

# Excelsior Springs, Missouri

DOWNTOWN  
REVITALIZATION &  
ECONOMIC  
ASSISTANCE FOR  
MISSOURI

DESTINATION  
ASSESSMENT

AUGUST 2009





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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



PLANNING CONSULTANT



DOWNTOWN  
REVITALIZATION &  
ECONOMIC  
ASSISTANCE FOR  
MISSOURI

DESTINATION  
ASSESSMENT

---

*This Page Intentionally Left Blank*

---

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

---

	<u>PAGE</u>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
The Importance of Tourism .....	2
Assessment Methodology .....	3
Hierarchy of Needs .....	6
<b>CURRENT ENVIRONMENT AND ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCE.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Assessment Visit Experience .....	8
Perceptions, Understanding & Current Positioning .....	11
Visitor Profile .....	12
<b>REACHING DESTINATION POTENTIAL .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Suggested Positioning .....	14
Suggestion for Improvements .....	15
<b>CONCLUSIONS, IMPLEMENTATION AND FUTURE WORK .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Inventory of Attractions .....	22

*This page left intentionally blank*

## INTRODUCTION

The DREAM Initiative concentrates efforts on downtown revitalization because the overall health of the community is greatly influenced by the vitality and viability of its downtown. Moreover, downtown reflects the unique attributes of a community—its heritage, its people and its future. While much of America becomes culturally homogenized, our downtowns should retain their unique identity and reflect the incredible diversity contained within the American story. For tourists, downtowns embody the character of the community and represent hidden treasures awaiting discovery.

The DREAM Initiative recognizes that downtown exists within a larger context. Tourists may visit a city for destinations outside downtown, such as a nearby natural or historic attraction, but downtown should be a part of their adventure. In order for downtown to be viable as a tourist destination it must offer unique shopping and dining adventures as well as cultural and recreational opportunities.

The Destination Assessment component of the DREAM Initiative will help Excelsior Springs better understand its potential to derive benefits from tourism. Many communities already enjoy a significant economic impact from tourism, while others have fledgling tourist industries. In either case, the assessment will help formulate an aspiratory *and* realistic vision for the future. Recommendations will address potential synergies among existing features to capitalize on Excelsior Springs' Downtown and the surrounding area's tourism assets.

The "Destination Assessment Team" is a collaborative effort among representatives of PGAV, the Missouri Division of Tourism, and the Missouri Arts Council. The findings and recommendations contained within the Destination Assessment, while primarily prepared by PGAV, represent a coordinated effort to address the "tourist" or "visitor" experience from independent consultants and key State agencies involved in tourism and the arts. It is anticipated that the Missouri Division of Tourism and the Missouri Arts Council will play an ongoing role in providing technical and financial resources, as applicable.

This assessment will assume, as numerous Excelsior Springs officials, residents, and businesses noted in early meetings, that the style of tourism Excelsior Springs desires to promote is of a controlled, sustainable, orderly nature. The City would like to avoid the connotative meanings attached to the word 'tourist' and are more interested in the characteristics described by the word 'visitor'; and this document attempts to recognize that distinction.



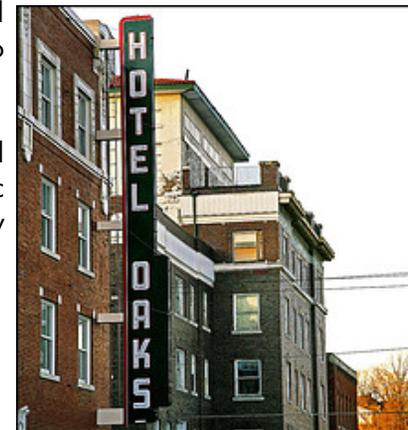
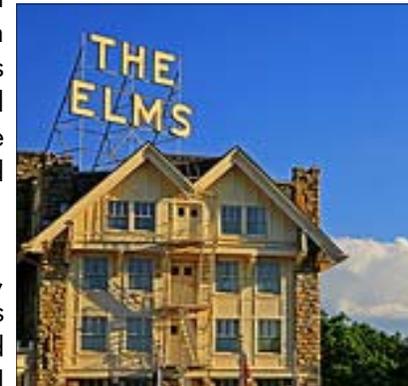
## THE IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM

A vibrant tourism trade offers many potential benefits to a community. Tourism can help enhance the image of an area, increase local pride, and improve quality of life. As an industry, tourism is recognized as an important component of a diverse economy providing employment, redevelopment, and investment opportunity. All together, tourism can help to build a distinctive, unique, and productive community.

The economic benefits of tourism include job creation, as well as increased retail sales generation, essentially bringing new money into the community. The potential new retail sales from tourism can help to counter the changing nature of the retail environment, which has generally lead to a decline in sales tax revenues over the last few decades. While this effect is felt community-wide, it has had a particularly strong impact on many small downtowns. The attraction of new money to the community through tourism is an effective strategy to deal with the financial gap left by these trends as new money travels into and circulates throughout the community.

The positive effects of a successful tourism industry resonate through many business sectors, including non tourism-related businesses and the local community. The positive impacts will be felt by local businesses and residents alike. Local residents will benefit from added or improved visitor services and infrastructure, increased employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and improved shopping convenience and increased choice. A well balanced mix of retail, services, and recreation will make Downtown a destination, attractive to residents, visitors, and investors.

In light of the far-reaching impacts of a successful tourism industry, and the size of the local industry, tourism should be viewed as a strategic sector in Excelsior Springs's economic future. Any Economic Development strategy for Excelsior Springs should specifically address the tourism industry and its importance to the local economy.



## ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The Destination Assessment provides a snapshot of the tourism industry operating community-wide, with a focus on Downtown. The “rapid assessment” process employed in Excelsior Springs consists of reviewing existing data and marketing materials, as well as, conducting field work, visiting the community, its key destinations, and meeting with tourism leaders. This report and the recommendations contained herein should serve as a foundation, providing strategic direction for the City as it moves toward destination success. Understanding the framework used to evaluate Excelsior Springs’s destination potential will provide a useful context for the recommendations and suggestions for improvement.

Development of a tourism enhancement strategy, just as any business or product development strategy, begins with an evaluation of the relationship between product and customer in a competitive marketplace. The analysis of these relationships results in the development or identification of a competitive advantage. A competitive advantage gives a community an edge over its rivals and an ability to generate greater success. The more sustainable the competitive advantage, the more difficult it is for competitors to neutralize the advantage. Competitors in this scenario are other communities that are attempting to attract in whole, or large part, the same target market.

### **Product**

For the purposes of this analysis the product is Downtown, its amenities and environ including: businesses, restaurants, museums, infrastructure, people, streets, sidewalks, parks, events, etc. Downtown is evaluated in terms of a theme park or resort, striving to provide the same level of services. Downtown needs a balance of businesses and amenities that address, at a minimum, the basic needs of customers. A key to a successful product is maintaining focus on the primary product, service, or destination strengths, while at the same time adapting to changes and taking advantage of opportunities.

The Destination Assessment will identify areas in need of improvement that will overlap with other DREAM Initiative tasks. Those tasks will be noted and addressed in greater detail in their corresponding analyses.

### **Customer**

The customer, in this evaluation, is the visitor or patron including residents of the community, neighboring areas, traditional tourists, etc. The community must understand who their customers are, who is currently visiting Downtown and why, as well as who they might be able to target and how. To understand and target customers, it is helpful to categorize visitors. A common categorization of visitors is by the reason for their visit:

Business Travelers—Most likely to travel during the week, driven by businesses, primarily basic needs of lodging, restaurants, services, gift shopping, and evening entertainment, potential to impress and return for pleasure.

**Customer** (continued)

Family Travelers—Most likely to travel during the weekend, driven by relatives, less likely to need lodging, potential needs of services and restaurants, general shopping.

Ethnic and Cultural Seekers—Looking for exposure to new experiences, development, and education. Interested in the area’s “way of life” and people. Adventurous and looking for more than basic needs. Museums, galleries, concerts, festivals, and performances. Likely to shop for unique items.

Heritage and Passive Recreation Enthusiasts—This visitor enjoys the scenery and feel of the area more than the interaction with the people. They are more inwardly focused and reflective. Their needs are similar to the culture seeker, but are just as likely to enjoy a drive through town to look at architecture or a walk in the local parks.

Active Outdoor Adventurers—Intense enjoyers of the parks and natural areas. These sportsmen enjoy a wide variety and are not always young. Outdoorsmen, boaters, hikers, or golfers; they are on the move. They are devoted and spend money on their chosen sport.

Urban Entertainment—The shoppers, team sport spectators, college visitors, night owls, or amusement park attendees. They tend to travel in groups and have higher expendable incomes. Internet connectivity and cell phone access is important to them.

**Market Positioning and Brand**

Once an understanding is reached on exactly what the product is and who the customers or target markets are, the focus turns to identifying the market positioning. An important component of a competitive advantage is a distinct market positioning and brand—something that draws on the strengths of the destination, its authenticity, and leverages customers’ desire for unique experiences.

It is essential to understand how customers currently perceive the destination, especially relative to competitors. This perception is the community’s image or brand. The destination must craft a strategy that builds on the positive aspects of its current image and, if necessary, repositions it to a more advantageous and competitive position. Repositioning takes time, patience and persistence as it typically involves modifying previously held perceptions about your destination.



Customers carry a preconceived idea of the destination’s brand. The brand represents what people think of you—your image. The destination’s brand is important as it is essentially a promise to provide a product or service in a consistent way.

Destination brands have four distinct components that make up brand image in the mind of the customer. Each component represents an opportunity to differentiate from competition and offer a unique consumer benefit. Destinations can reach their maximum potential by leveraging all four components.

***REALM ONE—PLACE:***

If you visit the Empire State Building, you go to a building with the city surrounding it. Up at the observation tower, the **place** becomes an oasis high above bustling Manhattan. What benefits does the place provide for the guest? Some people like the high energy feeling of being in the city, but they may also like taking a break from the intensity. People go to a destination. It exists in a physical place. A destination should try to get the most out of the power of its place.

***REALM TWO—EXPERIENCE:***

Hike in the canyon. Ride the coaster. Attend a show. People want to *do* something at a destination—something unique, something to brag about, or something to share. The experience of a destination can provide key benefits to guests and a fundamental part of its brand. A destination can reach its full potential when it promotes the benefits of a unique experience and delivers.

***REALM THREE—MINDSET:***

Sometimes a destination epitomizes or evokes an attitude, value, or mindset that has meaning beyond the physical limits of the site. Colonial Williamsburg set out to “own” the concept of Colonial America, and people might feel more patriotic just thinking about it. When a destination can symbolize an inspirational concept, it can form a powerful connection with its guests. The destination becomes a touchstone for the concept and people return to renew their connection with it.

***REALM FOUR—ORGANIZATION:***

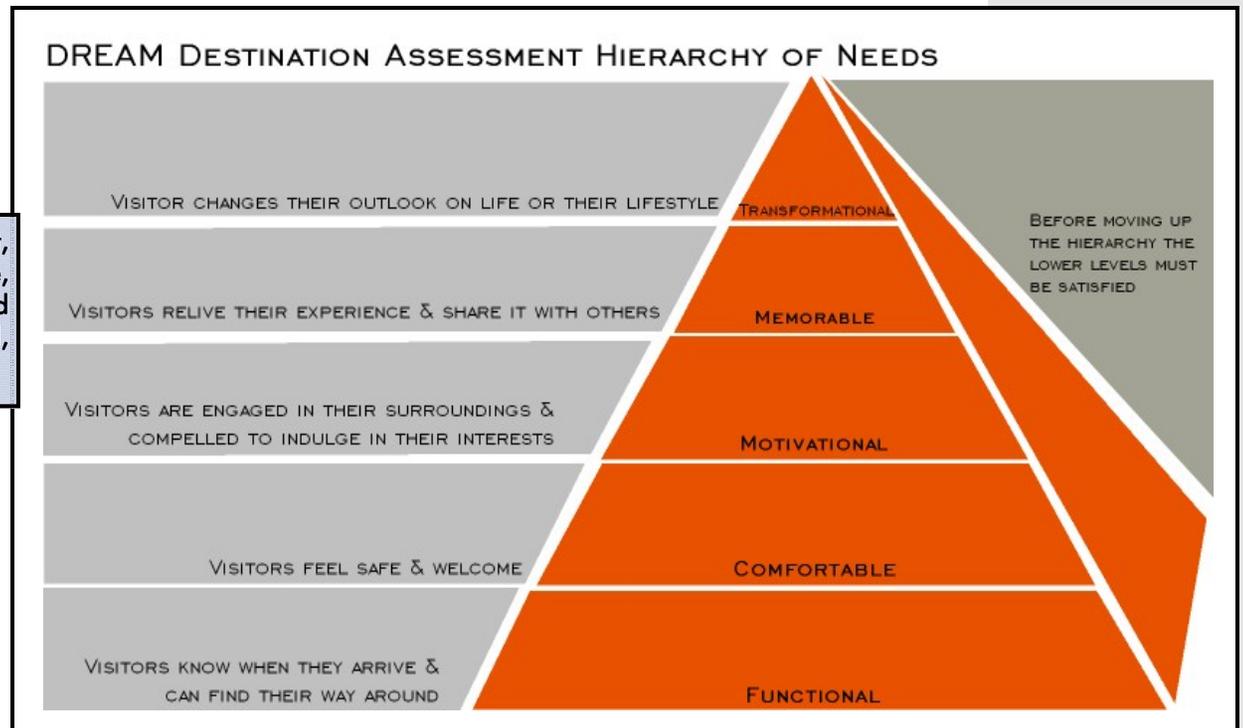
What role does the organization behind the destination play in the brand? The Niagara Parks emblem conveys tremendous trust among regional guests who want to spend their money with the organization that helps preserve the nature and heritage of Niagara Falls. The organizational dimension of a destination may also make a big difference to future employees, donors, business partners, granting agencies, or other organizations. People want to associate with a cause or organization they feel good about, one that expresses their own values and aspirations.

When people think of your destination, do they long to be in the place, get excited by the experience, aspire to the values represented, and trust the organization behind it? When you can answer ‘yes’ to all four, people will attribute a high value to your destination brand. That value is your destinations’ competitive advantage, which relates directly to attendance and financial success.

## HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Destinations and, in a larger sense, downtowns are basically customer-oriented businesses and therefore should always take the customer point-of-view. As stated earlier, when destinations conduct product development and determine marketing decisions they must address what the customer wants and needs. During the Destination Assessment Kick-Off Meeting, the Destination Assessment Team introduced the concept of a destination consumer “Hierarchy of Needs,” which hypothesizes that customers must have their most basic needs met before they can attain higher levels of fulfillment. This customer-focused theme will recur throughout the recommendations for each community.

For the purposes of this Destination Assessment, PGAV uses the hierarchical scheme shown here, listed from bottom to top, to illustrate and describe the motivations of the typical, “Downtown” Missouri tourist.



There are a great number of reasons or desires that drive an individual consumer’s decision to travel and their choice of destination. The “Hierarchy of Needs” describes the requirements a typical visitor has to have met in order for them to have a fulfilling destination experience. Questions a destination community may ask themselves regarding whether or not their community’s destination assets meet these needs are:

1. Functional: Does the City provide adequate wayfinding to make travel throughout the area easy and somewhat intuitive? Do visitors know when they have “arrived”? Does the City adequately provide basic comforts, such as parking, bathrooms, and a place to rest? Is information about destinations and events easily attainable?

**HIERARCHY OF NEEDS** (continued)

2. **Comfortable:** Is the downtown pedestrian friendly and well lit? Are the building facades and streetscape designs aesthetically pleasing? Are numerous lodging and dining options present throughout the municipality? Does the downtown provide adequate comforts so that the visitor can relax and get away from home?
3. **Motivational:** Does the downtown provide visitors with activities in which to participate? What will move the visitor to get out of their car and get involved? Does the downtown provide a chance to learn, interact with others, and an opportunity for adventure or escape?
4. **Memorable:** Does the downtown leave the visitor with positive memories? Do visitors repeatedly return to downtown? Do visitors recommend a visit to downtown to others? Is there positive word-of-mouth about downtown?
5. **Transformational:** If the City meets the aforementioned needs, then they've created a fulfilling experience to the visitor, which, hopefully, will positively change the visitor; thus imbuing the visitor with not only a valuable rejuvenative experience, but also a new and positive outlook on life. The visitor will want to return to and reconnect with the destination to renew that positive outlook in the future. The visitor will actively seek to bring others and share the rejuvenative experience.

In the case of a visit to a destination like a resort, zoo, or theme park, a single organization manages the tourist experience to ensure a “seamless” experience; one that flows smoothly and consistently from parking and restrooms to attractions, food and shopping without breaks in the “brand.” People have come to expect this level of product and service. Destination communities would benefit from emulating this model to the degree they can considering the complexity of their destination environment (i.e. multiple tourism product owners and interests). For example, Destination communities can develop organizational structures that support a coordinated aesthetic presentation of downtown; manage a consistent and unified marketing plan; administer special event planning; and guide businesses towards consistent business standards (i.e. uniform business hours).

Although Destination Assessment focuses on tourism and arts, many of the recommendations promise to improve quality of life for both visitors and residents. Conversely, many of the recommendations in other parts of the overall DREAM initiative, such as streetscape improvements and traffic management will provide essential infrastructure to support tourism. This synergy of benefits illustrates the key strategy of the initiative—that an integrated approach to planning and implementation will achieve the best results for Excelsior Springs.

## CURRENT ENVIRONMENT AND ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCE

### ASSESSMENT VISIT EXPERIENCE

Most approaches to Excelsior Springs include a pleasant drive past farms, fields of crops, cattle, or a few grazing horses. Clearly, Excelsior Springs is “remote” given its relative proximity to the city of Kansas City and its northeast suburbs. Excelsior Springs enjoys the benefit of being located on a State highway and within close proximity to the interstate system leading directly to Kansas City.

The eastern approach to Excelsior Springs from State Highway 10 via Interstate 70 leads visitors on a two lane road to the City limits. There are opportunities to turn off Interstate 70 and head toward Excelsior Springs, taking either State Highway 13 or 24, both of which will ultimately lead to Highway 10. When on Highway 10 traveling west, the Destination Assessment Team found it difficult to follow the very few signs directing visitors to Excelsior Springs. After turning onto Highway 13, a visitor could easily miss a turn onto Highway 10, as all routes are small two-lane highways, and there are few significant landmarks. Once the Destination Team got closer to the City on Highway 10, there was a sign directing visitors to Downtown Excelsior Springs.

Approaching the City from the west on Highway 10 is a much more direct route, and visitors can easily follow Interstate 35 to US Highway 69 north to Excelsior Springs. The travel time from Kansas City to Excelsior Springs is only one half hour, making this a very convenient drive. Once in the City, the path to Downtown is winding with multiple sharp turns before finally reaching Thompson Avenue. Wayfinding signage is also in short supply when approaching from this direction.

In general, there are residences, farms, parks and some businesses along the routes, with little or no signage or wayfinding directing visitors to Downtown. It is easy to get lost.

The first impression a visitor has of a destination is typically a lasting impression. Once visitors enter Broadway or Thompson Avenues, and the Downtown district, Excelsior Springs appears to be a quaint and historic town. The Destination Assessment Team could see evidence of street, storefront and building improvements – sidewalks, street light banners, and new curbs helped to demarcate the area. Many of the historic renovations or building improvements appeared fresh and well-done. However, there were few people on the streets and many shops were closed, suggesting to the Team that there are not many residents or visitors who frequent Downtown.



The intersection of Excelsior Springs' main streets of Thompson Avenue and Broadway is just 5 blocks from the main roads that lead into Downtown. Once visitors enter Downtown, there are several signs that direct visitor to the Hall of Waters or the Hall of Waters District. Downtown was easy to navigate as the continuity of streetscapes, sidewalks and renovated buildings provided definite demarcation of Downtown. Within the Downtown, there was convenient parking on the street, although there were few people visible and many of the shops were closed. There were two or three public parking lots of substantial size and the Destination Assessment Team concluded that parking could quickly become a problem during busy days or events.



Upon entering Downtown, the Destination Assessment Team looked for a visitor or a welcome center where the Team could obtain information and a map of Excelsior Springs. Many signs directed us to the Hall of Waters, a beautiful building surrounded by a clean landscape, and located at the intersection of several streets in Downtown. The Hall of Waters had a small and very convenient parking area right in front of the building. In fact, the Destination Assessment Team expected to find the Visitor Center inside the Hall of Waters. Many City offices are located in the Hall of Waters, as well as the world's largest mineral water bar. However, there were no brochures about Excelsior Springs or surrounding attractions. We were able to obtain a black and white copy of a map entitled "Excelsior Springs Hall of Waters Historic District Visitor's Guide." Since the Destination Assessment Team's original visit, The Downtown Excelsior Partnership has established a small, part-time Visitor Center here.



The Hall of Waters provides employees and visitors with access to public restrooms, although they were not on the main floor. However, once outside the Hall of Waters, there were no other places or businesses where visitors can purchase simple conveniences. There are some mini-marts associated with gas stations just outside the Downtown where visitors have access to restrooms or other amenities, but those min-marts are not pedestrian friendly and were outside the quaint, historic Downtown area. Providing these amenities for visitors is a basic need and important to creating a seamless experience.

There are several attractions and events appealing to adult visitors within the Excelsior Springs area. In particular, the Hall of Waters, Excelsior Springs Golf Course, Wine Festival at the Elms, antiques shopping and the Historical Museum provide attractions that appeal to adults. In addition to the above, families could enjoy visiting Watkins Woolen Mill State Park, and the Jesse James Farm and Museum located in the region around Excelsior Springs. There are a few special events and fairs in Excelsior Springs which occur throughout the year and appeal to a broad audience of families, adults and seniors. Events such as Gatsby Week, Waterfest, Hall of Trees and Bluegrass music performances at the History Museum attract residents and visitors of all ages to Excelsior Springs's Downtown district. In addition, The Elms Resort & Spa hosts meetings, weddings and reunions throughout the year, drawing thousands of visitors from adults to seniors and children.





There is also a growing community of artists based in Excelsior Springs and the environs. The old Baptist church located near Broadway and Thompson Avenue will be converted to artists' studios and an exhibit space. The nicely renovated buildings that have storefronts on the ground floor and apartments on the one or two floors above provides a welcoming venue for artists' galleries, studios and living space. There are a few artists who display and sell their work in local shops, but not enough to establish an "art district" at this time.



In addition to the physical arts, Excelsior Springs has great potential with theatre artists. The Paradise Playhouse, although recently closed, was a dinner theatre located in the center of Downtown which produced plays and musicals that residents and visitors would regularly enjoy. The playhouse building is currently vacant but similar performances could easily be revived there again. The local Kiwanis Club and Community Theatre produce a musical over the summer that appeal to residents. The Community Theatre group is moving to a new and permanent venue on the western end of Downtown, which will allow it to produce more theatrical performances on a regular basis.

There is a limited variety of shops and restaurants along Broadway and in Downtown, and the number of active businesses appeared sparse. However, the renovated buildings, art-deco architecture and well-done street and sidewalk improvements are inviting, and would encourage new businesses and restaurants to support the existing business base that has pioneered Downtown's revitalization efforts. It was noticeable that there were one or two blocks that appeared to be empty, having no business traffic at all.



The lodging in Excelsior Springs is very limited. Although there are a couple of bed and breakfasts, and a modest motel, The Elms Hotel is really the only lodging option available to most visitors. The Elms can accommodate a variety of visitors – from newlyweds to families and business travelers. Most of the overnight stays during weekdays are from business travelers and corporate meetings. On most weekends, The Elms is filled with guests for weddings or reunions. The fact that Excelsior Springs is a 30 minute drive from Kansas City does not usually encourage casual weekend overnight stays outside of special event planning.

## PERCEPTIONS, UNDERSTANDING & CURRENT POSITIONING

Excelsior Springs is proud of its natural springs and legacy as the place to visit for health spas and the therapeutic nature of its natural springs. In addition, Excelsior Springs promotes its proximity to Kansas City and the advantage that visitors can easily enjoy a “big city” and a “small town” within one half hour of each other.

As visitors to Excelsior Springs, the Destination Assessment Team initially perceived Excelsior Springs’ position in the destination market as a quaint small town that featured a historic hotel and a Downtown district that had the potential to support a good mix of restaurants, shops galleries and attractions. Downtown’s infrastructure – streets, sidewalks, curbs, lamp-posts and storefronts – were nicely finished and could provide a picturesque venue for businesses and attractions. Upon reflection, the Destination Assessment Team views Excelsior Springs as a town that has the potential to be a “get-away” or “small town escape” for residents of Kansas City, as well as visitors from the region.

The proximity of the community to Kansas City makes Excelsior Springs easily “drivable” and so accessible that little advance planning would be needed. The 25 minute drive to Excelsior Springs is no different than a drive from a suburban home to a downtown office in Kansas City. And the quaint small town atmosphere of the historic Downtown district is dramatically different than the Kansas City downtown, and reinforces the feeling that visitors to Excelsior Springs can “get-away” from the big city and enjoy a game of golf or listen to a live performance of blue grass music.

Excelsior Springs is in position to expand existing festivals as well as add more businesses, attractions, and lodging options. The addition of these elements, more fully described below, will provide this “critical mass” of attractions, restaurants and shops needed to draw more visitors from the Kansas City areas to Excelsior Springs.

**Welcome to the City of Excelsior Springs....**Welcome to the city of Excelsior Springs Missouri home page. Rich with history and tradition, Excelsior Springs is a vision of opportunity for residents and visitors alike. Our location, just 30 minutes from downtown Kansas City, makes Excelsior Springs the ideal location for business or family.

City of Excelsior Springs website, [www.ci.excelsior-springs.mo.us](http://www.ci.excelsior-springs.mo.us)



## VISITOR PROFILE

A majority of visitors to Excelsior Springs travel from the Kansas City region or the surrounding counties of Missouri and Kansas. Most visitors come to Excelsior Springs for events held at The Elms Hotel; weddings, reunions and meetings are the most frequent events hosted at the hotel, drawing broad audiences – from business travelers to families. The events are conducted throughout the year; business meetings dominate the weekdays, and weddings and reunions on weekends.

Other visitors to Downtown Excelsior Springs – whether resident or tourist – come for festivals and events. These visitors are predominantly “day-trippers” and consist of a broad audience, from children to seniors.

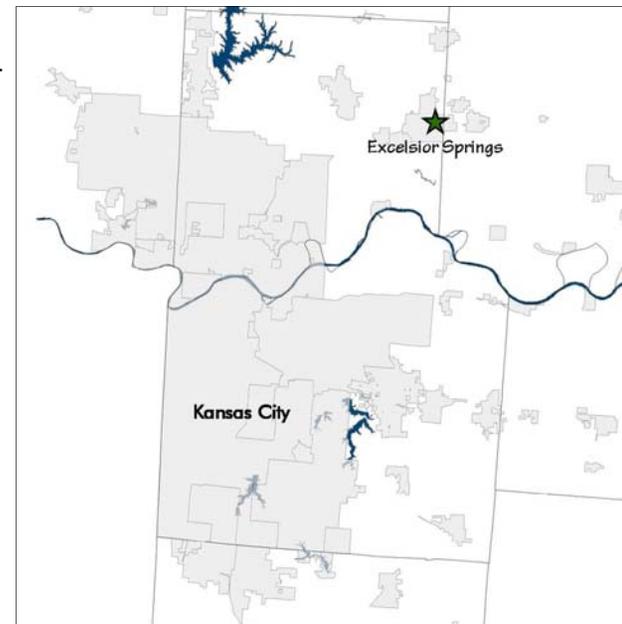
Current attractions and restaurants appeal more to adults, although there are some fairs and events throughout the Spring, Summer and Fall months that can entertain families. Also, there are several arts and theatre activities that can appeal to children. The dominant form of lodging is the Elms Hotel and a few bed and breakfasts.

In late 2007, the DREAM Initiative conducted a Visitor’s Survey of visitors to Excelsior Springs. Survey responses were gathered during special events held Downtown, therefore most respondents indicated that their reason for visiting Excelsior Springs was to attend a special event. A complete copy of the Excelsior Springs Visitor Survey Results is available from The City of Excelsior Springs. Interesting responses include:

- 32% of respondents indicated they had visited Downtown Excelsior Springs to attend a special event
- 40% of respondents said they visit downtown once a year or less. 11% said they visit Downtown more than 5 times a month.
- Dining & Shopping were among the top two reasons respondents indicated they were planning to visit Downtown.
- 42% of respondents thought they would spend at least \$100 or more on their visit to Downtown.
- A larger majority of respondents (81%) stated they do not bring children under the age of 18 with them to Downtown Excelsior Springs, and a majority of those who visit are between ages 35-49 (45%).

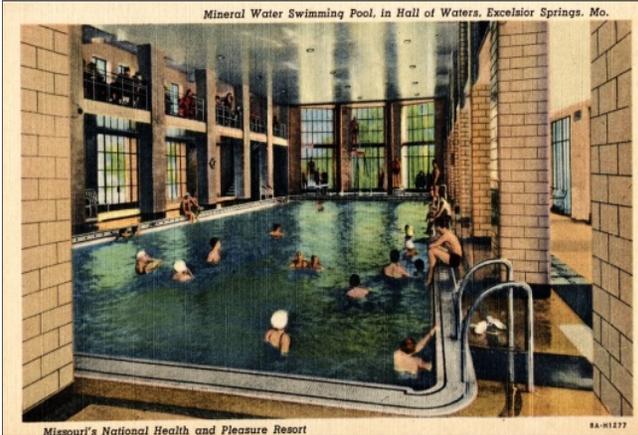
**VISITOR PROFILE** (continued)

- 46% of respondents thought Downtown was “very” or easy to navigate and another 35% thought it was “somewhat easy.”
- 66% of respondents thought the Downtown business hours were “very” or “somewhat” convenient.
- Less than 25% of respondents felt that Downtown parking was “somewhat” or “very” inconvenient .
- 56% of the respondents were staying at a motel/hotel or Bed and Breakfast in Downtown.
- A majority of respondents (60%) felt that “more/better restaurants” would make them more likely to visit Downtown. Other answers included a specific type of shop (in order: more shops, clothing stores, specialty/upscale shops, movie theater, antique & coffee shops).
- “Bands/live music”, “Theaters/movies/plays”, “more restaurants”, “more special events” were the top responses for recreation or entertainment opportunities likely to make a visitor come to Downtown.
- “Renovation of historic buildings” and “better maintained buildings” were the top physical improvements indicated by respondents.
- Almost 50% of those who visit have an income between \$50,000 to \$99,000.



## REACHING DESTINATION POTENTIAL

### General “Brand” Strategy



Excelsior Springs boasts a rich history of rejuvenating and therapeutic spas and mineral baths using the waters from the surrounding natural springs. But those natural resources are generally not available anymore, due to nature, deferred maintenance, and inaccessibility. Excelsior Springs cannot yet use the natural springs as the main attraction for visitors. However, as the water infrastructure is reconstructed, Excelsior Springs can promote its natural springs and waters, and it will already have an arts district Downtown that can provide activities and restaurants for spa visitors.

Improvement of existing attractions, recreational facilities, and addition of galleries, restaurants and events located in the historic downtown district will strengthen community support for historic Excelsior Springs

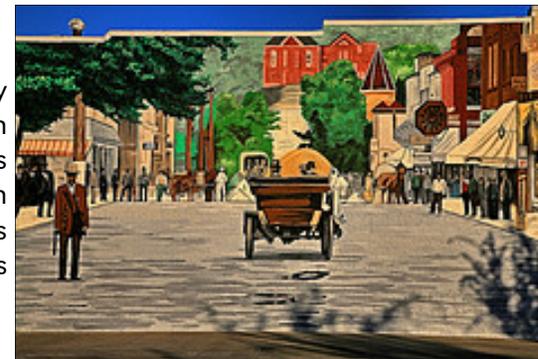
and will bring more residents, activities and money to Downtown. As the residents visit Downtown more and more, visits from tourists and business travelers will be an added bonus.

Excelsior Springs is not currently in a position to market Downtown as a stand-alone “tourist destination.” However, investing in the people, businesses and community of Excelsior Springs, and in particular Downtown, will bring the most benefit to Excelsior Springs as a city, and ultimately as a tourist destination.

## SUGGESTED POSITIONING

### Excelsior Springs: Getaway and Enjoy Arts and American Crafts

Excelsior Springs is not the only quaint, small town in Missouri, nor is it the only venue to feature a resort and spa, and it faces stiff destination competition on both accounts. However, the location of Excelsior Springs (so close to Kansas City) and the beautifully renovated historic buildings and streets in Downtown which are surrounded by picturesque parks provides a combination of attributes to position Excelsior Springs as a unique “arts and crafts” district for the Kansas City region and western Missouri.



### SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

There are different levels of recommendations that Excelsior Springs can follow in order to reach its destination potential. Improvements can range from better integration of existing community resources to adding more cultural events and attractions. Addressing basic needs of visitors and the coordination of existing resources and attractions can have a significant impact in helping Excelsior Springs realize its potential to its local community and region. In addition, addressing basic needs in Downtown will help Downtown realize its potential as a “destination” for arts and American crafts, and the place to escape for a day or two from the “big city” (Kansas City).

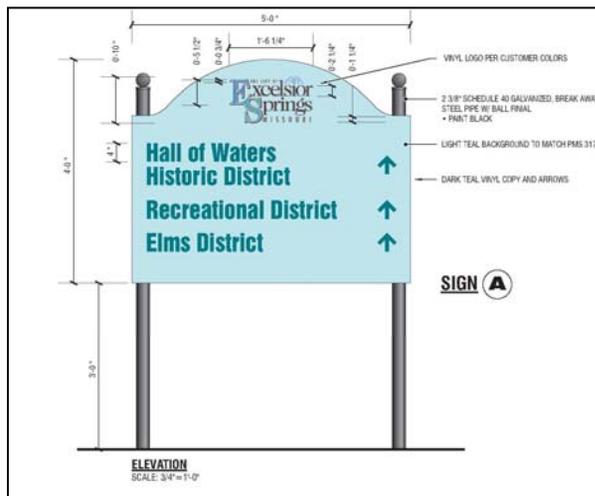
#### Improve Signage, Wayfinding, and Gateways to Downtown

It is important that Excelsior Springs establish a sense of place, define the boundaries of historic Downtown Excelsior Springs, and promote the brand of Excelsior Springs and its arts community. Good wayfinding is one of the most basic needs of visitors. Not only will wayfinding establish a sense of place for the City, it will also provide reassurance to visitors that they are on the right road, and that they are in the right place. This represents a missed opportunity to establish an arrival experience, to define the community of Excelsior Springs as a destination for arts and American crafts, and to promote the position of Excelsior Springs as the “best regional escape” from Kansas City.



Wayfinding Signage  
Webster Groves, Missouri

An improved and clearly defined corridor from Highway 13 and Interstate 70 to historic Downtown Excelsior Springs will establish a sense of place for visitors, and begin to create the setting for a relaxing visit. The use of consistent and well-placed signage along the several roads leading to town, banners as part of the streetscapes, and signage that is coordinated with signs on the interstate will make the drive to Downtown Excelsior Springs easier for any visitor. The City of Excelsior Springs is in the process of substantially revamping the existing wayfinding signage on the periphery of the community.



Once in the Downtown, there could be uniformed signage that defines the “Historic District” or “Art Works” zone or other signs with a Downtown logo or branding to highlight the events, attractions, and location of parking in and around the District. Design and construction of gateway monument signage at multiple Downtown entrances will further demarcate Downtown, encourage visitors to explore the several block area, and reinforce the uniqueness that is the Downtown and Hall of Waters District.

Establish Downtown Public Amenities for Visitors

Providing information to visitors is a vital component of a successful destination. In Excelsior Springs, a Visitor Center is the first place visitors stop. Although the nicely renovated Downtown is inviting, visitors still need direction and orientation. Currently, many visitors begin their tour of Excelsior Springs at the Elms Hotel because that is their lodging. And the Elms Hotel does provide brochures and directions for Downtown and surrounding local attractions. However, many visitors and most residents will not visit the Elms Hotel first.

The Destination Assessment Team found that the Hall of Waters was instinctively the first place to stop when entering Downtown Excelsior Springs: the building and site are beautiful, it has convenient parking located in front of the building, it is located in Downtown and is a good starting point for a walking tour. In addition, the Hall of Waters already has public restroom facilities that can easily be improved. Access to public restrooms is a basic need and important to creating a seamless experience. This is particularly important in consideration of the fact that the Hall of Waters and the surrounding blocks host events and festivals in Downtown. Additional public restrooms can be located in conjunction with the Visitor's Center or in conjunction with a group of art galleries. Furthermore, the facilities will provide shelter, a place to rest, and possibly the opportunity to purchase simple conveniences. Promoting the availability (i.e. signage) of public restrooms will be needed.

Within the Hall of Waters, the Water Bar is located on the main floor. It is an impressive space that has a good historic display about the mineral water springs and therapeutic clinics that once made Excelsior Springs one of the most desirable destinations in the country. This small attraction offers an important context to a visitor experience in Excelsior Springs. The Downtown Excelsior Partnership has recently made use of this space on a part-time basis to operate a Visitor Center.

The Visitor Center and accompanying information should be available 24 hours/7 days a week, such as making brochures available outside the facility when it is closed. The Center should be easy to locate for any visitor traveling by any means. One way to accomplish this is through improved wayfinding and signage, a simple and cost effective solution. The City's current efforts to upgrade the existing wayfinding signage on the periphery of the community continue to a Downtown wayfinding system, as mentioned previously.



Expand and Further Develop Park Amenities

Recreational opportunities are an integral part of the typical visitor's expectations as they seek to do more than the typical shopping, restaurants, and museums. In addition, park amenities such as playgrounds, ball fields, and trails provide a destination for residents. In Excelsior Springs, Paul Craig Park forms a large portion of the southern boundary of the Downtown area. The park offers a lighted ball field (Jim E. Piburn Ballfield) with parking, restrooms, and a playground, as well as a trail system which is part of the Fishing River Linear Park that connects Downtown to other parts of the community. Access to the park is available on Saratoga and Broadway Streets, both of which are located Downtown. Therefore, residents and visitors to Excelsior Springs have the opportunity to add leisure to their Downtown experience.

The Destination Assessment Team found that the park, while convenient to Downtown, lacked design appeal and did not offer a visitor much to do. Also, the connecting street from Broadway to the park did not provide an inviting entrance for people that might not be aware of the park's location. Further developing the park should begin with updating the amenities and adding new signage to better identify the park and its entrances. Upgrading the design can be achieved through uniformity of design features, such as lighting, signage, fencing, and building materials. In addition there is the opportunity for fountains and other water features to further beautify the space as well as tie into Excelsior Spring's history with water. Expanding the park and improving the connections will provide a vital link and help make the park a major destination in addition to the Hall of Waters, shopping, restaurants, and other sites of interest within Downtown.



Develop Programs Dedicated to the Arts

Arts, crafts, music and performances are part of almost every event or festival hosted by Excelsior Springs. Plus, there are many empty and renovated spaces that can house galleries and shops along the streets of Downtown. There is consensus among community businesses that Excelsior Springs should grow its arts community, looking to the model of Paducah, Kentucky. There are many talented local and regional artists that could use Excelsior Springs as a venue to show and sell their work.



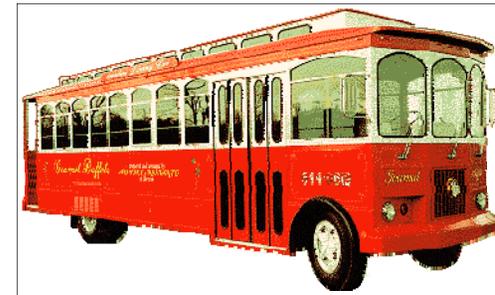
The several festivals hosted in Excelsior Springs throughout the year also feature “crafts” or “arts” as part of the event. This provides another opportunity for visitors to purchase artwork. In addition, most of the festivals and events provide a venue for music and theatrical performances.

Excelsior Springs must form an arts council. Not only would the arts council be able to coordinate and communicate with all artists in and around Excelsior Springs, but the arts council would be able to better utilize the resources of the Missouri Arts Council and can be more

competitive in its bid for community arts grants. The Excelsior Springs Arts Council could first be started or operated by Downtown Excelsior Partnership, with status as a 501c (3) organization.

Develop a Trolley Car for Downtown

An important component of a seamless experience is access to safe and reliable transportation. Currently, the majority of visitors travel to Excelsior Springs by personal vehicle or bus. Visitors arriving by bus are left with no other method of transportation once they arrive in Downtown. Additionally, visitors arriving by personal vehicle will likely park in one location and walk around most of Downtown. Most of the attractions, shops and restaurants are in a 6 square block area, a distance that is “walk-able” for most visitors. However, many visitors and residents will have to park several blocks from Downtown during events that attract large numbers of people. The City could address a basic need of Downtown visitors by expanding the City’s bus program to provide shuttles or some temporary transportation service during busy events or festivals. The opportunity exists for use of historic-looking trolley cars to tie into the historical nature of Downtown Excelsior Springs.



Coordinate Downtown Businesses and Cultural Activities

Excelsior Springs has the start of a diverse mix of attractions and character that make it a unique destination; however these attractions must work in concert in order to be successful. A simple way to improve the integration is through increased coordination of visitor-oriented retailers, service providers, attractions, and event activities. It is important that all businesses in Excelsior Springs work together to provide visitors with a seamless experience. A round of golf at the Excelsior Springs Golf Course, listening to blue grass music at the Historical Museum, or attending a wedding may provide main attractions but it is through the coordination of businesses, destinations and the Downtown organizational partnerships that the basic and higher level needs of a visitor can be met. For example, improved communication and coordination can help retailers and attractions develop similar hours of operation to encourage visitors to extend their stay, and provide a seamless experience while better meeting visitors needs.



“Art Crawls” on the second Friday of each month is a great example of an event that coordinates the business and destination resources of Downtown. This event persuades Excelsior Springs’ residents to visit downtown, enjoy food, entertainment, shops and visit with other members of the community. The addition of other events that happen during the day and/or on the weekend will allow for more people to enjoy the experience.



Restore Springs and Leverage Water for Additional Attractions

Excelsior Springs has a grand history related to the natural springs, mineral baths and therapeutic clinics from the 1920s-1960s. Although this feature of the town has declined over the years, the community is very interested in reviving and updating this attraction. The City should engage an engineering firm to review the potential of restoring springs in Downtown. Once the springs have been cleaned and repaired, and natural spring water is available, luxury spa facilities and getaway fitness centers would be a great addition to the Excelsior Springs attractions. The Downtown will already have developed more art galleries, shops, and restaurants, giving the spa visitors other attractions to extend their length of stay in Excelsior Springs.

Restore Springs and Leverage Water for Additional Attractions (continued)

In addition, development of water based features through public and private improvements around the Downtown should be encouraged. Since Downtown Excelsior Springs has several springs there is an opportunity to develop a “natural water park” to help reinforce the unique attributes of the City and provide a true attraction for visitors.

Beyond the springs and water, Excelsior Springs has a limited mix of attractions located within the Hall of Waters historic district as well as in the environs surrounding the town. Watkins Mills, Jesse James Farm and State parks that are near Excelsior Springs may attract some visitors, but they are not significantly tied to the community and brand of Excelsior Springs. Visitors can easily visit those attractions and not stop in Excelsior Springs or spend the night. With limited restaurant offerings, retailers closing their doors around 5:00PM, and no movie theatres, there are truly few other activities to keep visitors in town beyond their main purpose. The music and theatre performances attract local and regional visitors, but there are not enough other attractions to draw tourists into the heart of Downtown or to persuade them to extend their stay or even stay overnight.

Attention should be paid to the number and variety of shops and restaurants within Downtown. Filling empty storefronts, with particular attention to the types of retailer, will help create a more seamless shopping and gallery experience. New and existing stores should offer goods that complement the needs of visitors as well as residents.

For example, the Hall of Waters can be reinvented as a destination in addition to a Visitor Center. The Water Bar could be revived and updated to include a working mineral water bar and added facilities for catering. It would be a great site for special events: a guest reception for wedding guests at The Elms, rental space that a resident could use for parties, or the site for annual American crafts shows or awards ceremonies. The Hall of Waters and the Water Bar should become a “must see” attraction for visitors and residents.



## CONCLUSIONS, IMPLEMENTATION AND FUTURE WORK

Excelsior Springs possesses the foundation for cultural and entertainment attractions that can draw residents and regional tourists to Downtown and the natural attractions in the surrounding environs. However, the community – in particular Downtown – does not yet have the critical mass of attractions or a distinctive brand to attract more visitors solely as a destination. Furthermore, the integration of business operations, improving wayfinding and signage and furnishing visitors' "basic needs" will provide good customer services.

The expansion of the modest "artist" district in Downtown to include more resident artists' galleries, the addition of more arts and music activities at existing events, and the addition of one or two distinct arts festivals in Excelsior Springs will strengthen the personal experience and provide opportunities for enrichment to visitors and residents. Ultimately, the addition of more shops and restaurants and further development of the park and trails will complement the attractions and provide that critical mass needed to draw more tourists to Excelsior Springs as a destination.

Overall, Excelsior Springs will be able to reap the benefits of a "quick win" by addressing the recommendations that focus on the "basic needs" and "social experiences" of the visitors' Hierarchy of Needs. Specifically, improving signage and wayfinding, and expanding the Visitor Center within Downtown to provide conveniences and amenities will provide all visitors with a level of comfort and sense of place of Excelsior Springs that will encourage them to visit and stay in Downtown.

Addressing these basic needs will significantly improve the "get-away" and "small town" feel of Excelsior Springs, and will allow visitors to look beyond their comfort and safety needs, and explore the attractions that will deliver that "personal" and "enriching" experience that tourists hope to find in a destination. For Excelsior Springs, visitors will be able to really enjoy the richness and variety of arts and natural resources of the region, and firmly establish Excelsior Springs as a relaxing get-away for people in the Kansas City region.

- *Excelsior Springs offers an interesting and eclectic mix of shopping districts, history, eating establishments and cultural opportunities.*
- *Historically, Excelsior Springs meant excellence in tourism and health. Visitors flocked to Excelsior Springs health spas, clinics, hotels, restaurants and entertainment establishments. Promoted nation- and world-wide, Excelsior Springs became a premiere destination for health and relaxation. ...*
- *New growth provides additional shopping, dining, and recreational enjoyment for visitors throughout the city today. Come join us as we celebrate Excelsior Springs' 125th anniversary in providing quality of life for visitors, residents, and businesses, alike.*

Excelsior Springs Chamber of Commerce website, [www.exspschamber.com/tourism.html](http://www.exspschamber.com/tourism.html), 2006

---

*This Page Intentionally Left Blank*

---

**APPENDIX 1 - Inventory of Attractions**

<b>Type of Attraction</b>	<b>Name of Attraction</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Historic Sites/ Points of Interest</b>	<b>Carnegie Foundation Library</b>	Local Register property. The Excelsior Springs Library was built in 1916 with a \$10,000 grant from the Carnegie Foundation, through the efforts of the Civic Improvement Association to establish a library and reading room in Excelsior Springs.
	<b>Clay County State Bank</b>	Local Register property. Standing on what was originally the Excelsior Hotel grounds (Excelsior Springs first hotel), the bank was constructed of Bedford stone and was known as one of the most artistic bank buildings in Missouri.
	<b>Elms Resort &amp; Spa</b>	National Register property. Operating as a landmark 19th century resort hotel, the Elms offers accommodations, dining, spa, swimming pool and planned activities.
	<b>Excelsior Springs Museum and Archives</b>	Housed in the Clay County State Bank, the building is a historic resource in itself. Contains a vast collection of artifacts from historic Excelsior Springs reflecting the mineral water and health industry, hotels, pre-history, and more.
	<b>Excelsior Springs Hall of Waters &amp; Cultural Museum</b>	National Register property. The building boasts exquisite Art Deco detailing and houses the world's longest mineral water bar and a mineral water bath department.
	<b>Hiawatha Boarding House</b>	Local Register property. The Excelsior Soda Spring was located on the northeast corner of the property, 401 East Excelsior, where a well had been dug and water was made available from a hand pump on a concrete slab. Privately owned.

APPENDIX 1 - Inventory of Attractions

Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
<p><b>Historic Sites/ Points of Interest</b> (continued)</p>	<p><b>Jesse James Farm (Kearney, MO) and Mt. Olivet Cemetery</b></p>	<p>Located 15 minutes from Excelsior Springs. Home of Frank and Jesse James. The original house is still standing and is open to the public at the <b>James Farm</b>, a new visitor center and museum are also located on the property. Jesse James is buried in the historic <b>Mt. Olivet Cemetery</b>.</p>
	<p><b>O'Dell Family Cabin</b></p>	<p>Clay County Register property. The O'Dell cabin is considered to be the oldest existing building in Ray County, Missouri and was located on Old State Road, the first route across Missouri, the stopping place for western travelers.</p>
	<p><b>St. Luke's Episcopal Church</b></p>	<p>Local Register property. The church is a virtually intact example of a Gothic Revival "country" church, a style appropriate for the pastoral atmosphere of this resort city.</p>
	<p><b>Samuel J. Rowell House</b></p>	<p>Local Register property. Rowell served as mayor during 1909-1910 and his home, constructed in 1907, was the first private residence built on Elms Boulevard. Privately owned.</p>
	<p><b>Snapp/Oaks Hotel</b></p>	<p>Local Register property. The Oaks/Snapp Hotel in Excelsior Springs, Missouri is the second Snapp Hotel. It was designed by the prominent Kansas City architect Frank J. Jackson, of the firm Jackson and McIlvain (also designed two Elms Hotel buildings).</p>

**APPENDIX 1 - Inventory of Attractions**

<b>Type of Attraction</b>	<b>Name of Attraction</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Parks and Recreation</b>	<b>Paul Craig Park - Includes Jim E. Piburn Ballfield</b>	South of Broadway. Includes lighted ball field, rest-rooms, play equipment, and trail that parallels the Fishing River along the south side of the park.
	<b>East Valley Park - Includes Isley Park Woods (15 acres)</b>	South of Isley Road. Boasts three shelter houses and a view of thick forest on one side and the Fishing River on the other.
	<b>Fishing River Linear Park</b>	Borders the river, just north of East Valley Park and south of Paul Craig Park. It boasts an asphalt walking trail that parallels the river from Golf Hill Drive.
	<b>Siloam Mountain Park</b>	This hilltop park gives a lovely view of the town. The nature trail also connects Siloam Mountain to the previous two parks.
	<b>Cooley Lake Wildlife Area and Cooley Missouri River Access (south of Excelsior Springs)</b>	Owned by the Missouri Department of Conservation. These sites, comprising 1,348 acres, include the old oxbow lakes that were once part of the Missouri. Offers fishing, hiking, bird watching, and, on the river, boating as well.

**APPENDIX 1 - Inventory of Attractions**

<b>Type of Attraction</b>	<b>Name of Attraction</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Parks and Recreation</b> (continued)	<b>Smithville Lake</b>	Located 25 minutes from Excelsior Springs. Over 175 miles of shoreline offering excellent boating and fishing opportunities, two full-service marinas, and five multi-lane boat launch ramps for easy access to the 7,200 acre lake. A special sailboat launching area is available for the exclu-
	<b>Tryst Falls</b>	Located 10 minutes from Excelsior Springs. Provides a scenic site popular among area residents and visitors, alike. The beauty spot provides picnic areas with shelters, playground equipment, water, electricity, rest-rooms, and a baseball field.
	<b>Watkins Mill State Park —Watkins Woolen Mill</b>	Located 15 minutes from Excelsior Springs. A 1000-acre park. The site provides camping, picnicking, bicycling, swimming, boating and fishing, as well as walking and nature-watching opportunities. Watkins Woolen Mill State Historic Site is a 19th century woolen mill, complete with house and outbuildings, a church and school-house, and a modern visitors' center.
<b>Golf Courses</b>	<b>Excelsior Springs Historic Golf Course</b>	Public; 18-hole course

APPENDIX 1 - Inventory of Attractions

Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
<b>Arts &amp; Entertainment/ Special Events</b>	<b>Art Crawls</b>	Held on the second Friday of each month in Downtown, featuring work by local artists.
	<b>Excelsior Springs Community Theatre</b>	Community theatre located in Downtown.
	<b>Gatsby Days</b>	This annual event sponsored by the Excelsior Springs Cultural Guide takes place in late April and early May and is a popular community event to celebrate the past. Among the usual events scheduled are an 1890 to 1930 Style Show, a Radio Talk Show, River Arts Festival, Mystery Dinner Party, and Hickory Stick Golf Tournament.
	<b>Wabash Blues Garden</b>	Featuring live bands May through September, the Blues Garden provides outdoor concerts adjacent to one of Excelsior Springs historic train depots, now a BBQ restaurant and within walking distance of the Elms Hotel.
	<b>Waterfest</b>	An annual event sponsored by the Excelsior Springs Area Chamber of Commerce which celebrates the city's mineral water heritage and is held in the downtown Hall of Waters Historic District. This three day event features arts, crafts, live entertainment, and water games for the kids, motorcycle show, parade, fireworks and much more.