem to lack that one big company in town that ties it all together, or maybe a couple more small ones. Our economic development is a big part of our future, and we've taken some big steps with our school system and our airport to increase some of that. We're building a brand new high school. Previously we had some overcrowding and facilities issues. We look forward to new facilities. When a large industry comes to town, they look for services for their workers. Other than that, we're located between Kansas City and Springfield, and we have great four-lane highways now. Second-largest town Square in the United States.

Largest.

Is it?

Yeah. It's 3rd largest in the world.

There's a lot to offer here for the youth. We have a wonderful recreation and arts department, with basically every sporting event.

A lot of the small towns come here to play.

(side conversations.)

Clinton's a real caring community. We do a lot of philanthropic and charity work, and they're very supportive whenever there's an issue that comes up, not necessarily a tax issue but as far as taking care of each other. I'm really proud of the way this town pulls together.

There's a lot of service programs for the community.

Moderator: *Why are you viewed as a retirement community?*

We have great medical facilities and golf courses and fishing and the lake.

We're centrally located between Sedalia, Kansas City, Springfield, Warrensburg... people are close to their kids in Kansas City.

Clinton offers the same facilities as big cities, police department, fire department...

Plus, this facility you're sitting in here, the community center, is free for the community. We have a massive aquatic center. You don't see these in towns this size.

Moderator: Do people stay in Clinton to do their shopping?

There's leakage. Yeah. There's always a campaign to shop Clinton when you can, because when you go to a Clinton shopkeeper, they'll take care of you, but not everything can be purchased in Clinton.

A few more stores would be nice.

There's not a lot of selection.

And if you don't buy it by 5:00, you've got to go get it at Wal-Mart.

We do have a base of people who come and shop in Clinton. We have specialty shops that draw, but residents travel.

There's a lot of things you can't buy here.

Moderator: What do you buy here?

Groceries.

Building supplies.

We leave for clothes. I still get some here, but a lot from out.

A Kohl's would be nice.

We had a J.C. Penney's that left, and that hurt us a lot.

I have a friend who went to the city to buy clothes for her kids, because unless you go to Wal-Mart, there's nothing.

Shoes.

Yeah.

Two things not in shortage here are car dealers and attorneys.

And banks.

And churches.

We have 2 jewelry stores.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Do you have shoes here?

I travel usually to buy shoes.

We have one shoe store.

Moderator: Where do people go to shop?

Springfield or Kansas City.

(agreement.)

Lee's Summit.

They're an hour away.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: From how far away do people come to Clinton?

Sales tax statewide has gone down 1%, but ours is up tremendously.

We draw a lot of people from Collins.

A 60 or 70 mile radius.

It's not for specialty items, though.

I drive 20 miles everyday to come here. If you live in a small town, you need to come here.

There's 9 communities in the county, and the only other viable one is Windsor, but there are a lot of people who live there who come here to work. Most people in the county work in Clinton or travel outside the county.

Moderator: Do you have enough dining options?

Mexican.

That's the one thing that people most request, is a family steakhouse.

Yeah.

Something other than fast food.

We've got a lot of places to eat here, though.

Yeah, but if you're going to go out for the evening, do you stay in town?

No, we go to Kansas City.

(many people talking at once.)

We go up to the City once a month or something.

Something different.

I think a lot of our spending trends have changed with gas prices. People don't make enough to drive all over like they used to be.

(agreement.)

And I think the Internet plays a big part in shopping habits.

I buy a lot of stuff online.

Moderator: Is there any other type of dining you don't have here?

Italian.

Barbecue.

There is one. Brown's.

Yeah, I guess we do.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: What about fine dining? Where do you go for special occasions?

There are some people in this town that can go for fine dining, but the rest of us are talking about a Ponderosa or something. I'm sure there's some elite in the community that would like to see fine dining, but they'd go to Kansas City or Springfield anyway.

(many people talking at once.)

We've had fine dining before, and it hasn't stayed open.

Moderator: What do you do for entertainment?

Movie theater.

We could use like a roller rink.

I've had about five inquiries about a roller rink.

(many people talking at once.)

We've got a nice movie theater, and you can swim year-round.

And we have community theater, and civic groups that provide us with events to go to, but they're not establishments.

Moderator: Do kids stay here?

Mine did. They stayed about half the time. But once they got up to 17, 18, they were gone to the City.

We've got a bowling alley, but I don't think their hours are convenient.

And it's always full.

We have a skate park, which the kids use.

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

I think there's way too many offices on the Square. The Square should be known for retail.

With the collapse and the new building, that's going to be a huge impact. I always shopped at Kreisler's Drugstore, and once it's open again...

There's way too many office buildings.

And there's still the connotation that the buildings aren't safe.

Those people, though, will never come into a building, even if engineers certify it as safe.

Well, the people that were involved... like you say, there's nothing you could do.

I think we're hoping that the opening of the Elks and the retail businesses will be magical for the Square. There's a lot of space available for retail, waiting.

What's going to make it good, with the Elks Lodge, is new buildings that are energy efficient.

(agreement.)

I think we would do well just to follow some patterns that you've seen on small Squares in other towns. A lot of food, entertainment, and shops on the Square. With the banquet facilities at the Elks, a lot of people will come.

And the Square needs to be trapping. Like, the Dollar Store. When Kreisler left, boy did that... but once you get people downtown...

We need to continue with that. We need to bring back all the old-time stuff, things that are entertaining so people want to go down and look, not dodge beer bottles.

And business hours are not really conducive to people that work. If we could talk people into opening a couple hours later and closing a couple hours later...

Most of the people who would use downtown daily or weekly are people who are going to work.

We work right on the Square, and it's hard to get to the store even then. We are getting a new car parts store and a clothing store. We need anchor stores down there, something to bring people down. And when we have festivals, some of the retailers need to make a real effort to stay open. They could get some business that way.

I always wondered how a grocery store or a specialty meat shop would do. If I could go to the Square from some groceries, I'd do it. Or if I could buy a couple steaks at a meat shop, I'd do it.

That's one thing I like about Dollar General. If I need milk or bread, I don't have to travel. It beats going all the way out there.

A neighborhood grocery. You may not make any money on it, I don't know.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: What are the major reasons other than work that you go downtown?

An event.

A haircut.

Courthouse.

Old Glory Days. Our annual festival.

To buy furniture.

Insurance.

Attorneys.

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

I shopped at a men's store that was part of the collapse, but they're coming back again. I had to go to Kansas City.

A flower shop.

A hardware store.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Do you think downtown is user-friendly? You've mentioned business hours. What else?

For someone who's new, it's hard to navigate. It's easy to drive the wrong way on the road.

They tried to correct that sign problem, and it's not doable. People from out of town should use the "when in Rome" rule.

Everything's easily accessible, there's no steps...

There's handicapped parking.

Moderator: So parking's not a problem?

No.

It would be nice for merchants and employees to be able to park off the Square. Most of them park right at their stores. People like to park close.

(agreement.)

But if you park off the Square, then it looks vacant.

Put them somewhere else on the Square, then.

Moderator: Is it easy for people to find downtown?

More signs would be nice.

We have the 2nd street project going on, and once that's done, I think it'll be great.

When I'm traveling, and people ask me where I'm from, a lot of people think that all we have is the intersection. They think that's the downtown. I think some highway signage to downtown would help.

You're right, though. There's not anything at all out there.

There isn't, right on 13?

Yeah.

I think once it got designated as a historic district, there are a couple little signs.

They could be on the Downtown Square and call you and ask you where you are.

I think some of the misconceptions are, if you have a historic district that there aren't active businesses. I think that's one of the things that has been missed, is to advertise both of them—that it's a historic district that actually has businesses in it.

(agreement.)

I think if they had apartments above some of these buildings, you know, that would...

We tried to do that, but we can't because of the money.

Lofts.

Moderator: Do you have any downtown living?

A couple.

(many people talking at once.)

From a fire department standpoint, they don't have proper fire escapes.

Those things could be done, if you had an investor or something.

Moderator: Do you think there would be an interest in second-floor living?

Yeah, I think so.

There's a lot of duplexes, there's a lot of all that here.

It's got to be something unique.

Something like that might work if you had activities going on in the evening. A show, restaurants. People coming and going besides the kids circling the Square.

Moderator: You talked about the safety issues a little. Do you think that would feed into people not feeling safe down there?

If someone has that in their head, then they'll be like that. The buildings are all solid and good. I personally wouldn't want to live up there, though. They need so much work and modernizing.

Which, I think if they were available, it would be an expensive process to get them livable. I'm sure by then it would be safe.

And some of the retailers on the bottom would have security issues. A water leak or something like that. But there's some nice rooms. The old J.C. Penney buildings.

Well, what they've done in Kansas City with the old lofts, they go so fast.

There's 2 or 3 buildings with big spaces up there.

I went in the other day to the Payday Loan place, and it's huge. And the woodwork and stuff. You can almost feel the history of the building. But you're probably looking at \$200,000 to redo the upstairs.

If you had an investor, though.

I think that would be a big pull to downtown. When the stores close up, there's nothing out there though. We've got beautiful lighting, the Main Street's done landscaping...

Moderator: Are there restaurants open?

Yeah, 2.

There's 2 restaurants at night, and 3 bars just off the Square.

Moderator: Are there any destination restaurants?

I wouldn't say so. There used to be, but after the collapse, no. And I think that a lot of people don't realize...

(many people talking at once.)

...if people knew that Square 109 has changed hands, they'd be more likely to go there...

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

I think we need a nice salon, tanning... that may not be on the top of the list. But there's no place to go for that stuff. Not a beauty salon, but just a spa tan kind of place. I think you need to get things that'll get people up there and walking around, go have a nice lunch, go here and shop, go get some ice cream. We don't have an ice cream shop.

We don't have any bookstores.

We have a new Christian bookstore...

(many people talking at once.)

I've always thought it would be awesome to have a bookstore on the Square and live above it, but I've always wondered how to eat.

Some specialty shops. I think we're going to have to...antique shops...

Maybe some outlets, too. Maybe an outlet store.

You need an anchor store down there.

Something that stays open later.

A clothing store that caters to the middle class person, not so expensive. They've got nice clothes, but...

What's keeping those stores from going downtown?

I think right now the traffic isn't there. You're much better out on the intersection.

If you want an anchor store, they do traffic studies.

You can develop downtown all you want to, but if you don't have the industry, nobody's ever going to show up and buy anything. You can concentrate on downtown, but for that to flourish, you've got to have industry.

And it should pay living wages.

(agreement.)

People aren't going to go downtown with boutiques and stuff...

I mean, look at the number of people who put a shop in and then close in 6 months.

And there's a real misnomer in this town of, "Oh, we need this..." People say, "We need daycare." Well, no you don't. There are plenty of daycares. Everybody's going into the daycare business. So the daycare industry... does this town need daycare? No.

But I don't think there's daycare during the evening.

We did it for 6 months, but it cost too much. The bottom line is, people find other ways to deal with nighttime daycare than taking them to a commercial facility. You just have things like that, people saying, "We really need this."

Main Street did a survey of downtown employees and asked them where they shopped, and the majority didn't even shop down there.

What's there to shop for?

And they can't get off work to do it. And they don't make the wages downtown to support some of the higher-end shops down there.

We're just about to expand out of the courthouse... security needs to be increased, and there's just not the means to do that. There's no place to expand, but we're at capacity.

Moderator: Other kinds of businesses?

Pet supplies.

Grocery store, meat store, or a deli.

Good luck with pet supplies, competing with Wal-Mart.

Kreisler's is bringing in their pharmacy, but a sporting goods store...

That would be a destination place. And Everhard's is a destination place, too. It's a sporting store, not downtown, but something downtown would be a destination too.

You've got these specialty shops down here, you'll get this stuff here, but brand names are not going to go downtown.

Or the guy who makes golf clubs. You get the Kansas City Chiefs to come down here for golf clubs...

Moderator: Do you think downtown should have cafés and restaurants?

Yeah. A nice Italian bistro. In Stockton, I can have a fabulous dinner on the Square that I'd have to drive to Kansas City for otherwise. That would go over really well here. I think it would absolutely.

We've got a restaurant here in town, privately owned, and they're looking for a new location.

I don't think he wants to go downtown, unless we can convince him to.

Let him go in the old bank.

(many people talking at once.)

...real estate is so cheap down there...

Moderator: Let's talk about the look of downtown. Is there anything you'd want to change?

I like the way they've brought it back.

Behind the buildings, the backs, could use a little sprucing up.

Yeah, some of that's kind of ugly.

And that's what you're driving into from 2nd street.

Even Warsaw, the little decks back there with little seating areas. Or a fresh coat of paint and some weeding.

There's a couple that have done the backs, and they're beautiful.

(agreement.)

A little beer garden or an outside café would be great. I was hoping they'd do that.

Those are really cool. Carthage has a few of those. I really like their Square.

You can do the eating out sometimes at the museum. It's kind of hidden and it's only for special events...

But the setting, that's what we should do.

That would be really cool, to eat outside like that on the Square.

Yeah, it looks beautiful.

Cappuccino in front of the bookstore.

Moderator: What was it about Carthage that you liked?

They have little green spaces that you can go sit in.

They did it with Blackwater, too. They put little park benches and butterfly gardens...

And they have a great restaurant there.

They've taken dead spaces and turned them into pockets of green and flowers. And we have a couple places like that.

Where H&R Block is...

Basically, there's a lot of pride downtown. The business owners keep their properties nice.

We could use a nice coffee shop down there.

I take my family down there to see the lights, especially during the holidays.

And some of the businesses coming into the Square could be spruced up a little bit.

Maybe you need to start at the end of the street and go down.

I think we need restrictions on what can be in the Square. The last thing I want to see is a Payday Loan, and we've got one coming in right now. I think that takes away from the downtown.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Anything else about the look of downtown?

I think it's great.

The streets need to be restriped, but that's a maintenance program we do.

The street department does a good job cleaning it up. We have a lot of vandalism, too...

Maybe if you had stuff there in the evenings and on weekends, there would be less vandalism.

One thing we talked about is the sidewalk system. We need some sidewalks in this town.

These are good, too, compared to the old ones in the 70s. They were narrow things, they jumped...

That was like 30 years ago, though.

Moderator: Are the buildings in good condition?

They all have good fronts on them.

There's a few buildings that, going along with the historic look, that their facades do not match.

People are kind of grandfathered in, though.

You've got a Square that's been down there for 175 years, and through that time, buildings have been rebuilt in the style of the architecture of that time, so you've got some more modern buildings, so you're not going to have that total 1830's look down there, but it's kind of what makes the Square unique, too.

The new buildings kind of fit in, though.

Is that a bad look?

No, it's a good look.

It's great.

I'm no builder, but I come in on Franklin Street, so I can see behind the West side of the Square, and there are definitely some problems. There's stucco falling off in sheets, missing bricks, full sections of brick that are gone, on some of the building tops you can see some bricks missing sometimes on those. Are these structural defects? I don't know. Are they glaring and will they make people think there are problems? Yeah.

(agreement.)

And so many people are renting, there's less pride in their property.

(agreement.)

Some of them are spending some money, especially since our tragedy.

But there are things like that that do need to be fixed. If nothing else, it'll affect confidence.

And even though the front looks nice and it's structurally sound, the back needs to look nice too.

You know, along those lines, identify what's at the backs of buildings. Sometimes we find an open door on the backs of buildings, and we don't even know what belongs to who.

(many people talking at once.)

In Warrensburg, they have business names on the backs of buildings. It looks nice.

I think like Zona Rosa, it doesn't have to be luxurious, but it should be a shopping district, not an office district.

One thing that the Square is nice for, it's nice for parades. Everybody can see, and normally, it's some protection from the elements. There's protection on the buildings against rain.

Moderator: Have you been to other downtowns that you think Clinton should look like?

I go to more downtowns and thing, "Darn, we're lucky for what we have." They're not real...

It's just awful most places.

Parkville, Missouri is viable. People are lined up.

It's a day trip from Kansas City.

You've got 10,000 bored housewives.

You see folks over there shopping as day trips.

I was just in awe. You've got to wait on the sidewalk for people to pass.

And they have that big restaurant up on the hill that overlooks the Square.

(many people talking at once.)

Look at the landing down at Branson.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Thank you very much.

SECTION V

ELECTED CITY AND COUNTY OFFICIALS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Describe your community to me.*

I'll start. We have the largest downtown Square in the state.

It's a friendly town.

I think the historical part of the Square is the main attraction of the town. Most people I've talked to that have moved here like the small town atmosphere. That's why people come here.

Just the area we sit in is full of recreation, golf, hunting, fishing, water sports—you've got access to about everything.

A lot of people come to town and think we've got cheap taxes, but local people think we have high taxes...and a friendly attitude. Several people say they like the friendliness. We had a guy come in the other day, late in the evening, and he (unintelligible...someone walking in...people greeting him/her)... and the hospital, that's great too. People want to get out of the city and come down here for a slower pace.

The ones that like to fish like Truman Lake...

Good school system.

Brand new school coming in. Looks like we're going to have some more airport.

A jail.

Brand new jail.

(laughter.)

I'd say for a small community, pretty nice access to Kansas City, Springfield. It's different than most small towns. You can be to either in an hour. Good access without having the traffic on a day to day basis. From one side of town to the other is no more than 10 minutes.

It's a small town atmosphere that draws people.

I think location. A lot of people know where it is. They've been through here. I ask people why they don't stop sometime.

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

I think the population has remained the same.

It's increased a little.

The county as a whole is really growing. It's a direct reflection of Clinton.

And there's several subdivisions on the city limits.

(agreement.)

I would say that our community's progressing, but it's lacking additional industry. With the access that this place has to 44, 70, 71, it's a good spot for that. I don't know if it hasn't been approached appropriately or it's not the right time right now...that's part of the idea with expanding the airport, to attract industry.

We finally got the school issue passed, and that will help a great deal too.

That's where we're lacking now, in my opinion. Our school is small.

More retired people are moving to town for the lake, I think. But the county, we're 23,000 people or so, and it's gained about 3000 people in the last 10 years.

Back in the 1970s and 80s, we got down to 16,000. We're moving back in the right direction. The sales tax has really picked up because of the 4-lane highway, too. Tourism is popping up at the intersection because of the highway.

And I don't think it's just people traveling through. It's just a lot easier to come up here from smaller towns than it was before, and people are passing through on the way to the lake.

Moderator: Where do Clinton residents go for their regular shopping?

I think the gas is going to keep them here.

Most people go to Wal-Mart.

Dollar General.

Walgreens.

And if you're looking at downtown, that's one thing it needs is an anchor store down there. Right now, it's probably Dollar General.

(unintelligible...)

We had a collapse a while back, and we have the new Elks building, and it's going to be really nice. There's going to be a drugstore, clothing store, computer store.

And a space that's still available.

We really miss Kreisler's down on the Square. That would be an anchor business.

Kreiser's is a local Walgreens.

I've heard the Dollar store talk about moving off the Square. Anybody heard that? I don't know.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: What are popular options for dining and entertainment?

Applebee's.

Most people take people to El Sombre's and Pizza Glen, but outside that...

Mexican food.

New movie theater.

Yeah.

And you've got 2 18-hole golf courses, both of which have restaurants, both of which should've been combined at some point.

We've got the building you're sitting in, which is an aquatic center and exercise.

Katy Trail.

We've got a swimming pool in the park.

It's Olympic-sized.

(side conversations.)

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

The right direction, but there's only so much you can do down there.

The restaurants are staying open later, I think.

As good as other towns is not good enough.

When the Elks caved in...our buildings are old, and I think that has an effect on the downtown, on people going in now to buildings.

Safety concerns.

Have we ever had them inspected?

Not unless you call the Main Street engineer a safety inspector.

The old buildings are the main attractions down there, though. If you replace them, you lose the ambiance.

We've got one guy that owns probably a third of the Square, and he wants to keep them all there. We just became part of the National Historical Registry. Many are vacant, but there needs to be an anchor store there to draw people. We used to have a J.C. Penney's and other things there in the past, and we just don't have that anymore.

(agreement.)

Moderator: What are the main reasons people go downtown?

I work downtown.

The courthouse.

There are dress stores and the gift shop.

Jewelry store.

There's several stores. It's just not full.

Attorneys.

A lot of professional businesses.

There used to be 4 or 5 dress shops, and shoe stores everywhere. There's still one dress shop and one shoe store.

Back in those days, the lawyers were upstairs.

The out of town people come for Evertine's, Nagel's.

The museum. We have a nice museum, right off the Square.

Antique shops.

When they start showing up, it's scary, because you can't rent the building.

We're revitalizing an old movie theater into a live theater.

We're hoping for an art gallery.

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

When Wal-Mart showed up, out everything went.

The dime store.

We even had a bowling alley there.

People used to live in the apartments above the shops, and they don't anymore. Just a couple.

(side conversations, agreement.)

Moderator: Do you think there's a need or demand for housing downtown?

I can't speak to the need for it, but I'd sure like to see apartments come back. That would reenergize the Square.

Affordable. Something that's not super-expensive.

I think they would be affordable, unless somebody really sunk a lot of money in.

I could see them going both ways because of the buildings.

I think a lot of the insurance... (unintelligible).

Our building used to have 3 or 4 above it, and we remodeled it with ADA requirements, there wasn't any way to use those stairs anymore. That's probably cost some of the changing, because people can't afford all the requirements to actually remodel. Just compliance things.

I think the East side of the Square and you put an elevator and walkway on the back sides of the buildings, that could work.

You could do that on the West side too.

I think the engineering, plus most all of the buildings are really in need of repair, and by the time you get that done, you'd have to have so much.

So you'd spend \$150,000 on remodeling just the upstairs.

A lot of those are so dilapidated for lack of maintenance on the roofs and the walls, and a lot are shared walls.

One major issue is that the community likes to utilize the community—we do Halloween, an Easter egg hunt, a car show, Old Glory Days, a Christmas Parade, parades all come through the Square. Parking's not a real issue. The farmer's market doesn't pose too many problems right now as far as parking. Some additional parking on the outskirts could be stripped and turned into parking or cleaned up. On the back side of the Elks, there's a whole area that could be public parking. You've probably got the same thing on every side of the Square. Some of the alleyways could be cleaned up, too.

(many people agreeing.)

The museum parking lot, we use it just every once in a while.

Moderator: Do people perceive a parking problem?

Only when there's a big function. If somebody needs to get to court during a function, you have to park all the way out. There's not a true public parking lot anywhere.

And it's not well-marked.

There's no cost to park anywhere, which is good.

I don't see a problem parking on the Square, but on the side streets, the employees take up most of those spots.

The whole library, they could put a parking lot there.

Well, and what I was alluding to with Kreisler's and the Elks, the drainage system off the backs of these buildings...well, there is none. If you go to the South Side, your buildings are in better shape based on the way water traveled... supposedly the water caused the collapse of the Elks. We should divert water away from the buildings and incorporate that with additional parking. The new theater will need more parking, too.

(agreement.)

I think they're talking 250 for the pavilion and 237 seats for the pavilion.

Does the theater own that parking place just north of it?

No.

Moderator: Are business hours convenient?

No. They shut down at 5:00.

Dollar General stays open until 7:00.

The restaurants have started opening a little later.

Some people have tried Thursday nights.

Way back when, Saturday night was the night.

There's been a lot of changes. Now, I'm not certain anyone utilizes the Square on Saturday nights.

(agreement.)

Moderator: *In terms of finding your way to and around downtown, is it easy to navigate?*

I don't think it's difficult for anyone, even tourists.
There are several signs.

And we got a war memorial down there, which does bring a lot of people down there. You'd be surprised how many people are taking pictures down there.

And that one by the cemetery is gorgeous, too.

There's no signs to show you which way you go around the Square.

Traffic direction.

We don't have stop signs coming off the center of the Square.

And they should. People used to know...

We painted it with arrows a few years ago.

I don't think I'd know how to do it if I was new.

(many people talking at once.)

...in the center, people need to know where to stop...

...there should be stop signs on all sides...

...if you're coming in from the North, it's hard to see traffic coming, and you get down into the inside and here come somebody real fast telling you you're number one.

(laughter.)

Moderator: *A few of you mentioned the Elks building. Did that raise safety concerns?*

Definitely.

And it raised awareness in other communities, too.

The moisture problem we have on the North side of the Square contributed to it greatly.

(agreement.)

As the Elks fell in, it affected the other buildings too. It affected all of us.

I think it affected the attitude of people. Several people are still scared to go down there. And people are aware of exterior problems, you can see them. Missing bricks...

(agreement.)

Moderator: *How do people get information about what's happening downtown?*

Newspaper.

Newspaper, radio, e-mail from the Chamber.

They've got a flyer.

My mom got a bank statement in Kansas City, and it had an Old Glory Days brochure in it. I think our Chamber did a good job.

Moderator: *Let's spend the rest of our time looking to the future of downtown. What kinds of businesses would you like to see downtown?*

I thought a lot about a...would an outlet mall ever think of going in a place like this? They're a destination for people out of town...(unintelligible).

This would be a good place for it.

People drive 70 miles out of town for outlet malls.

(side conversations.)

I never saw one with old buildings like this, though.

I'd like to see a hardware store and a grocery store, but I've been told by everyone that it'll never work.

I'd like to see a children's clothing store.

(agreement.)

Those mom and pop stores are not going to come back. It's just a definite.

With the price of gas what it is, you'd think there would be people who wanted to do it.

(many people talking at once.)

If you could get 4 or 5 additional retail stores downtown, they might decide that all of their open hours are 10 to 7 as opposed to 8 to 5. I think the downtown, or the community, needs something by way of entertainment for younger people. I'm not just saying teenagers. I think it needs something for younger adults. I don't even know what it is, but if you're 24 years old and you don't like to hunt or fish, there's nothing to do around here. There's no place to listen to live music, and it doesn't need to be every week. They have drinking establishments here, but there's not an upscale restaurant or lounge...

There's not an upscale restaurant.

Well, there is, but it's not on the Square.

I think something like that on the Square would be great.

We never support a great restaurant. We'll just never do it.

No town this size is ever going to have a great restaurant.

People go to Collins.

(many people agreeing.)

That may be part of the problem, is people want to drive somewhere else. But if you gave people a reason to stay.

If you could go out to eat on the Square and the stores were open...

But they'll jump in the car and go somewhere else.

They would stay if there were something to do!

You were talking about...(unintelligible)...there's an old Square south of Las Crusas, and there are upscale restaurants, a couple bars...this is New Mexico, so they all serve alcohol, and there are some really nice gift shops. There's a 100-year-old church, they have a little square garden park area, and they have things there almost every weekend. Now, parking is not good, but they promote that so well, that all of those buildings are full. It's Mesilla, New Mexico.

I think one thing is for certain. There's hundreds of people from our community, and a lot of them stay. You've got a lot of families that have stayed. Everyone wants to see the Square survive and thrive. We want to see a constant number of businesses and we want to see people survive down there.

(side conversations.)

We had a great steeple up there, and they tore it down.

It was really overdone.

It was a tourist attraction, though.

I think we can revitalize our downtown to be a calling card.

I still think you have to start with the infrastructure. Get rid of the water problem. And if every store was full, parking would be a problem. You've got the employees all parking all over. And the north and south sides will be like that once Kreisler's is open again.

Wouldn't it be nice for us to have to worry about that?

I think getting some of that old dilapidated areas utilized for that...

But it's the same old problem. Wal-Mart's sitting out here with everything, cheap.

That's the problem.

That's why Dollar General is convenient to run into.

(many people talking at once.)

You've got to be competitive somewhere in the neighborhood of Wal-Mart.

Or you've got to provide something Wal-Mart doesn't have.

Atmosphere.

Moderator: Let's talk about the look and feel of downtown. What do you think the big priorities need to be?

Getting businesses up there.

Probably a more uniform look. We've got a few buildings with the more modern façade on the front.

The Elks looks really good.

On the South side, there's a vacant lot. That could be turned into a small park, with a couple of small benches and a couple big flower pots. Something there.

Whether it's a parking lot or something...

Yeah, it could be a parking lot! Just something other than a vacant lot.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

I don't know how neat you can make housing up above there, but there's a few areas that could probably be clean swept and utilized for housing. You can't build a new structure that's not \$100,000. If you build in the outskirts, it's expensive. But living downtown might be cheaper and developing there. If you add 50 people to Square, they're going to walk all over.

A grocery store, and a coffee shop, a bookstore, a restaurant that's open late... they'll walk there.

(unintelligible conversations.)

If you get people to downtown, you can get more things to do. It's chicken before the egg, but...

One thing we've all talked about is that the focus has changed from downtown out to the East Junction, and we need to get the focus back to the downtown historic area.

The streets are good, the courthouse lawn is pretty...

(agreement.)

We've got the makings.

Moderator: My last question is, thinking about other downtowns, which would you like to see Clinton resemble?

I've never saw another small town better than what we've got here.

Butler's kind of pretty, with the brick on the ground.

I think Carthage has a nice Square.

(many conversations at once.)

If you talk about downtowns that aren't Squares, Warsaw... they've done quite a bit with that Gasoline Alley.

That's really cool.

And they had a little area upstairs...but their food wasn't any good.

(laughter.)

We'd like to see it be more retail. A place you could go shop and eat, rather than a purely professional setting.

We do draw clients downtown for the professional stuff.

The dress shops would draw people from Warrensburg, and they'd eat, years ago.

(many people talking at once.)

I think in order to get the shoppers to the Square, we need to look at what Nagel's and Main Street are currently doing. They're pulling people from out of town for the specialty of it. It's not just your run-of-the-mill stuff. It's not real expensive...

It's not cheap, though.

It's boutique stuff.

We should have meat market.

A bookstore.

A Wild Oats or something like that.

My in-laws are from Texas, and they're used to buying meat from a butcher shop, and they drove to Kansas City to buy steak.

We have nothing like that. We've got stuff that's a 15-minute drive away, but not here.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Thank you very much.