

# FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

## FINAL SURVEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

CITY OF EXCELSIOR SPRINGS, MISSOURI

May 29, 2007



**D·R·E·A·M**  
I N I T I A T I V E

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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



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PREPARED BY



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## SECTION I

### FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted three focus groups in Excelsior Springs, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the Excelsior Springs community in regard to the downtown area. The three groups included the following: 1) elected officials and city statespeople, 2) the business owners, and 3) residents.

Participants of all three groups are from a variety of backgrounds, and all have some interest in downtown development.

This report summarizes the responses of the members of all of the groups to the posed questions. Attached are the complete transcripts of the three meetings.

#### A. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE BUSINESS GROUP:

The following questions were included in the discussion guide for the business group:

##### General Questions about Excelsior Springs

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

##### Downtown Specific Questions

04. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Excelsior Springs 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/property owners)?

06. From what you hear from your customers, how “user-friendly” is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they’re looking for?

07. How do you communicate to your customers about information about what’s going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation) or with your own business? How would you like to be communicated with regarding what is going on downtown from the City of Excelsior Springs?

### Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **B. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE GENERAL GROUPS:**

The following questions were included in the discussion guide for general groups:

### **General Questions about Excelsior Springs**

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

### **Downtown Specific Questions**

05. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Excelsior Springs 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 Excelsior Springs? Is there anything that you used to do downtown but now do elsewhere or vice versa? Why?
07. How “user-friendly” is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they’re looking for?
08. How do local residents and visitors get information about what’s going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation)?

## Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

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

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

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

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

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

12. What other downtowns in the area would you say Excelsior Springs' is most like? What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* it to resemble?

## C. THE EXCELSIOR SPRINGS 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 Excelsior Springs as a friendly, quiet small town within an easy distance of Kansas City. They mentioned that the town is a good place to raise a family, has a rich culture and history, has a good school district, a variety of nearby industries, and has a historic downtown area that has been undergoing some revitalization over the past five to ten years.

Excelsior Springs's mineral waters made it once a regional hub for medical and spa care for patients. Doctors once prescribed visits to Excelsior Springs to ailing patients, and Excelsior Springs advertised as such. As the nature of medical care changed and other factors intervened, the number of people visiting the town for this purpose declined.

Many participants in every group indicated that Excelsior Springs is moving in the right direction. They cited downtown redevelopment as a major reason for positive direction, but also mentioned the cooperation of the community, a slowly increasing pride in Excelsior Springs, and an increased number of businesses.

**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 two main shopping areas in Excelsior Springs are the downtown area and the strip malls on the western side of town. The downtown area has specialty and gift shops, while the strip malls have major chains such as Wal-Mart and Applebee's. The grocery and household stores are mainly on the west side of town, in these strip malls. The groups also mentioned that many residents go outside of Excelsior Springs to shop, as Kansas City is so close. Many people go to malls in Kansas City, or drive to Liberty, Missouri to shop.

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

Many in the groups indicated that there is a variety of dining options in Excelsior Springs, but not as many entertainment options as they would like. In dining, they cited a Mexican restaurant, a Chinese restaurant, a Cajun restaurant, the Wabash, Atlas Bar, Outpost Grill, and a number of other local favorites. On the west side of town, Excelsior Springs does have chain restaurants such as Applebee's and Subway.

As far as entertainment, the groups mentioned a few different options but felt that the options overall are limited. They brought up high school sports events and plays, music shows at the Wabash, art crawls, a dinner theater, and a number of local festivals. They noted that more consistently open options and more evening options, such as a movie theater, would create a stronger entertainment industry in Excelsior Springs.

**What kinds of recreation are popular with local residents? What kinds of opportunities are there to participate in these activities in Excelsior Springs?**

The recreation options the groups mentioned included walking trails, a beautiful golf course, parks, and sporting events. While there is a community center, the participants felt that the community center is "limited" and "in disrepair." Some groups urged that a new community center with a swimming pool would be an important addition to the town, and some felt that more sports fields would help create more recreational options.

**D. DOWNTOWN EXCELSIOR SPRINGS: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT**

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

The groups overwhelmingly felt that downtown Excelsior Springs is headed in the right direction. The redevelopment and revitalization efforts, so far, have been successful, and many participants felt that the community's perception of downtown is slowly changing and becoming more positive. The City has improved the infrastructure and beautified the city within the last ten years, which has prompted more business to come downtown and more tourists to visit Excelsior Springs.

The participants did, however, feel that there are a few areas that Excelsior Springs still needs to address in order to move in the right direction. They mentioned the abandoned buildings, the absentee landlords of some apartment buildings, and the drug rehab center as issues that still need work in order to move Excelsior Springs in a more positive direction.

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

The business owners chose downtown for two main reasons: economics and historic architecture. They felt that the buildings and the rent were affordable, and that the buildings were beautiful and reflected Excelsior Springs' rich history. One business owner mentioned the feeling she got from the momentum of the downtown redevelopment, and chose downtown because of its potential and the excitement surrounding it.

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

The groups cited city government, the municipal court, the police station, and all of the city services as reasons that people go downtown. They also mentioned shopping and restaurants as the major non-business reasons that people go downtown. Since there are a number of shops and restaurants downtown, many participants stated that they try to frequent these downtown shops and restaurants in an effort to help these small businesses survive. They did say, however, that many of these businesses are thriving. In addition, the Hall of Waters and museum are big draws for tourists.

The participants who have lived in Excelsior Springs for a long time mentioned quite a few things that used to be located downtown that are no longer there, including many shops, drugstores, movie theaters, the library, more bars and restaurants, banks, and the high school. They felt that the high school moving outside of downtown drew a lot of business away from downtown.

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

The groups had mixed feelings about the user-friendliness of downtown. According to the participants, downtown is user-friendly in some ways but could be more user-friendly in others. They addressed business hours, navigation, signage, and parking as issues.

The groups felt that the business hours in the downtown area are an issue. Most businesses are open during regular weekday business hours, until 5:00 or maybe 6:00 PM, which makes it difficult for those who work during those hours to patronize downtown businesses. In addition, many downtown businesses are closed on Sundays and Mondays. As tourists often come in on weekends or plan to extend their stay into a long weekend including Monday, they sometimes are left without anything to do downtown. The Elms, the major hotel in town, provides activities in the evenings and on weekends for tourists, but many downtown businesses tend to be closed during these times, making it difficult for tourists to have a choice of entertainment, dining, or shopping.

While the participants did not say much about the layout of downtown, they did feel that signage is an issue. Clearer and more signage, according to the groups, would especially help tourists get around downtown, since many are not already familiar with the area. A number of participants addressed pedestrian navigation as a key area for improvement, suggesting “You are here” maps, lists and locations of businesses, and other such navigation tools.

Participants had mixed feelings about parking—some felt that parking is adequate, while others felt that there needs to be more parking, especially on certain blocks. The general sense among participants was that, even though there may be an adequate number of parking spots within walking distance of downtown, some of these spots are in areas with abandoned buildings and “unsavory” people, which makes many feel unsafe. While this perception of the safety is an issue that the participants addressed, they also felt that in putting the town’s “best foot forward,” the downtown should offer ample parking in beautified, aesthetically pleasing, and “perceived as safe” areas.

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

Residents and visitors currently get information from the town newspaper, neighboring towns’ newspapers, the Chamber of Commerce and its website, the Elms and its website, word of mouth, the downtown partnership’s publication, brochures distributed in town, and individual businesses’ advertising. The groups felt that the City should do more to promote the town as a whole, rather than just individual businesses and festivals, in order

to help Excelsior Springs become a destination; suggestions included billboards on the highway, advertisements in magazines devoted to historic areas, advertisements in publications in major cities such as Kansas City, Des Moines, and St. Louis, and a bulletin board of events in town. One group discussed marketing to high school students through school publications or announcements, making the youth more aware and excited about what is happening downtown.

## **E. DOWNTOWN EXCELSIOR SPRINGS: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

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

The groups wanted to see more of various types of services, retail shops, dining, entertainment, recreation, and residential space downtown. Especially because, according to the participants, there are so many abandoned buildings, there is space for these businesses. The participants felt, overall, that downtown should be a destination, different from the chain stores and restaurants on the west side of town, that provides a unique experience for visitors and residents who go downtown.

The services the participants suggested included a doctor's office, a dentist's office, banks, ATMs, a pharmacy, a grocery store, and a business incubator. In retail, the groups wanted to see a variety of retail shops to draw in people of all kinds, and specifically suggested specialty food stores, a bookstore, a coffee shop, a wine store, a candy shop, more antique shops, art galleries and art shops, and any other unique specialty ideas. For dining, the groups felt that there should be a larger variety of restaurants clustered downtown to draw people in. Ideas for additional entertainment options included demonstrations from artists and artisans, a live music venue, and a movie theater. In discussing recreation, the groups mentioned a need to improve or replace the community center with something more up-to-date that has varied options. For residential living, the participants felt that the City is already doing a lot with senior housing and low-income housing, and they hope that the downtown develops more middle- and high-income housing.

**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?**

The groups felt that the City has come a long way in improving the infrastructure, including sidewalks and streets, beautification, and streetlights. Most of their comments focused on building repairs, renovations, and upgrades, as well as codes enforcement and the drug rehab center.

There is a perception among residents, according to the participants, that downtown is unsafe. Much of this perception comes from the abandoned buildings, the apartment buildings with absentee landlords or “slumlords,” the drug rehab center, and the people from the drug rehab center who are on the streets and sidewalks downtown. To combat this perception, the participants prioritized finding ways to encourage building owners to repair and renovate their buildings. The groups also felt that the drug rehab center should be moved away from downtown, in order to help visitors and residents feel safe around the people downtown.

Other ideas to improve the look and feel of downtown included increasing the number of streetlights, increasing attractive signage, putting in “pocket parks,” pagodas, or pavilions, and adding water features such as fountains.

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

The most prioritized improvements from the groups were moving the drug rehab center away from downtown, enforcing codes to discourage “slumlords” and negligent absentee landlords, finding ways to renovate and occupy the vacant buildings downtown, marketing the town as a whole, and encouraging businesses to locate themselves in Excelsior Springs.

Additional priorities brought up by some participants included adding more streetlights, improving parking, and capitalizing more on the Hall of Waters and the city’s history.

**General Public: What other downtowns in the area would you say Excelsior Springs is most like? What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* it to resemble?**

The participants mentioned a number of downtown areas with desirable characteristics including Eureka Springs, Arkansas; Paducah, Kentucky; the Plaza in Kansas City; Westin, Missouri; Selma, North Carolina; a small town in New York with attractive fire hydrants and planter boxes; and a number of small towns along various highways with clean and attractive downtowns. The town to which the participants most often compared Excelsior Springs and most admired was Eureka Springs.

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

The business owners group unanimously felt that addressing codes enforcement and absentee landlords and moving the drug rehab center are the two most important things in helping the area, and their businesses, thrive. The participants felt that code enforcement would help with the perception of safety, the desirability and aesthetics of downtown, and the willingness of residents and tourists to shop downtown.

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

The business owners’ group was cautiously optimistic about the idea of a special business district with an additional sales tax, particularly since they have seen the success of this strategy in other communities such as Eureka Springs. Some members of the group felt it would be a deterrent for people shopping at some types of businesses, but most felt that an additional sales tax would be a reasonable idea, and suggested further discussion of the idea.

**F. KEY POINTS**

**Key points about the Excelsior Springs area:**

- ◆ Excelsior Springs is a friendly, quiet small town within an easy distance of Kansas City, with a good school district, a rich history, a family-friendly atmosphere, and a newly revitalizing downtown area.
- ◆ Historically, Excelsior Springs’s mineral waters made it once a regional hub for medical and spa care for patients.
- ◆ The groups generally felt that Excelsior Springs is moving in the right direction because of downtown redevelopment, community cooperation, increasing pride in the town, and an increased number of businesses.
- ◆ The two main shopping areas in Excelsior Springs are downtown, with the specialty shops and restaurants, and the west side of town, with the major chains.
- ◆ Many Excelsior Springs residents go to Kansas City to shop, since it is such a short distance away and provides variety.
- ◆ There are many diverse dining options in Excelsior Springs, and many people do dine in town.
- ◆ Excelsior Springs has some entertainment options, such as high school sports, an art crawl, live music, and a dinner theater, but the participants felt that the entertainment options are still not enough to keep residents in town for entertainment.
- ◆ Excelsior Springs has walking trails, parks, a golf course, sporting events, and a community center that offer recreation options; however, the participants felt that the current community center does not offer many options, and would like a new community center with updated facilities and more options.

### **Key points about downtown Excelsior Springs in the present:**

- ◆ According to the participants, downtown Excelsior Springs is moving in the right direction and has been consistently in the last five to ten years—the city has improved the infrastructure and beautified downtown, the number of festivals and events has increased, the number of businesses has increased, and tourism is improving.
- ◆ In order to keep downtown Excelsior Springs moving in a positive direction, according to the participants, the city should address the abandoned buildings, the absentee landlords, and the drug rehab center downtown.
- ◆ Business owners chose to locate their businesses downtown because it was cost efficient, the historic architecture is beautiful, and there is a feeling of excitement about the downtown redevelopment.
- ◆ Residents go downtown because of the city government, the police station, the municipal court, city services, shopping, and restaurants; tourists particularly enjoy visiting the shops and restaurants, the Hall of Waters, and the museum.
- ◆ Excelsior Springs' downtown, in the past, had drugstores, movie theaters, many different kinds of shops, the library, more bars and restaurants, banks, and the high school, all of which brought people downtown.
- ◆ Participants felt that business hours are inconvenient for working people and tourists, particularly since most businesses close at 5:00 or 6:00 in the evenings on weekdays, making it difficult for working residents to visit them, and are closed on Sunday and Monday, making it difficult for tourists to find entertainment, shopping, and restaurants on those days.
- ◆ Clearer signage, particularly for pedestrians, would make downtown more user-friendly.
- ◆ Parking is an issue, both because some blocks do not have enough parking, and because much of the parking within walking distance of downtown is in "run-down" residential areas near downtown.
- ◆ Residents and visitors currently get information from the town newspaper, neighboring towns' newspapers, the Chamber of Commerce and its website, the Elms and its website, word of mouth, the downtown partnership's publication, brochures distributed in town, and individual businesses' advertising.
- ◆ The residents felt that the City should do more to promote the town as a whole, both within town and in other communities.

### **Key points about the future of downtown Excelsior Springs:**

- ◆ Downtown Excelsior Springs should be a destination, different from the chain stores and restaurants on the west side of town, that provides a unique experience for visitors and residents who visit downtown.
- ◆ Additional services would be welcome downtown, including a doctor's office, a dentist's office, banks, ATMs, a pharmacy, a grocery store, and a business incubator.
- ◆ In retail, the groups wanted to see a variety of retail shops to draw in people of all kinds, and specifically suggested specialty food stores, a bookstore, a coffee shop, a wine store, a candy shop, more antique shops, art galleries and art shops, and any other unique specialty ideas.
- ◆ A larger variety of restaurants clustered downtown would help to draw people in.
- ◆ Ideas for additional entertainment options included demonstrations from artists and artisans, a live music venue, and a movie theater.
- ◆ In discussing recreation, the groups mentioned a need to improve or replace the community center with something more up-to-date that has varied options.
- ◆ For residential living, the participants felt that the City is already doing a lot with senior housing and low-income housing, and they hope that the downtown develops more middle- and high-income housing.
- ◆ The City has come a long way in improving the infrastructure, including sidewalks and streets, beautification, and streetlights.
- ◆ Residents often perceive downtown as "unsafe," and moving the drug rehab center, as well as enforcing building codes and codes against "slumlords" and absentee landlords, would help combat this perception.
- ◆ Increasing the number of streetlights, improving signage, putting in "pocket parks," pagodas, or pavilions, and adding water features such as fountains, would help improve the look and feel of downtown.
- ◆ The highest priorities for the focus groups were moving the drug rehab center away from downtown, enforcing codes to discourage "slumlords" and negligent absentee landlords, finding ways to renovate and occupy the vacant buildings downtown, marketing the town as a whole, and encouraging businesses to locate themselves in Excelsior Springs; the business focus group specifically felt that these things were most important in helping their businesses thrive.

- ◆ Additional priorities brought up by some participants included adding more streetlights, improving parking, and capitalizing more on the Hall of Waters and the city's history.
- ◆ Downtowns that the participants admired included the following: Eureka Springs, Arkansas; Paducah, Kentucky; the Plaza in Kansas City; Westin, Missouri; Selma, North Carolina; a small town in New York with attractive fire hydrants and planter boxes; and a number of small towns along various highways with clean and attractive downtowns.
- ◆ The town to which the participants most often compared Excelsior Springs and most admired was Eureka Springs.
- ◆ The business owners were cautiously optimistic about the idea of a special business district with an additional sales tax.

## SECTION II

### ELECTED OFFICIALS AND CITY STATESPEOPLE DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

I'm Frank Davis, I'm the planning director here for the city, and I don't live in the city, so I have a unique perspective. I don't know much about the DREAM initiative yet.

I'm Sonia Martin, I'm with the historic preservation commission, I've lived in the area all my life.

I'm Betty Bissler, I'm also on the historic preservation commission, the transportation board for the city, and the board of directors for the museum and archives, and the board of directors for the downtown Excelsior Springs development partnership.

I'm Nancy Nilcher, the executive director or (unintelligible) for almost 7 years.

I'm Jim Nelson, I'm the mayor, I've lived here for 22 years, also have a business in town.

Bob Nance, I've lived here 57 years, had a business here for probably 30 years, state representative.

Ken Fossett, city council, unofficial town historian, member of the cultural guild board of directors, lived here 24 years.

Steve Perryott, city manager for the city of Excelsior Springs and finance director, I've been with the city for 5 years and lived here for a little over 4 years.

I'm Maynard Moore, I'm on the planning board, and I've lived in Excelsior Springs a little over 15 years, and I've lived in the area for 17 years, so I've been around this area off and on since 1966.

*Moderator: Thanks for taking the time to speak to us tonight. Before we talk about downtown, tell me a little about the city of Excelsior Springs in general. How would you describe this area to someone from out of town or somebody that was thinking about moving here?*

I think the first word that would come to mind is quiet, or fairly quiet. Not quiet as sleepy, but quiet as not high crime rates.

25 minutes from downtown Kansas City, very good highway system.

Excellent education.

Convenient to the airport, convenient to downtown, convenient to all the major services, shopping, dining, entertainment, etc. Extremely historic.

Unique history.

Especially because of the mineral waters we have here. Friendly, open. Improved, especially in the last 10 years. Infrastructure and other things.

Wonderful historic golf course.

City owned hospital.

That's the oldest public golf course west of the Mississippi.

City airport.

And the 10-year-old or 9-year-old Clay County airport.

Well, we also lay claim to Walkensmill and Jesse James.

(noise, unintelligible. New person walking in. Discussion about Jesse James.)

...the history's just phenomenal.

We have the Cadillac manufacturing plant.

Lincoln.

Yeah, Lincoln.

I saw in the Smithsonian it's largest pasta plant in the world.

Manufactures a million pounds a day.

Well, the mineral waters to me is what made this town and ultimately, somehow, mineral waters will bring it back. More mineral waters in one location...

Everybody says between 4 and 7 different types of mineral water, plus we have a carbonic gas plant.

I saw something on one of the old postcards that actually the 4 well, the proximity to each other, it's the only place in the world that that occurs.

There's one place in Germany.

Baden-Baden?

When water becomes scarce, it's going to be a commodity that's much sought after.

We're a town of about 11,000 people right now, and we reach a lot more...probably 15 to 18,000.

I think the population in the school district is like 17,000 people. It's really a small school district as far as geography, compared to Georgia, North Carolina. Even Lawson has a larger school district.

But I think this town is uniquely balanced to be able to provide an element of tourism, industrial development because of our drinking water and other industrial uses, and also for the fact that we would be able to provide different things because of rail, because of highway, because of the connections with Kansas City, and our real estate prices are less than greater Kansas City.

As far as employers go, the hospital, the pasta plant, the school district...

At one time, most of our population did work inside our community because we had major hotels. We have a lot of residents that have to drive. Ken hit it on the head in one meeting when he said, "What we really need is jobs." We need jobs.

If we have to depend on Kansas City and other things, then we'll have to work on a linkage of transportation, within the community itself but also between here and Kansas City and elsewhere to be able to figure out a way for people to get to their jobs.

Something else in the next 5 to 10 years, Ford Motor Company has a lot of acreage, and they're going to save a lot of money if they put a lot of businesses on site there, and you could see the sink factory probably ending up there, a lot of things, so they're looking at that, trying to keep that place profitable.

Ford did that in Chicago, brought in about 6 major suppliers and located them right there. The stamping plant is still 20 miles away, but that's no big deal, but they put small industry there. Seat cups and seat cushions and all that. So, it would...this is really two plants here. This is the largest automotive facility in the world. There's no one in the world produces as many vehicles an hour out the door. Nobody in the world does that much, except that plant right over there.

They're 20 miles from us, but there's quite a few people up there.

Yeah, that's...a lot of us retirees used to work there. This town's full of Ford retirees, and GM, and TWA.

*Moderator: I heard a comment earlier that the city is improving. Do the rest of you feel that the city's moving the right direction or the wrong direction?*

The city's moving in the only direction it can. What the city has done, and I'm not a councilman or anything...what we've done downtown to try to make it pleasing to the eye, it seems to be working. When we talk about infrastructure of a city, we don't have an infrastructure downtown. When we get banks and grocery stores back downtown, then downtown will start paying for what it's set up.

I just wanted to stress also that even though we've focused on the downtown, I think that we need to not exclude the other areas of our city. Everyone who's a resident or works here is a part of Excelsior Springs in any way needs to build an ownership and a pride of their downtown, and they need to be made to fulfill a part of the DREAM initiative. I think it's going to take all of us as a community working together to see the growth we want.

I totally agree. For years, there used to be an "us and them" mentality, east side, west side, and I think we're finally getting through to citizens that, "hey, when something is developing and happening on the west side, it's good for downtown; when it's happening downtown, it's good for everybody." We're one city. We're maybe in two counties, but we're one city, and what is good for one is good for the other.

And I think that part is reflected by the fact that we've pushed our borders westward since 1999, and that we should be looking at other ways of pushing our borders to different aspects of the city. We've concentrated on downtown, but we've also worked on the creation of building out west as well, and other parts of the city.

We have things happening all over this city at the present time, and a while ago, we mentioned some of the larger employers and so on...

...We forgot to mention Wal-Mart.

(laughter.)

If we fill the vacant buildings downtown with shops and so on, that employment base would surpass probably any other employer—well, I shouldn't say that, with school district and so on—but that would be a major, major impact, because not only are those people now getting paid in their jobs and so on, but now they're spending money, and it's a shot in the arm for the entire economy in the city.

*Moderator: If you're a resident of Excelsior Springs, where do you go to do your regular, day-to-day shopping?*

I shop groceries locally.

Wal-Mart.

Price Chopper.

And John's.

You have to realize, west of this building, if you go four blocks and hit residential, probably 80% of those people never go east. I had a girl who worked for me years ago, and I was one block from the post office, and I told her, "Go to the post office," and she drove 3 miles. She didn't know there was a post office downtown.

There are people that have moved to Excelsior Springs who think that the shopping area on the west side of town is Excelsior Springs.

I have met people that have lived here and say to me, "You mean, there's a downtown still? I haven't been downtown in 25 years!"

People who used to live in this area have written it off years ago.

That's a culture everywhere. One of my best friends, he and his wife will drive to Liberty to shop at Wal-Mart and eat at Applebee's.

My neighbor drove to Liberty to eat every night when his daughter was here, and he said, "I hear there's place called the Wabash in town. Is it any good?" He was driving to Liberty every night.

Mayor Nelson might be able to tell us, but I'll bet 75% of his customers are from out-of-town. I think the downtown...

(many people talking at once.)

I've had people come in and say, "This is really a nice shop. How long have you been here?" Well, this is our 8<sup>th</sup> year. And they live in town. That is a frustrating part. In my opinion, one of the biggest things that happened last year that beat the daylights out of us trying to promote downtown was when we had the barbecue contest and the marching cobras, and somehow when your friends from Smithville and Carney are saying, "Hey, that was one heck of a deal you had down there," I think there's a lesson somewhere in there. We can promote, we can push, we can advertise, but when it came from somebody, a friend from out of town telling somebody that they missed out in their own town, all of a sudden...

...but the thing about it is, I write a historic column, and last week in the paper, I printed an article from 1954 that asked people to shop downtown and what shopping downtown meant to the business, those who were, they were talking about the same problem the last 80 years.

I talked with Keith at the Elms the other day. He was talking about bringing people in to promote the town, he said we could do billboards off the highway—the Elms could do one, the city could do one. Get people off the interstate. Also, working with the Elms, because we want tourism here, we want tourists here, and I'm happy to say that we finally have that wall broken down between the city and the Elms, because if you want tourists to come in, they need someplace to stay. The Elms, the bed and breakfasts. We need to have nice brochures, put them in visitors centers, promote the trail, the shops downtown, all the eating places that you guys were talking about, just little things like that, things that's been out there that he wanted to get finished before he left. That's just the little things that cost a lot of money that could help out to bring people here and tell em what we're talking about. We have the shops here, we have the restaurants here. Let em know. There's a lot to do here. You've got all these beautiful trails that we're building down here now, and there's a lot of stuff for people to do.

I think we need to not overlook, when we're talking about tourism and things like that, the people who have been associated with Excelsior Springs, just the people alone are wonderful. We had a landscape architect, George Kessler, who helped develop our parkway system, the golf course, several buildings.

Lewis Curtis, who developed the bank building, and various architects...the guy that built our golf course, designed our Lakeshore Country Club. In the history, there were millionaires and poor people, bankers and farmers.

The original Uncle Sam, the guy who posed for the poster and went back and forth across the US for the war effort, is here in Excelsior Springs. He died here in the veterans hall, and he's buried here. We have a lot of people associated with our community that we have yet to discover ourselves. We're trying to work on this in our spare time, and it's just wonderful, the Excelsior Standard recently donated all of their newspapers to the museum, and the museum is going to allow people to use those as reference, so there's really a research place being created here now to go back into our history and to refresh our mind about things that have happened here. Some really neat things happening right now.

*Moderator: Let me ask you about dining and entertainment options. Where do you take people that are visiting from out of town?*

We have Paradise Theater right over here.

Wabash.

(many people talking at once.)

Our Mexican restaurant here is great.

The Atlas Bar is great.

I heard that.

It's all-you-can eat, and they've got Cajun shrimp, and they're that big.

Outpost Grill's good.

And Gray's lunch is just really unique.

One of those places back there, back when Excelsior was booming, and when Wal-Mart came, I don't know if Wal-Mart has put any of our businesses out of business.

But they've suffered.

Yeah, they've suffered.

Thompson's, Coast to Coast.

The downtown used to have all the hotels, the Sheraton at the top of the hill, there was about 19 bars with bands on Saturday nights, and we had 2 theaters, and 2 taxi services.

In the 60's, you still had the clients, 250,000 a year.

And the railroads also advertised.

Because we couldn't advertise mineral waters.

Life magazine had an article about it in 63 or so.

That building there, there was a pawn shop, and his son owns Staples.

The thing about it is, it begs the question, in the modern age—and I think the thing that made it possible was the automobile—what is the purpose of a small town? Now, with the high price of gas, I think different shops here may attain more importance because people will be able to shop at home.

It depends on the swing away from bigger and bigger shopping malls. Look at them closing all over the place. People are tired of them. People are migrating back to the small shop.

In 10 years, it'll be very difficult to get to Kansas City, because of the traffic.

25 years ago, there was 0 stoplights between here and Kansas City, and now there's 9.

I think it's one of the decisions we can make as a community, and if we have a master plan, then we have a plan for growth, and we can shelter ourselves from things that happen in other area.

*Moderator: I asked early whether you thought Excelsior Springs as a whole was moving in the right direction. What about the downtown in particular?*

They've made great strides in the last 5 to 10 years, and especially in the last couple years, with the streets, the street lights, the shops going in, buildings being bought and rehabbed, I'm amazed.

I'm curious to see what the Elms does.

I think it's going to be wonderful.

I'm not on that yet, because that's fixed-income people that are living there. People say that that's going to bring a lot of business to the downtown, but I don't think it will, because those are fixed income people.

Yes, but my father-in-law is moving in that building, and they spend money. They go out to eat, they shop.

(many people talking at once.)

They go to the theater.

The housing authority now has a 40% vacancy rate.

There's a waiting list already.

I want you to tell us more about your end of the spectrum. We're also concerned what we're going to do with the Royal.

I feel that there's no need for more senior housing, but our section 8 waiting list is over a year long for families. Excelsior Springs residents first, always. Working families first.

When a person shows up with a voucher, aren't you obligated to put them into housing?

No. And we have very few complaints now.

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

City government's downtown, and people come down here to get their water turned on or pay their water bills. The police station's downtown, municipal court, and of all the shops.

School board.

In the old days, it used to be the library, people would come downtown, and I was thinking something else.

I mean, the banks are gone down here, the drugstores are gone down here. Everything that was down here is gone.

We moved the high school all the way out west, and everything went out there with it. And Friday nights in the 60's and 70's, you get a football game here, you had to park far away and walk, and on the way back, you'd stop by the Oaks or the Royal and get a drink.

I do want to come back to the concern that we have with the huge buildings that we have downtown in our historic district. Unfortunately the tax credits that have been offered to rehab these buildings are mainly for senior housing. Or fixed-income. If there was just a little bit more out there for readapted use of these buildings, we'd be in better shape. Business incubators or whatever, something.

We have a block there that's been empty for probably 20 years.

One of the things I didn't hear mentioned a while ago, I think some people come downtown as part of our retail base, fledgling as it is. We have Redmond's, which has accessories and whatever, and several other shops. We need more shops, and I see these vacant buildings that can be shops, but that's, Steve mentioned that you do pull people in from out-of-town to downtown, but I think we're also starting to get more and more people locally. Part of that is resulting from... "what is there to do?" "Can we walk downtown?" "Well, don't go down there after dark." We've tried to make it more people feel safe, with the streetlights and the trails.

The Saratoga area, there's a lot of stuff going on there. It's something that seniors don't like to see, not necessarily things that the police can do anything about.

I'm not exactly happy with the Carnegie Library building today either, with their signs in the window. There are certain parts of our culture, we need to find a way to protect these things. And the Flack, which is one of the most unique historic buildings downtown, what's going to happen with that robbery? I think it's something that needs to be saved.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

All these buildings have been protected by planning and zoning.

(many people talking at once.)

...It's unfortunate that everybody's not civic-minded...

...The golf course was Alex Ross...

...it was built just like a Scottish course. That's where I learned to play golf...

...we used to go up there to eat...

...it's open for breakfast...

I'm excited about what's happening all over Excelsior Springs, and we really need to take advantage of making it happening.

Most of us that have been here know the things about Excelsior Springs. Some of the people that live here now don't know a lot about Excelsior.

We could just have Jim Bolden do some testimonies now and then, just to raise awareness of the community to the new residents.

...tourism, and it's an ongoing process to educate the public that we don't mean creating a Branson, but it's to encourage people from outlying areas to come in and do their shopping in Excelsior Springs, leave their money, and go back home. That's the tourism we'd like to attract.

I'd like to talk about my favorite desire. I want to refurbish the mineral water system.

Absolutely.

That is a part of our heritage, and it's essential.

But I want a bottling plant.

I think you have to contract that out to someone. I don't think the city needs to get into that business.

It was. It would make money if it just covered costs.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: I've just got a couple other questions about downtown. How user-friendly is downtown? Parking, lighting, navigation?*

It's awkward.

It's hard to find the downtown.

We call Broadway downtown, and making the turns to come back, you've got to go onto some back streets.

(many people talking at once.)

First couple houses down there have got a lot of work done on them.

We just got done rehabbing all of those side streets.

That's one thing, and I might as well just jump right out and say this, the drug rehab center has got to go. It is not conducive to a downtown revitalization, having that kind of facility operated as this is, nearby.

There's no exit plan for these people. They're not really serving Excelsior Springs. It's not that they want to stay in the rehab program. And there's no jobs for these people. If you put someone out on the street without the resources that they need, it's not going to work.

And the 21-day program doesn't work, period.

Move them to Liberty.

I think they need to go to the community they serve.

Do you realize what a drain they are on the hospital system?

(many people agreeing.)

We pay for it as a community.

I'm not saying there isn't a place for this kind of a place, but one block from a downtown retail district where previously we talked about someone going through heroin withdrawal with police officers trying to hold him, it's not a pretty sight. It's not conducive to bringing people downtown, to have somebody going through drug withdrawal.

(many people agreeing.)

I don't think it's just the Job Corps kids that are doing all the damage. But I want to see people taken care of. I think the Good Samaritan Center does a great job with them. The poor are part of the community, their kids are part of the school district...

As far as people up there at Job Corps, I never see any of those kids down here.

It's a direct reflection of whoever the director of Job Corps is at the time.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Let me shift gears. How do people get information about what's going on downtown?*

We've got our calendar of events that the downtown Excelsior partnership puts together.

The newspaper.

The Chamber.

The Chamber is very strong right now, and growing.

Very good, I think.

Yes.

They also send out flyers...

...and postcards for all the special events, and for the art crawls. They have an art crawl once a month. And the Elms, there's brochures available, they have calendars of events, and the museum has a whole table full of brochures for stuff all over town. And the Chamber office, I'm assuming, does the same thing.

Now something the former city manager spoke to me about this year was trying to make an art district, but about that time, he left. But the house passed something this year with the senate, and you can designate an area for an art district. I know the arts are going pretty good right now, with the crawls and things.

I'm tossing things out, but there's some things we need to keep downtown. The post office, for example. It still amazes me how small that post office is. One of these days, that post office is at a point that it's bubbling over. Somehow, we've got to foresee that the land around that post office or another plot downtown, when they need to build on or build another office, we've got to be prepared to keep it downtown.

One of the things that's changing drastically is that it all goes to Kansas City, even if it's coming back here.

We don't have an Excelsior Springs post office.

Still, the volume that they have, even though the Internet has taken some of the mail out of the system, that's still a small post office for our size.

If we're talking about these things, we need a bank downtown, and we need to somehow get the library back downtown.

There's no advantage for the library to be all the way out there.

Using this building to promote Excelsior Springs, even if it didn't make a profit, the sales tax would be generated and the interest in the way Excelsior used to be...

When you think about it, you come in through that door, and you come to pay your water bill, and you look around at all the mosaic and bronze work, and it was all done in the 30's—it would cost millions to build this building now.

1935, this building cost over a million. In today's dollars, it would cost a lot more. It was Egyptian, Roman, Mayan, and a couple other things.

This building's classic.

This building was meant to be City Hall.

We're not going to move it. We're going to have it downtown.

*Moderator: Let's look ahead for downtown. What other sorts of businesses would you like to see downtown?*

Doctor's offices, dentist's offices, a bank.

Pharmacy.

Mixed use, with dining and tourism, but also provide services and retail to the community.

I'm sure the Elms Hotel has an ATM machine.

I don't think you'll find an ATM machine anywhere in downtown Excelsior Springs.

I was telling Ken that it's a struggle to get people in there and have them make money. I don't know if Jim's making anything or if he just enjoys himself there.

We do need more retail shops. Retail is what brings people to town, it's what causes them to spend money, creates jobs, collects sales tax, on and on, and I could give you my evaluation of this. Last Christmas, the season wasn't too bad going up to the final week, and then they just stopped coming. I think what happened is it comes to the last few days before Christmas, and it's no longer leisure shopping. They go to the biggest mall with the most stores to buy 14 gifts at one time. I feel that if we had 5 times as many retail shops, that we'd pull people in. "Oh, there's 3 or 4 shops up here, or we can go here and there's 25." The more we have, and it doesn't make any difference, really, I'm not a scrapbooker or whatever, but we've got a scrapbook store here, and people see that as an option. That's the biggest thing that we need to pull people in. I'm tickled to death with the attorneys, and I think that's great, because that pulls people in too, but I still feel that retail is what people come to spend money for.

And the more diversity you can offer them, the better.

Unless we can raise our sales tax revenues, which have been basically flat since 1999, it's very difficult for us as a city and as a government to provide the things necessary to provide the services. We do need jobs, we do need people with spendable incomes, and this thing with gasoline shows that there's less spendable income and they're less likely to spend their money.

That works for a while, but you know what... when Jimmy Carter was president, and gas prices were high, and people rode to work together. The gasoline don't mean anything, they'll still pay it.

You go to other large metropolitan areas, and the interstates have the carpool lanes, and you still see a lot of carpools. I totally agree, and I don't care if gas is six bucks a gallon, people are still driving by themselves, though.

I like that they'll drive out of their way to save 3 cents at Wal-Mart.

*Moderator: What else would you like to see happening downtown? Is there a need for parks and recreation?*

We're already saturated with parks and walking trails.

I'd kind of like to see the bridge rebuilt. At one time, it was designed to be pedestrian-friendly.

(many people talking at once.)

Back in the 60's and 70's, we had the best parks and recreation in the state. We don't now, but...

All of the studies have shown that they want it on the west side.

(many people talking at once.)

I know there's been a lot of discussion, and I'm not against a community center on the west side, but I still think there's value in what we have here, the pool just downstairs.

Talking about keeping people downtown, that would do it.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

...The flooding could be rectified by an on-site generator. It's the power, not the water level...

...in '93, it was estimated 40 miles an hour...

...the flood took out houses. It was a hundred-year flood...

Our parks and rec is handcuffed right now. They're using the high school now. They've proposed a sports complex on the west side of town with various fields, courts, and pools. Liberty makes about \$90,000 off their parks and rec, so Liberty turned theirs around... our parks and rec doesn't have that because they don't have facilities.

We have abandoned fields out there on Rocky Hollow.

That's being used now by a club of some sort.

Clay County closed the parks.

But the city could've took em. But then you'd have to take care of them.

I think parks and rec wouldn't mind taking care of em.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

...one big problem with having ballparks up there is I can't figure out how a 10-year-old kid on a bicycle is going to get up there...

...no one rides bicycles anymore to those things...

*Moderator: What about the look and feel of downtown? What improvements need to be made as far as aesthetics?*

I think we're pretty much there.

There's probably some building facades that need work. Some additional wayfinding to help our pedestrian traffic, since they don't know exactly where they're going or how to get there. Some "you are here" signs or something, I think that would be a great benefit for downtown.

There's a little town on US 20 highway in New York. Every fire hydrant in that city is painted to look like a dog. The downtown, on every post, they've got hanging baskets of flowers. The city puts the bracket and the businesses put the baskets. It's just beautiful. Little things like that.

I totally agree. We need the merchants in the shop to get signed on.

Let's get the Excelsior Springs garden club to donate or raise money.

I think there's some buildings we could do without. I think we need some new growth, some new buildings. We could redevelop Excelsior Street, and I think redevelopment would be good, some kind of plan would be good. I was in a city where their manhole covers were maps of downtown, because they'd always say, "you are here." There are neat ways that you can get people the information they need.

(many people talking at once about bricks.)

I think the main complaint I keep hearing is there's too many empty buildings.

Every town in North America is full of empty buildings downtown.

And the community theater's coming back downtown, and I hope that brings more people downtown.

The historic commission is active again, and we have just declared a portion of this to be our Hall of Waters historic district, and we're designing guidelines for this district, and we'll keep meeting on that, but we want to take all this information and strengthen all this.

(many people talking at once.)

...if we have a master plan, we'll be better prepared to do these things...

*Moderator: Are there other downtowns that you've seen that you admire?*

I like what they've done in Westin, Missouri. The other town is Selma, North Carolina.

We do have a lot in common with Eureka Springs, but I think we need to look at our own uniqueness and build on that.

It's a shame we don't have one of the old theaters left down here.

Paducah, Kentucky. They did something with what they called Lower Town, 10 blocks from downtown, and they rebuilt it. It's probably 7 years ago, it suffered from all of the inner city problems of drugs and absentee landlords and drugs and prostitution, and the city went in, they would buy up an abandoned building and pay more than what it was worth, and they got the bank to fund up to 300% of the finished product, and then they started attracting artists to come in, and if they could qualify and had a business plan, they agreed to locate their residence and a gallery, they gained this building. They hoped to attract 10 artists to the community, and now they have in excess of 60. They've had so much success with this that they're doing something similar in a different area now. Having been to Eureka, I see more parallel problems with Paducah with what we have. And now that I just painted this terrible picture of lower town...

Very scenic river towns.

We've got some major buildings downtown that we need to get occupied. That would bring...

I'd like to see somehow that we utilize Roosevelt, even though it's under private ownership.

(many people talking at once.)

One of the things that's been mentioned is that we need to look at a master plan to figure out where we're going, and one thing I would help the community is if we could find some funding mechanism to hire a marketing firm to help us get the message out, do the pamphlets, do the brochures, help us with tourists and our own citizens.

We've done a much better job improving our image outside the city than we have internally. There are still people who apologize about living in Excelsior Springs. I don't know how to do it. I just see so much potential for this city, and we're sitting here with things and history and other stuff that other communities would kill for.

We have to place a value on ourselves.

If you don't think you're valuable, nobody else will either.

There's still a lot of state incentives for getting employers in.

*Moderator: Is there anything else?*

(side conversations.)

*Moderator: Thank you for coming.*

## SECTION III

### BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

My name's Amanda Mook, I'm co-owner of Mook and Mook Law Firm.

I'm Keith, and I'm the general manager of the Elms.

I'm Terry, director of Chamber of Commerce.

Clint Hilton, and I have an insurance office in town.

Jim Bohm, I own a little boutique shop here in town.

Cindy Rear, I own the alteration shop up at the Y.

And Cindy, and I just work for her.

Shari McCullough, and I own the Wabash.

I'm Daphne Bowman, and I'm also (unintelligible), antique shop downtown.

*Moderator: My first question is really general. I'm from St. Louis, so tell me a little bit about your town. If I were looking to move here, how would you describe it to me?*

We talk about the history and the culture and the friendly people.

We promote affordable housing, although we don't want to do that forever.

(laughter.)

There's a lot of energy and excitement.

The town is moving forward.

Has a lot of personality, a lot of history.

I think the Elms is one of our pride and joys, a huge beautiful hotel. We have old buildings that are beautiful.

We're always trying to recruit business owners, and the business opportunities, and the town is unified now on its direction and how important that is to make it successful for business opportunities coming into town.

And it's within range of Kansas City, easy.

35 minutes.

Actually, people call me, and they live in Liberty, and it actually takes longer to get to Gladstone than it does to get to Excelsior, and then they come out here, and they're like, "That wasn't so bad."

People from Kansas City think it's just the other side of the world. I think it's just an excuse.

(laughter.)

From a tourist's perspective, we're a great getaway as a town, for those folks that live in Kansas City. There's shopping, there's food, there's history, there's adventure...

Rolling hills. I mean, it's just beautiful, the rolling landscape, the walking trails.

The architecture's fantastic.

I think one of the things you run into is we know we have a great town, we know we have potential for tourism as well as a place to live. We know what's here, but we've never sat down and sort of categorized, these are the things to see. We've tried to do that on the Chamber website, but it's still a piece, when somebody comes in, they're looking for different things, if they're music lovers they go down to the Wabash or the Blues Garden or the Dinner Playhouse, if they're historic buffs, you try to get them to the Elms, the Hall of Waters, but a lot of that has never been totally identified in such a way that it's easy to promote, because most of us are trying to fly off the top of our heads, and we don't remember...

We have a good school district that's trying to compete with the big boys.

We have the cleanest river in the state of Missouri.

(side conversations.)

*Moderator: Do you feel that Excelsior Springs is moving in the right direction?*

Oh, definitely.

Absolutely.

(many people agreeing.)

Certainly in the last 10 years, or even 5 years.

I've lived here all our lives. It's home to us, because we live here, but it just wasn't enticing to come in, and we've had a business for 25 years, and we finally came back to the Chamber because it's exciting, because it's actually growing. It's a lot better than what it used to be.

Not so long ago, it was kind of a slum area. There were residents down here that promoted drugs and prostitution.

Now we've got something exciting to tell them about, versus just sending them out of town.

And the downtown, we've got 2 or 3 new restaurants, 2 or 3 new boutiques, 3 new art galleries, new streets and sidewalks. The infrastructure that the city has put in makes it extremely enjoyable.

Much more attractive.

When we first opened our business a year and a half ago, people would come in and ask, "Which way is your town headed?" and now they say, "I can tell you guys are revitalizing." Even in a year and a half, they can see that we're moving forward.

And Excelsior Springs has a Girls Night Out, and we were amazed at how much business we had, and we could not believe that was a big turnout, because we thought the first time wasn't going to be a big deal, but it was.

One thing we're doing as businesses is coming together to create an event calendar, and there's one or two or three or five things that bring people to town for art, restaurants, shopping, wine tastings, music, the Blues Garden. We have two wine festivals a year now. We're really focusing on bringing people into town to see what a great town it is, and hopefully from that, maybe we could get some quality family...

The barbecue contest.

And our events are becoming annual. They're not just a one-time thing. People look forward to them again and again.

And the Wabash does their thing on Saturday nights, and that's packed.

The events calendar on the Chamber website is average 320 views a month, and it's set up to entice tourism to come to town.

And we're kind of talking about the retail business side of it, but some people probably look at it from a different aspect, as far as insurance and attorneys and all.

Most of our business is referral, word of mouth. But we are seeing more local business, and we're thrilled by what's happening in the city. I think it really benefits... it's great, what's happening.

*Moderator: Where are the main shopping areas for people who live in Excelsior Springs?*

Wal-Mart.

(many people agreeing.)

The grocery stores out at the Y.

It's on the west side of town, and it's got the shopping center.

You have Y Plaza and Town Hill Plaza. A lot of franchise businesses, the hardware store, the Subway, the banks, everything.

The banks and the gas stations are all that way.

And then there's more of an eclectic shopping experience downtown.

We're on the west side of town, and we send people downtown.

The majority of our business has been due to the Elms and tourism, and we're starting to see residents supporting us, and we've evolved our product to meet the needs of the town. We have restaurants downtown, so people come down to eat and they shop.

I think it's an even mix between residents and tourists. I think for a lot of time, the residents kind of stayed away, and now it's kind of starting to get a good balance. I think we've got some ways to go, I think there's a lot of room for us to improve still, and as we continue to do that, we'll draw more people.

And I think the city made a commitment a few years ago by redoing the infrastructure downtown, and if they didn't do that, it would have been very hard for the businesses to continue forward. The city got prepared for it, and the businesses were able to follow and build on that.

We still have areas of downtown that are kind of slum-lord-ish and buildings that we need to somehow rehab.

There are still some problems downtown.

And that's...there's just a small group of them, and they're all landlords that have some large complexes, most of which really have the issues, the roaches, are out-of-state landlords who are just collecting rent and they don't care, and so it's a matter of buckling down and zoning.

How I look at that, though, is that everybody around this table has got real estate somewhere in Excelsior, whether it's your business or whatever, and if everyone don't see eye to eye with trying to get that stuff out of town, I don't mind helping the people that grew up in Excelsior that need help that's had hard times, but when you start bringing all these people in from everywhere else that expect free handouts from Excelsior, that's where I have a problem with it. All it does is bring down the real estate. No one wants to come to Excelsior to even buy real estate, because all you hear is that it's "trashy."

It's hard to get quality homeownership.

(many people talking at once, agreeing.)

There's a lot of section 8 housing in Excelsior.

Well, we have our business on, we're probably the last business before the slum area, and one of the things that we actually see, the housing authority, even though I would love to have them out of town, and the HUD housing, those are not the houses that we have issues with. The ones that we have issues with are the ones that are uninhabitable that people are living it. The hard part is the landlords that don't care, that live in Utah, that live in Virginia, that live in California, and all they care is about getting their 1000 dollars a month, and they have landlords in there managing it, and all those people care about is getting that money for their owner, and they don't care how they get it, and they're just filling them, they're putting 3 and 4 people in one-bedroom apartments, and there's not an effective management of that.

There's not any kind of screening, it seems, either.

And when I called the housing authority to check addresses for the problems that we had, HUD and housing had nothing to do with the issues and problems we had downtown. It was the out-of-town owners. We have one local landlord that bought up 16 properties (noise, unintelligible), but I'm not seeing an evolution of the profile of people, but I don't know what his plans are.

He's trying to do stuff, but he doesn't have a lot of money?

Ryan?

Oh, no.

He's got lots of money, and he's collecting it left and right right now.

It's not just downtown, but you've got the office site, too, and you've got all that junk through all that. You go through the slum part, and it's like, "why would you want to stay?"

The bottom line is if someone spends the night at the Elms, and they want to walk around downtown, they have other people walking around the streets, they're looking at them like leery about, "Do we get out of the car? Is this safe?"

The Chamber survey for the DREAM team, we did a survey of business and residential, and a lot of the things we found, we asked about 6 areas, "Do you feel safe?" and there was a category, and 68% of the respondents said they did not feel safe downtown. Now, I don't know whether that's true or not, but it's a perception problem that we have for visitors. If they come downtown and they see (noise, unintelligible), they don't feel safe getting out of their car. We had a meeting down here, and one of the consultants was here, she brought her daughter, and when we were in the meeting, her daughter was walking up and down the street, and a bunch of guys started following here, but she said she did not feel safe, and if you're a visitor...so if it's perception, we need to change it, and if it's reality, we need to change it. Most of the time, when people would come into town, they'll ask, "Is it safe to walk in this direction?" And if their perception is that it isn't, that can really kill your downtown.

Keith, do you ever get feedback from your guests about downtown?

I hear (noise, unintelligible), there's a drug rehab center downtown that doesn't need to be down there. It needs a new location.

Definitely needs a new location.

(many people talking at once about drug rehab center.)

They sit at one of the wells and smoke cigarettes. And part of that is, it's a hundred times better than 3 years ago, and the prettier we make it downtown, and the further we move the quality businesses, the further away they go. Right now, I think some of them are fighting back, and there's a few left that are really struggling with the evolution of downtown, so they do dumb things like spit on windows, but they'll move out of there.

It really is just a small handful of them that do that. Most of them move from slumlord to slumlord. They get kicked out of one and move to another. And most of them are from here, and they're the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of that kind of lifestyle. It's about changing the mentality.

They don't have shoes on, they don't have shirts on, they're cussing. Simple respect for other people. That's what the other people out of town perceive.

It's a matter of our planning and zoning, getting some enforcement rules for landlords. If we got the landlords under control, we'd improve immensely.

(many people agreeing.)

*Moderator: For dining and entertainment, do you stay in town?*

Yeah.

Yeah, we do.

But you're talking to business owners who want to support other businesses.

We try to do the small businesses, because you have to, because they're going to be gone if you don't.

If we're trying to bring tourism to town, they don't want to go to Applebee's. We need to make sure they have unique things to do.

I don't think our residents support the local restaurants.

Well, I was just a resident up until months ago, and we stayed here, but only because we support the Chamber.

If you selected random residents, they would probably say they don't dine in Excelsior Springs.

People just want to get away. They go to Kansas City, they go somewhere else.

If you live and work in Excelsior...

You don't want to have to go down to the Wabash and have somebody say, "You delivered this, and it's cracked, and..."

People have a tendency, you'll get a few people from Excelsior that support your store, but then you have people that buy their goods somewhere else and then come ask for a donation.

What we've found so amazing is how people who live in Excelsior Springs say the worst things about it. They call it the "armpit of Clay County." People say, "There's no money there, you're not going to make it there." I think it's getting better, but there's a definite perception.

There absolutely is.

The history of it, when it was really good, it was a great town. And then Excelsior Springs became the dumping ground for Liberty and Gladstone and Kansas City bringing their drug rehab into town, and the perception was that it was the “armpit of Clay County,” and it’s just beginning to come back.

You have Job Corps, the Salvation Army, the Good Samaritan Center, the Pregnancy Center, all these social services. You can watch people go into these things and come out and do it all over again.

I did grow up in a different small town, and some of it is just small town. People when they’re from a small town, when they go out to dinner, it’s fun to go into the big city.

The more events that keep people in town, the more they’ll support the businesses. I say, “Come to the art crawl, have dinner, join us for a movie.” It’s educating the community about all there is to do in our town...

We live in Liberty, but we have the little store, and we’re more likely to eat here than in Liberty because it’s different.

I stay here.

152 has gotten so packed, and it’s quieter here.

I think when you look at shoppers, people would come into my store and look at my clothing line, and then go to Kansas City, and I would see them a month later walk into my shop with the clothes I was selling. I think that’s sort of the mindset of shoppers, shoppers look for a reason to go to Kansas City, and why I don’t know, but I think that’s the mindset. It’s lets go to the city.

But if you’re looking for something in particular—like we don’t have a jewelry store in town.

I used to live in a tourist town in Colorado, and as a resident, I didn’t frequent the restaurants, but when I had visitors, I took them to them. When your family comes to see you, you can take them to the Wabash or wherever. You need to have the product available to have people say, “I want to show my family the 10 shops or 4 restaurants or the Elms downtown.” There’s a lot of people from Excelsior Springs won’t come downtown, because they’ve been conditioned not to, but you want them to come down here and show their family.

*Moderator: When friends and family come to town, where do you take them?*

Redmond's, Annie's, they go to them all. My sisters love to come, and they stay at the Elms. They like the shops.

Either the Wabash or Outpost Grill.

From my perspective, I don't know if you've seen it, but there's an Excelsior Springs tourist guidebook, and we were upset about the business that came to town and didn't promote the right atmosphere, so we put a list together of places to take your friends and family, a little brochure broken down into categories: specialty stores and dining, historical stuff. It was a real simple brochure, and the restaurants that were unique to us.

And the Hall of Waters and the Elms.

We'd send them up to the golf course.

We have things to offer, and we just need to get better at promoting things.

People will come into our shop, and we'll hand them our visitors guide, and they'll say, "This is what I was looking for!" It's got a map, and all the places listed. It's a mixture of unique businesses downtown as well as, Annie's is on it, Outpost Grill is on it.

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

Ours was an economic decision. We were able to buy a building that was a really good price, and we just redid a house, and we saw the energy and momentum starting to move, and felt like it would be a good investment.

We looked at historic districts all over the metro area, too, and we just...

...couldn't afford it anywhere else.

(laughter.)

You saw the potential here, though.

Yeah, we did. I bought a house by the Elms and we were just going to flip it, but we moved in. We felt like there was an energy boom starting to happen here, that things were starting to change and go the right way. Plus it's scenic, it's quaint, it's a small town, a lot of neat things. So we went ahead and thought we'd just jump in and give it a shot.

It was an economic decision. That's pretty much our story, too.

We didn't see any place in town that offered what we were going to sell, which is new and used clothing for young girls. Other than Wal-Mart.

We're the same way. We bought our building, and then we bought another building, because in time, the values will go up, and that's kind of our financial goal.

The previous city manager we had was really awesome about pushing that momentum, and whoever they hire is hopefully going to be that energetic.

Our story's a little different, because we wanted to rent a little place and try it out.

We're renting rather than buying.

Yeah, which is different than most everyone else, and for whatever it's worth, for the same square footage in Liberty cost 4 times as much, and we thought maybe this was a better customer base for us, because of the fact that it is a little economically diminished... we thought maybe they'd be more people here looking for what we wanted to do.

We chose the downtown over out, you know, other areas in Excelsior because we liked old buildings and liked the feel.

Drawn to the architecture and the uniqueness. That was part of us, too.

I didn't say that part, but that was part of our decision too. It could be a very charming place.

It could be like Eureka Springs.

If that's going to happen, there needs to be some attitudes change in this town, because if you develop a city like Eureka Springs, that brings a whole diversity of people in there.

It's a bit more liberal.

(laughter.)

They're now struggling with the liberal vs. conservative there.

(noise, unintelligible. Many people talking at once.)

...renting vs. owning...

...alternate lifestyles...

*Moderator: From what you hear from customers, how user-friendly is downtown?*

Parking and lighting are issues, especially in the evenings. We need more lampposts that are nice-looking lampposts, and the parking is diminished. We need more parking.

We have a brand new, beautiful street, and for one whole block, we have two parking spaces because of those signs that say, "no parking 20 feet to the corner." We got a real problem with that.

A lot of parking we do provide is near these houses that we spoke of earlier.

This is going to sound really silly, but if we had businesses in a higher percent of the buildings than we do now, you literally could walk out of the Elms and just start shopping, and next thing you know, you're a long way away, and parking isn't an issue because you don't notice it because you can walk around. In Eureka, you can park anywhere, and you shop the whole way, and that's because there's lots of shops. You want it to be convenient for someone to park in front of your shop, so I agree, and that's ideal, but theoretically, if there's enough shops, it doesn't really matter because they'll eventually get to you. Right now, there's not enough links in the chain.

Then again, you're talking about tourists. Local people want to park right by your shop.

That's a mentality thing too, because a lot of people are too lazy to walk anymore.

(many people agreeing.)

There's not enough signage. They were talking about signage, but to get people driving or walking, there's not enough signage.

(background noise, unintelligible. Many people talking at once about giving people directions to find their way around downtown.)

*Moderator: Do you hear about business hours?*

Yeah. From a tourist perspective, they don't understand why we're closed on Sundays and Mondays and the evenings.

I was just reading an article in a magazine, a publication that's for business districts, and it's one of the biggest complaints that all small towns have is that mentality of being closed on Sunday, the day of rest kind of mentality (noise, unintelligible).

*Moderator: How do you communicate to people about what's going on downtown?*

Lately, it's been our newsletter.

The hotel has a website that lists everything.

Press releases, because they're free. Direct mail. Newspaper.

Advertising.

Keith's website. The Chamber website.

*Moderator: Do you think those are effective?*

Yeah, but I think there's a lot more we could do with more time and money. I think the town as a whole needs to advertise. We should. We have a beautiful town with lots of history, and we just need to clean up downtown and the slumlords.

I just had a couple in my shop from Germany, and I said, "Where do you live?" and they said "We found a house in St. Joe, and we found a historic district, and we bought a house downtown and are restoring it." And I said, "Why don't you come to Excelsior Springs?" More people are moving from the east coast, the west coast, and this is a perfect opportunity to tap into that market of people who want to move into old homes. There's always advertisements in historic district magazines for old towns, and people often say, "We wish we would've found this place." We've got to get better at marketing Excelsior Springs through tourism, and trying to bring that whole market that loves historic homes down here, and revitalizing, and then we'll start evolving.

If you're coming down I-35, you see a highway sign that says Excelsior Springs, 13 miles, but if you go north, you'll see a little town called Jamesport, and they have billboards for miles. We've been trying to work with MODOT about getting a billboard that says, Historic Excelsior Springs, 14 miles, or coming up I-35, something other than Excelsior Springs, 14 miles. How many Lexington signs are there on I-70.

How many people have driven through Blackwater because they saw the big sign on I-70. People take a look at it, just to check it out. Historic, quaint, perfect spot for a break.

From the hotel's perspective, we probably spend the most amount of money promoting the town, but we can't do it alone—we need billboards, brochures at other visitors centers. We don't have any promotional piece that advertises the entire town. And also print advertising. There's a lot of mediums to meet the folks in Kansas City, Lawrence, St.

Louis, St. Joe, Des Moines. To advertise and hit them all takes much more than one business.

When I was looking into the history with all the medical clinics, they ran ads in the papers in St. Louis, Chicago, Wichita, Kansas City, Des Moines. They were running about \$8000 per month in advertising. At that time, the hospitals were paying for all that. We need to find the funds.

*Moderator: I'd like to shift the focus and talk about the master plan. What kinds of businesses would you like to see come into downtown?*

Things that I hear from tourists: a bookstore, coffee shop, more restaurants, specialty food shops, wine shop...

A candy shop.

I said when I first came back as director of the Chamber, I would like to see the downtown area because a mini-Plaza, like Kansas City, specialty restaurants and shops, basically making Excelsior Springs a destination, stuff you can't buy elsewhere.

You can't survive trying to sell what you can get at Home Depot or Wal-Mart. You've got to find your niche. As an antique shop, we'd love to see more antique shops. I can't tell you how often people ask, "where are the other antique shops?" There's no real antique shops, and I would love to see them back in town. It would pull a huge day trip group of people that would visit all our shops and dine in all our restaurants.... I think a custom candy shop, a unique bakery, a unique confectionary. Most small towns survive on art and unique boutique shops.

The museum's opened up the gallery, and that's very nice, but it's just not enough. We need more of that kind of thing to draw people in.

I've been working with a group called The Best of Missouri Hands, and it's an art guild, and some of these artists are spectacular. To get some of those people to showcase their art—one of a kind wood carving, silversmithing...

I agree. It's pretty much what I'd like to see down here. I think that would bring a lot of people into town.

*Moderator: What about entertainment?*

A movie theater.

Yeah.

We used to have two of them.

And now they're gone.

B and B would put a movie theater on the west side if we approached them again.

That's one of the keys to tourism is you've got to have something to do at night. After 6:00, the streets close up. I talked to one guy who talked about opening a comedy house or something. You just need places to go at night.

How often is the Dinner Theater open?

Every weekend for four weeks, and that's six shows a year.

The movies at the Elms, that's really cool too.

Our guests like it, we do movies on Sundays and bonfires on Saturday, because they need something to do at night.

Unless we have a special event, we close up at night.

We need more restaurants and more things to do.

We could use another nice bar, besides the Atlas.

Yeah, something more upscale.

(many people agreeing, laughing.)

Since you redid the Cajun restaurant... the food is spectacular.

There's just not enough people to support it.

The best thing that ever happened though, is when you started putting music out at Wabash. You literally walk a mile to get there.

That's the kind of thing we need.

People feel safe down there, but they don't feel safe down at the Atlas. They're holding their own down there, but...

The more things we have to do that bring quality people downtown at night, the more people will feel comfortable. On Girls Night Out, everybody felt comfortable.

The police have been patrolling pretty heavy these days.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Are there things on your wish list as far as aesthetics?*

A landscape plan.

Just overall...benches to sit at.

The previous city manager was working at a couple pocket parks with benches and a water feature.

Yeah, a fountain.

There's several locations that we could do pagodas, pavilions, simple little places that would be historically accurate. And we had that game plan where there's a group that will build it if the money will be funded for materials, and they're working on a couple. If you make something pretty in the tough areas, people will go down to look. A water feature, benches, a mural... the hard part is the past city manager had great ideas, but we didn't have a master plan, and that's why I'm so happy we're brainstorming.

I think the most important thing is to get those ugly, derelict buildings cleaned up.

That's a huge part of this master plan is getting enforcements for the landlords, the houses, the buildings.

All the things we want, they're in a circle, and that's right in the middle, and it kills everything else.

If this were Liberty, two guys could probably handle it, but we need to have more than two guys trying to inspect and enforce all of this.

*Moderator: If you could come up with a list of things that the city could do to help you thrive, what would be on that list?*

Code enforcement.

Get rid of the alcohol and drug rehab.

You see all manners of stuff downtown—you have the good, the bad, and the ugly of every one of your questions answered in two blocks.

If you can't get that one problem resolved, all the talk, all you want to do, nothing's going to happen unless you get that resolved.

I think codes enforcement is the biggest thing. And I know that the Elms pays a tax for the city for promoting tourism, and I don't think it's being utilized, and I think the city needs to use that money properly for billboards and advertisement.

We just need to advertise Excelsior Springs.

We've talked to the mayor about advertising.

And the small businesses, we can't keep spending all our money advertising.

I'm negotiating with all these papers, and we have to commit, get all these business owners to commit. We got really good at bringing people in town for events, and the next piece of the puzzle is the marketing so we get the regular tourists in town Monday through Friday.

I think the other thing that we need to do is change the mentality of the local people. Get people to stay here in town to stay and shop.

We've got a million people within 40 minutes of us, and I think promoting the city is a huge part of that priority, instead of just the merchants and the Elms.

If something isn't done to get people down here, my business is not going to make it.

We've got some really good deals worked out with the local papers, but we need to take advantage of that.

If we get people in these vacant buildings, they're not going to make it if we don't promote.

(many people agreeing.)

The tough part is, we opened our doors knowing it would be a while before we saw any progress, but you want to bring traffic to town, but you've got to have people in the buildings. It's a chicken-or-the-egg thing.

Our store's a little different, because we don't rely as much on tourism. We knew that by targeting young women, we weren't doing very well, so we're going to start targeting more mature women.

That's a great idea. We could use another women's clothing store.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: I have one last question. There has been some talk in other cities about forming a special business district with an extra sales tax. Is that something that you think would work here?*

Eureka charges 11%.

Everybody else does it.

From a tourist perspective, tourists don't really notice or care, and that's how other towns support their marketing. Now, if you're trying to target locals, it would be tough.

(many people talking at once.)

That's like, I talk to the Westin Chamber, and I asked, "How do you guys do this," and they passed a 3/8-cent sales tax increase. I said, "Well, what kind of money is that?" It was \$38,000 that they used to promote their community.

Eureka Springs, it was a million dollars.

This might sound silly, but we have two distinct areas—the west commercial side, and the downtown side. How would you make a fair blanket sales tax specifically for the downtown when you have two different areas?

You just do it in general as promoting your community.

(many people talking at once.)

For the brochures perspective, the Chamber and the downtown partnership are trying to create a brochure to promote the community. Eureka Springs taxes gift shops, restaurants, and retail, and if you think about that, the people that would shop at Wal-Mart, to get 1/2 a cent, would certainly benefit our community in promoting the area.

We need to make sure that if you are going to tack on some tax, it's fair across the board that Applebee's get taxed just like I do, and it's not isolated to one area, but it's still used for the areas that need it most.

It's hard to break them apart, so it would probably have to be by classification or SIC code, but we pulled some information for the city of Excelsior, and every quarter, it's about 3 million dollars worth from tourism, and that's the economic impact of tourism.

I know from our store, we sell a lot of furniture for out of Excelsior. When people come here to spend money, they want to know what our tax rate is. It usually has a factor on whether they buy or they don't buy. They're all interested in knowing what that tax rate is. My theory is you still go back to the low income we have in Excelsior, and there's a lot of low income that's not paying taxes. If you got people in here that could pay taxes, that would bring in more money.

Plus, that percentage is going to be more noticeable on big sales as opposed to a \$20 meal.

People do ask about it for furniture, and they'll go somewhere else because of the tax rate.

How does that compare to other cities? Kansas City promotes lower bed taxes than other cities the same size. I don't know how the tax rate in Excelsior Springs compares to other cities.

Blue Springs is 1%. People will tell you about these tax rates, but it's amazing how many people bring this up. I'm still back to the theory about the circle and what's inside that circle, and you take it from there. No matter how many people you get on the outside of that circle, it still comes back to...

The people who live here.

*Moderator: Thank you very much. Anything else?*

Our Hall of Waters is a great facility, and it really needs to be rethought of, because it's a huge part of the tourism draw and the history. It's locked up on the weekend. People come here to see it. This is a huge part of the marketing plan that needs to be thought of, and I think it's a priority.

I'm glad you said that. It needs to be cleaned up, reopened, and in use.

I didn't realize how much they did until they closed.

(many people talking at once, agreeing. Background noise, unintelligible.)

...even the people that live and work here can't utilize it because you're working when it's open...

...working people spend money on evenings and weekends...

...our museum here's another piece...

...our museum's doing a great job...

*Moderator: Thank you very much.*

## SECTION IV

### RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

I'm Neil, I've been here since 1990.

Janet, same.

Karen, since 1993.

Tracy Brockman, I've lived here all my life and I'm raising 3 kids here.

Sylvia Hills, 44 years.

Joyce, been here all my life, retired schoolteacher.

Sharon Thompson, I've lived here since 1989.

Mary Hansel, and I came in 1974.

Kyle Brown, retired schoolteacher, lived here since 1943.

Melva Corsett, been here since 1958, and I'm retired.

I'm Kevin Foster, and I just graduated from the high school.

I'm Eric Woods, what he said.

I'm Chelsea Lane, and I'll be a senior at the high school, and I've been here 7 years.

*Moderator: My first question is really simple. This is my first time to Excelsior Springs. What can you tell me about your community? Give me a feel for your town.*

It's a really great place to raise kids.

A lot of history, and new development.

I think (noise, unintelligible), if you're coming from another community, I've heard people say that they've moved into towns and never felt like they belong, but I don't think you feel that way with Excelsior Springs.

Small town atmosphere, about 25 minutes from the big city, Kansas City, so you live in a small town but you still have the convenience.

That's exactly why we moved here. My husband was from Kansas City, and we wanted a small place to raise our family. Hopefully there'll be some input as to a couple we need down here.

I think this town is doing an amazing job of coming back from the depths after what it was at one time. I grew up in a nearby town, and it was a gorgeous community, the Hall of Waters and things, in the 1940s, and then it went down, down, down, because it lost the things it had, the Waters, the Healing Waters were no longer funded by insurance, and in '93, it looked awful. You didn't want to come downtown after dark. They've done a lot of wonderful things.

It used to be a big health spa, before the government decided that doctors couldn't advertise it.

I think it's come, a city with a great, great historical past... (unintelligible)...and it's a city right now looking for how to recover, for some direction that we need to recover.

I think we have a good school system. I was in it, but I also had 2 children that went through it, and I felt they had a good education and preparation for college.

(people agreeing.)

As compared to surrounding school districts, I don't feel like we have, maybe, we're not offered as many programs or classes. I wouldn't say it's a bad system. I don't think it's as advanced as some others.

Not as academically rigorous. I know in other schools, they do a lot. I mean, I think it's because of our size. It's hard to offer a wide range of classes with the amount of teachers we can have.

And if they have enough students that want to take it. They might have 2 or 3 students, but it would be hard to hire a teacher for that.

I feel like with the AP classes, more people are taking them in the last few years, and attendance is... our AP literature class, there's 10 people, and next year, there's 28, so that's 18 more people... I mean, that's almost triple the size, and if that's the case in all advanced classes like, then we should deal with it.

I think it was more rigorous in the past. I agree with you that our children want an excellent education, and I think you still get it here, but I don't think it's as rigorous, and I think we could make some improvements.

I think there's been other things going on that make it hard for everyone to focus on getting educated.

I've seen the level of intensity as far as academic... I mean, difficulty or rigorousness... I think I've seen it fall in the last 4 years... I've seen it decline.

I've had 2 children go through the school system, and I had my oldest son make the dean's list in college, so I feel like he had a good base here. And I had 4 grandchildren, and Misty is on the dean's list at William Jewell, and Aaron's on the dean's list at MU, and they're tough, so they must be getting some good base from somewhere. It's a real tough thing to make dean's list.

My kids went to Rockhurst and Jewell, and they were prepared when they got there.

Yeah, it must be getting something... I think that's one of the keys, too, to having a good town is offering a lot of opportunities for youth. Keep em out of trouble.

Talking about preparation, we filled out an exit survey, and part of the questioning was, did we feel like Excelsior Springs high school prepared us for our future endeavors, and personally, I didn't feel prepared. I felt that a lot of preparation I've received for my college and so on has been on my own and not necessarily through school.

Because you wanted to achieve.

Kind of out of necessity.

These three are very motivated young men, and I kept seeing decline in work ethic and decline in respect.

*Moderator: Can we go back a second? You mentioned that the town was in disrepair and coming back. Do you feel like the town is moving in the right direction?*

Oh, yes.

(many people agreeing.)

Well, with the Hall of Waters, just the lighting and getting the buildings filled with businesses and places where people can shop for unique things, I've seen that improve.

Once we got over thinking that it was going to be as it was in 1950, the change happened. I've been here all my life, and I've seen it all, and now people have a healthier attitude about, "Let's change it and develop it to what a lot of small communities like ours, when you think of Westin, Lee's Summit..." These are small towns that have a historic background, but they're taking a different twist. I think we're doing that, and because of that, we're moving forward. We can't just live in the past. The past was extremely rich, but we've got to change. I think that's happening.

We also need to thank Wal-Mart for that. They're bringing so much tax money, and that's funding all downtown... all downtown is paid for by that.

But your small merchants, it's effecting a decline in their business.

I think a lot of them have adjusted to being the kind of business, there were none of these businesses here when I came in 93, and I didn't want to go downtown, and now I think they...they have to start somewhere.

It seems to me like a lot of people that are—the things that you can get at shops downtown aren't what you go to Wal-Mart for.

(many people agreeing at once.)

Now the small merchants are using the history of the town and making the most of it. That only goes so far, but I think it's wonderful to see this. We have a lot to work with.

I also think that the city government, they're going forward now, too. For a long time, all they could do was look back, "The way we were," and that is past, it's gone, it's over, and everybody should look forward, not behind. I think it's good that we're building on that but progressing.

*Moderator: You started to talk about this, so let me ask you a question. Where do people in your town go to do their retail shopping? If you want to buy clothes, for example.*

(many people talking at once.)

Ruth King's.

Wal-Mart.

I try to shop local, and if I can't find it, then I'll go outside of town.

(many people talking at once.)

For our age, we go up to the malls...

(many people talking at once.)

They have things for young people at Stages.

But the prices have not always been right, and I find that if you go to a mall where there's competition, the price is better.

*Moderator: How far is the mall?*

30, 35 minutes.

(many people talking at once.)

Now, for groceries, most of us to go to Price Shopper or Wal-Mart. That's it for groceries, isn't it?

Well, John's.

John's is a small little...

(many people talking at once.)

I go to Liberty for fennel, but it's mostly in town.

*Moderator: Let's talk about nightlife. Let's start with restaurants. If you want to go to dinner, where do you go?*

Oh, we've got good restaurants.

*Moderator: Are these in town?*

Yes.

(many people talking at once.)

...Wabash...

...Barbecue...

...Baton's...

...Brian's Pizzeria...

...excellent Chinese, Mexican...

(side conversations.)

*Moderator: Do you mostly stay in Excelsior Springs to dine?*

I personally don't, but you could.

We go out of town, too.

There's plenty of options.

The Elms have a new chef.

The new chef, we actually had our first big event Sunday, and this new chef did a pasta bar, and they had chefs come out and cook it right there.

And it's an amazing seafood buffet.

5, 10 years ago, you couldn't eat in town.

And now we've got a lot of restaurants.

It's improved a lot.

You look at Liberty, and how such an area can support so many restaurants, and I have to think that with the right amount of traffic and the right infrastructure, I think the area could support a lot more restaurants.

What about the three new ones out west?

They're busy.

They're always busy.

They're doing well.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Now let's talk about evening entertainment. What are some options?*

The only thing here in Excelsior Springs is the Playhouse Theater. We have no movie house, no movie theaters.

They've said that they're going to build a dinner theater downtown. But that's it, isn't it? There is *nothing*.

(many people talking at once.)

...the high school plays are fabulous...

...but that's not every evening...

...there's nothing for young people...

...They never have been able to get a theater in town because it's financially unfeasible...

...During the summers on weekends, you can go to the Wabash and listen to music...

...The later it gets, the less kids will be there...

...The Elms is having movies, too...

*Moderator: Are there activities and festivals?*

There's a group called the Downtown Partners Group, and they have stuff going on every week. They have art crawls, they have all kinds of stuff. They are trying to make it more attractive to come downtown to do different things, and that's probably the most successful. We're probably getting real close to where people are wanting to come back downtown again. If you go out and walk the streets, you might not always feel safe—that's the problem we have, honestly.

The last comment I heard about downtown is about watching fights.

(many people talking at once.)

...I wouldn't want to send one of my kids down to that area...

...After a certain time...

...I'd go down there...

...We live downtown...

...We walk the streets, and we love it...

...The benches out front, they had to take them up...

...My friends who come to visit, we take them out, and people are just kind of hanging around...

(many people talking at once.)

You have the facilities, and I don't know how this happened. I do think the town needs to be more...

We're supposed to get a community center.

It's dead.

Really?

(many people talking at once.)

...There's a little bit of hope for a community center, but the one we were planning is pretty much unfeasible...

...Who wiped it out?...

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

...I think that's something people would vote for...

We've got a little airport east of town, and correct me if I'm wrong, but that's a losing thing for the city. It's cost money for years. And they were going to discuss about closing that, and that would be a great place to have a big community facility.

I'm not sure, as far as, by the airport, I'm not sure as far as the roads...

They'd have to do something...

(many people agreeing, talking at once.)

I think that's something this town needs, and they need it for this age kids.

We really need to do something for our kids. We always focus on the seniors.

But you've got to do something to keep them here.

When you say a community center, I don't mean one just for seniors. I mean one for all ages, and a swimming pool big enough to handle it.

Like in Liberty.

Liberty's lost money on it terribly. The mayor and the council members got fired in those next two years.

But they have other facilities. We only have Rainbow, and you have to have a lot of money for that.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Let me direct things back to the downtown. We've talked about Excelsior Springs as a whole, and you've told me that you think downtown is moving in the right direction, so why do people come downtown? Is downtown used a lot?*

They come to shop.

People come from other towns. I've seen them.

They come to shop and eat.

(many people talking at once.)

Now, I think that's part of the problem. I think part of the problem is separation of the downtown and the rest of the town...

Absolutely.

...I think that's a problem. Saturday, I showed a house, and the lady said, "I love the house and I like the town, but your entries into your town are in terrible disrepair, so I drove back out and drove in like I didn't live here, and it is, it's terrible. The weeds are not kept down and not manicured on the roadways and stuff like that, and I think that it's because everyone's focusing on downtown, but you've got to have roads coming into the downtown to get people there, and the focus should be on the town as a whole.

(many people talking at once, agreeing.)

...Curb appeal is terrible in this town...

I don't care where in the town you are, if your curb appeal coming in is not appealing, we have a lot of people moving here from California and everywhere, and a lot of the south of the river ones want to move here, but you've got to have curb appeal.

People ask, "What about this?" Just what you said.

I think your point is really good that we have to think about the community as an entirety, not separate parts of it. I think we have to think of this as an entire community.

You have a perception about the downtown, and a lot of people don't live down here because of the perception. We've lost all of our banks. We have no banks downtown. They've all moved out. So, right away, that tells me that a lot of people don't think the downtown's very important.

Same thing with groceries...

The perception of downtown is that the poor people live downtown and the rest of us live surrounding.

I think downtown looks a lot better. They look a lot better.

(many people talking at once.)

...There's been insane efforts put into those houses, on both sides of the street...

...There are some very nice homes down there. They're not all in disrepair...

A lot of it is pride, and a lot of it, I think you know, we think that what the government needs to do for us, but a lot of it is the store owner going out, picking up the trash along wherever it is, you know. We haven't always lived here. We lived in another small town, and my husband was president of the bank, and he picked up cases of beer bottles within a block. We lived a block from the bank. So we have to do our part. We're always wanting someone to do it for us.

An interesting thing is, we're talking about after the shops close, the "other" people start hanging. I think it's demonstrative of the fact that when there are people down here that are good people, nice people, those "other" people make themselves scarce. I don't know where they go. If there were more things offered in the evening, I think you would see those good people pushing out the bad people, because they don't want to hang out where people are going to be around there all the time. That's kind of a circular argument, because it's those people that are keeping it alive.

But I've talked to merchants that have commented on people fighting in front of their doorsteps.

That's true, and the down...

(many people talking at once.)

...not as much this year...

Something my whole family enjoyed last year was the barbecue contest. I saw the whole town down there.

I wanted to mention the Gatsby festival, because I had tickets somebody gave me, and we had a wonderful time. I was really... I was just so proud of the community, the way the whole thing was in...it was the style show I went to, and there were all ages there, all ages participated, all ages were there to enjoy it.

It's been going on for 5 years.

It has to build.

The art crawl is very...

And I went to that chocolate tasting weekend, too.

(many people talking at once.)

We had a fireworks display that they discontinued. They had worked hard on getting that built up, and it was a terrific display every year, and they worked hard to get donations and all, and they discontinued it because they felt like the money was going up in smoke.

(laughter.)

...but the people donating that money were donating for that, for entertainment for the young people, they got ticked off. And the kids really enjoyed it. Those people got annoyed, and they wanted their money back, because it was being used for something else. There's a group started now that's asking everybody to donate to try to get it back. That is a good thing for... I consider...I enjoy them, too. I think the ones that I really think that likes it is the little kids. I get as much pleasure watching their faces as I do the fireworks.

Sometimes you get a benefit from that, though. I mean, it did go up in smoke, but now those people are going to...

(many people talking at once.)

to eat... shopping...

...now we have a football stadium there...

I'm going to speak up for the baby boomers for a minute. We've got the kids to take care of, and we do a pretty good job with the sports, summer stuff. The school, of course, has a wonderful theater department, and we've got sports, so I think that's good. But the people between the ages of 35 or 40 up to about 65, let's talk about those people for a minute. The elderly, we do at the community center we have, we do provide a meal... I'm there too, don't laugh... at the community center right now, we provide meals for 55 or older. The point here is, for example, recently I had this happen to me. A lady moved into town from Overland Park, Kansas. She's a Pilates/Yoga instructor. She's wanted to offer these courses. We don't have that kind of thing here. We have a Curves and a 24-hour fitness thing, that's it, for adult people to exercise other than walking the trail. At the Elms hotel, they offered that, and long story short, it got moved out of there because people were trying to have business in the rooms, and we went to the community center, and I have to tell you, I was appalled at the community center. At the condition of the building, the fact that there's a major room at the back, and we walked in, at it was ceiling falling down, stuff piled everywhere. My point here is I was appalled at how it looked. We couldn't stay there. So we've got this little, pathetic community center, and we ought to at least be using it to full service. I mean, you could be offering health classes and aerobics and Weight Watchers—there's a million things that you could offer, that helps people of all ages, and we don't have anything like that, and so we've moved out. And maybe that's one reason we haven't gotten any farther with the community center, because what we've got, we're not taking care of it. It was awful.

Something along the same line, baby boomers and beyond. They always have housing, they don't want to buy and mow grass and that sort of thing. If you're not high income or low income, there's really nothing for you. This is not a problem here to buy, but there's nothing to rent for a senior citizen unless you're high or low. They did a wonderful job on the Oaks hotel, and it's low-income seniors, and like a lot of us say, "I don't want 1 bedroom. I want 2." You might want a bedroom for a computer and exercise equipment. If you don't have the income to do high-end buying or renting, you might not want low-income. A lot of us are in between, and there's nothing to rent anywhere for us.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Why do you come downtown? What do you do downtown?*

Eat and shop.

(many people agreeing.)

Go to the museum.

I come downtown because I think, even though I don't spend a lot of money, I need to do what I can to support the merchants that are trying to keep their business going.

I like to walk around.

I think there are a lot of people that will do that.

And now there's variety.

*Moderator: Where do you shop?*

Great furniture store.

Garden store.

(many people talking at once.)

...a Scandinavian kind of a, and an old English country store...

...new photography shop...

...bookstore...

People come from all over for the bookshop.

I can usually find most of my Christmas presents in downtown—well, within Excelsior Springs. I can usually do that, because we hate going to the mall.

Baby gifts, wedding gifts, I go downtown.

*Moderator: Are there things you used to do downtown that you can't anymore? You mentioned banks. What else?*

Bronky's is closed at 2:00.

(many people talking at once.)

The banks are gone. They've all gone out west.

Ray's Diner was here in the 1940's, and it's still here.

(many people talking at once.)

The pizza place is really good. I've eaten there once, but I haven't gotten to do takeout.

It's nice. It's not crowded. And they deliver.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: How user-friendly do you think downtown is? I mean parking, lighting, those kinds of things.*

Oh, yeah!

(many people talking at once, unintelligible.)

It's all brand new in the last 5 years, new parking lots, new streets, new sidewalks, new lights. It's all brand new.

...it's enough to support what we have, but I think if everything keeps going the way it's going and we get some more stores and everything generates a little more...

...you have a good point. The parking is not quite where the stores are. They walk a block and a half or two blocks to the stores, and if we had the people that you're talking about, there's plenty of space on the other street.

(many people talking at once.)

People talk all the time about Eureka Springs, Arkansas, but parking is atrocious. I mean, they have shuttles and walking and whatever. So that's not something... (unintelligible).

His comment about parking is an old friend that recently passed away but moved away a long time ago said, "We can go to Excelsior Springs and look at all the parking lots because there's no buildings left."

That's the sad thing about the new parking lots.

(many people talking at once.)

...A lot of buildings not doing anything...

...eyesores...

...yeah...

...half the buildings down there aren't even owned by people.

...Some of those look better now than they did two years ago...

...Same thing with the housing. It's all slumlords that live out of town...

...Yes, it is...

I was having a conversation about the zoning and code requirements in some of the other small places around here. For instance, Gladstone (noise, unintelligible), but they were talking about, you park on the wrong side of the street, you get a ticket. They're strict. If you have junk cars in your yard, you get fined or something.

We're very strict here.

Oh, I don't know.

I had a house that had a piece of paint that big missing, and before they would issue my license to rent to people who had been living there 18 years, I had to paint the house. I came downtown and saw these things that look scary...

(many people talking at once.)

I'm going to go back to the parking, because if we reach a point where parking is a problem, we could just get little trolley cars to bring people to the downtown areas, and we could make them go with the age background of the city, so I don't think we really need to worry about parking. It can be pretty easily solved.

(many people talking at once, agreeing.)

...At the girls night out, they shuttled the ladies all around town...

...very nice...

...all of these kids, there's nothing to do, because they don't want to participate. You can't force it down their throats...

...there's nothing for you to do, though...

...the school does provide a lot of activities...

...I think going back to the community center...

...I'm just talking about the way it is now....

...but if we had one that could provide...

I think part of the problem is if you pull kids in the high school, the amount of people that would know about the festivals and stuff to revitalize downtown, a shockingly low number know about it.

Even the people that live here, I still don't think they know or are aware of improvements and things that are going on.

*Moderator: It's like you can read my next question. How do you know about things going on downtown?*

Our newspaper runs the activities... (unintelligible). They've also been advertising in the *Kansas City Star*.

(many people talking at once.)

...Liberty paper...

That draws in the people who don't live here, and that's great. They have been advertising.

When they serve lunch at the Scandinavian place, people would say, "We're from Leewood, we're from Carney, we're from Kansas City." They come in from out of the town, but the people in the town don't come downtown.

That goes back to we've got to do some window dressing.

We have state highways coming in. It's so hard to do anything on a state highway.

Even a sign. We could do some things around that to make it look appealing.

To answer your question, like Kevin said, for people our age, there aren't a lot of things to make us aware of what's going on. If I didn't proactively search out, because I work in the Elms, I find out a lot of things that are going on, but aside from that it would be very difficult for me.

I know that I read the paper, I think he reads the paper, and he probably reads the paper...

(many people talking at once.)

We need to reach kids that don't read the paper.

Do you have a newsletter at school?

No, we don't.

We have a newspaper that is more for the inner...

...inner workings of the school.

But you could have a corner for community events...

...that would be a good idea.

(many people talking at once.)

Sometimes you see the little flyers places that people go, and the suggestion I have on that is you have to put it where it is, when it is. Sometimes I have to read the whole thing... where is it, when is it? Give me the day and the date and the month before you do anything else, because sometimes you're looking at an event, but you're like, where?

I think our biggest tool, and I think this is representative of the way things are, I think it's way easier for us to hear things through work. That's our number one tool for getting the word out, and the fact that a lot of kids our age don't hear about things like that tells me that people our age aren't talking about it, and even our parents aren't talking about it.

In other words, you're not interested.

Well, we have a website. You kids live on the computer.

Do you not have public announcements on the intercom at school?

(many people talking at once.)

Was it last year or the year before, there was a very good article in the paper, and I talked with one couple who lived here and one in Kansas, and they were interested in the barbecue thing, and I read the article two or three times, it was very well written, and I came to the conclusion that they weren't going to serve any food unless you went to the barbecue place here. I'm not criticizing.

Thing is, when you go to the barbecue contests, because of Clay County's health codes, you're not allowed to sell barbecue unless you have a restaurant, licensed. However, and this is the thing that I was never able to say in print, you are allowed to share with friends. You can give it away. So if you're at the contest, you're walking around downtown, then you get to taste. You can eat, but you just can't buy.

You did indicate that in that article. But they wanted to be sure. Two of them knew the barbecue restaurant here, they loved it, and they said, "we can go here anytime." People like to eat and they like to shop.

(many people talking at once.)

Your comment about notification, I suppose it's illegal somewhere, but all the places I've been, you've got your billboard posts. We don't have wooden telephone poles anymore, but the billboard posts, you just keep stacking them on there. They were locations where you went by. They'd be like the turn-in to McDonalds, and you'd post whatever you wanted. Not interfering with traffic, but you see what's going on just by reading the billboards.

(many people talking at once.)

An electronic marquee strategically placed might be good when we have events.

I think these are all good ideas.

One event that we do have every year is Relay for Life, and we have a very, very good Relay. One year, we made over \$70,000 in this small community, we made several years in a row over 60, and...

I think that's really well publicized, and that's why you see kids there. I mean, it's clubs, the clubs we have in town... ever since I've been old enough, there's a lot of Optimist Club and organizations, and they all get really involved in the Relay for Life, so if that means that all those clubs and organizations need to get involved in these other activities, I think that would help a lot.

I think that's what we're hitting on. We need the right publicity to hit the right target.

*Moderator: The last section of things that I want to talk about involves the DREAM initiative's master plan. Let's talk about what you would like to see in your downtown. What kind of businesses would you like to see in downtown, as you see your downtown growing and thriving?*

A permanent live music venue.

That would be incredible.

It wouldn't even necessarily be...

(many people talking at once.)

...for all ages, too.

That's exactly right. Not just geared towards younger people. I think all genres. Most live music venues, they don't have concerts 24 hours a day, they're whatever—they can be restaurants and other things... I think that would be very good.

Movie theater somewhere.

Yes.

Oh, yes.

Somewhere in town.

Absolutely.

I think that would be... I think if we apply our rich history in this instance and cash in on it and make a very nice vintage movie theater...

Like the Ferris.

Yeah, exactly like that. Really go through and play up our rich history, because it is there, and I think it would be a good time to play to that.

(many people talking at once.)

I'm going to say a community center with a pool.

Yes.

And things in it for all ages, not just for young and old, but everybody.

I think they already own all that land from the highway to the golf course, they could do an enormous, enormous thing out there, and the land is going to cost the most...and they already own that.

That's not our county.

But it's still...

(many people talking at once, arguing.)

Part of the focus that we're working on is the historic district that we just created, and it's probably going to take the direction of tourism. We're not going to be a Eureka Springs, but one of the things we want to do is come back to fix this place up, fix the pool up. In the wintertime we used to have a wooden floor that went across it, and everybody in town was down there on a Saturday night. That is kind of what our goal is to do is to use this as a community center with the pool. If we can do the pool, that's what we want to do.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: What kinds of businesses do you want to see downtown?*

A grocery store and a bank. There's a lot of people that walk and they do not drive, so they will not be going outside of downtown.

(many people talking at once.)

Clothing store.

To just throw our hands up and say, "We want any of these," that's not okay. To just say, "We'll take anything," I think... there were some grocery options downtown, but they were both just much more expensive than Price Shopper or Wal-Mart, and if that still exists, then that's a drain. Because the people that don't have access are forced to pay these higher prices...and that's not okay.

What about department stores? I shopped all the time at Flander's. Your shoes and your clothes.

(many people agreeing.)

...with gas prices as they are...

...it has to be unique...

I think those would be the three priorities for downtown.

But the bank just left.

...they couldn't maintain it...

We've got restaurants down there.

Yeah.

(many people agreeing.)

...I think we need more quality restaurants...

...We need to support the Elms...

...Where are they coming from?...

...They're in the process of possibly selling the Elms...

...If this is called DREAM, we should dream big...

Why couldn't we have recreation and theater, why can't we locate that downtown? We've got all kinds of land on this next street over.

I was just going to say something that I think is important. For me and for a lot of others, the Elms provides employment. And that's so important. If you took a poll of how many people live here and work elsewhere...I think we need to big businesses in that provide employment, that provide good employment. That's what I mean.

Another thing, too, is if this dream for the downtown does come about and we have these things like a theater and a community center, we have all of that, it doesn't do anything to help every one of us that's in this room that own property. The trickle-down effect means that we've got more people coming in and more people buying homes.

You have to think positive.

You're in real estate. Could you really sell the Saratoga property to anybody to invest a couple million in it to build property with Foley half a block away?

There are people that are investing in their homes down there.

(many people talking at once.)

Doing a theater or community center on some of that vacant land...

Why don't you use this building as a community center?

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Are there any other kinds of repairs or façade renovations or street repair or lighting that needs to be done downtown?*

Some of these homes are in disrepair. Is there any way we can help them help themselves?

(many people talking at once.)

...code enforcement...

...it can't be just a nice strip surrounded by slums, because it defeats the purpose.

...he's got it...

We have a neighborhood association, and we invited the USDA to come up, and they had 1% loans for anybody that wanted to use that money to fix up their homes, and nobody took it. Not one.

(many people talking at once.)

80% of the people live on the hills, 20% live down here, and that 20% is the lowest income we've got. It's the people that no one wants to live by.

Lots of people haven't been downtown.

You've got people down here that nobody wants.

There's just such a disparity between downtown and everywhere else in this city. There's clear divisions between these places. If you're driving in, you can see the divisions. There's the west side of town, the middle section, the residential area, and downtown. And it's very clear.

There's certain natural divisions to any town.

But there's the disparity.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Are there some other downtowns that you've been to that you admire, other than Eureka Springs?*

Parkville.

(many people agreeing.)

If you're just going by aesthetic, you drive through, and it's so much different than driving through here.

Westin.

Lee's Summit.

Liberty.

(many people talking at once.)

About 5 or 6 little towns just north of Concordia between Concordia and here, the neatest little towns, nothing going on, but they're so clean and so well-kept, they're just old German towns. You go through these towns, and it's what made me think about the long parking lot. What's different? It's a beautiful town. And you didn't drive by all these cars parked in the street that were junk. The pride of the ownership of the people there, and you get that through ownership, not the tenants.

Downtown has to diversify in its type of shops. The shops they have, some of them are doing very well, but others, if you have too many gift shops or too many of...

(many people talking at once.)

Except, I really kind of disagree with that. I think we're foolish to think we can go back to a downtown where we have all the kinds of businesses that we had before. We are too close to, we are too close to the city, we are too close to other urban things... and so, when you go through these neat little German communities, they don't have anything close, so they live there, they own their property, they work, they clean, that is their home. Here, it's different. We are close.

You can use more gift shops, but... (many people talking at once.)

I don't know that this downtown will or should be the kind of downtown that it was. I think we need to focus on a different kind of approach.

I tell you what we're thinking about is to make this where people would want to come down, like band concerts and music. We're trying to get people to come down and spend a Saturday night or Sunday or... or just come down. I think we're not talking about restaurants and all this stuff. We just want activities, at first, to get people down here.

The town is closed at night.

The movies at the Elms, that's a good start.

The secret, if you know people, encourage them. Come to the art galleries, come downtown.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

I notice, even the baseball field, I live on Bluff Hill, so it's not far for me to come down and run on a trail, and a lot of people are afraid. They don't like to go on that trail by themselves at any time. I personally don't feel that way, but females...

(many people talking at once, agreeing.)

They're redoing a huge strip of that trail, but I don't think people feel safe.

If they keep the brush cut, that'll change. They let that overgrow.

(many people talking at once.)

I think part of it should be promoting Excelsior Springs. If you're going to go through this expense, and this grant is a wonderful thing, and we beat out some really powerful towns to get that grant, so obviously we're worthy of it, so therefore, I think we need to advertise what we do get accomplished, it should be plastered everywhere.

Send out flyers all over the town, you know.

I hope this doesn't become the answer for all of our problems, because I think that's really not what it's intended for. I think it's intended just to get things started so investors... that's the key. Grants can't finance a whole town.

If the grant does the downtown, then the rest of us better start spreading it out to the rest of the town and join the community together, because you've got to come through the outside to come downtown.

It's a three-year grant, so it won't be the answer. And I don't think it's *a* grant—it's access to grants. It's kind of like hiring a grant writer instead of trying to do everything yourself. But, what I've heard is that it's basically on a three-year cycle. The first year you figure out what you want, the second year you try to get it, and the third year, you make the best of what you got, and then they'll bring in a bunch of new towns to start on this cycle.

Was it a grant that got the between fences that the museum did?

Yeah.

And that involved the whole town, and the children's art was there and in the Hall of Waters, so a lot of people got involved because they came to see their kids' artwork. The art additions downtown are very good, but if you get the children's art...

My kids've never been to the museum.

There's nothing like children to bring grandma and grandpa and everybody else in. So maybe a permanent place where you have something like that downtown.

I don't know how long you're going to be here, but it's worth looking into to poll the high school. The youth has to be there for anything to be truly successful...

(agreement from many people. side conversations.)

...we're the ones with expendable income...

...we like to be entertained...

Four years from now, they're going to be looking for homes. They are our future. They're the ones we need to focus on.

And others. There will be people our age who will settle here.

Well, enthusiasm is contagious. If there is a timeline, and this community takes advantage of it and really does something and writes the grants and does something, then that enthusiasm will spread.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Thank you very much.*