

**D**OWNTOWN  
**R**EVITALIZATION &  
**E**CONOMIC  
**A**SSISTANCE FOR  
**M**ISSOURI

OCTOBER 2009

# FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

FINAL SURVEY  
FINDINGS & RESULTS

Louisiana, Missouri



**D·R·E·A·M**  
I N I T I A T I V E

PGAV**URBAN**CONSULTING



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## THE CITY OF LOUISIANA MISSOURI *Missouri's Picturesque Rivertown*

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



### PLANNING CONSULTANT

PGAV**URBAN**CONSULTING

---

*This Page Intentionally Left Blank*

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. FINAL REPORT .....	1
A. Questions Posed to Business Groups.....	1
B. Questions Posed to General Groups .....	2
C. The Louisiana Area.....	4
D. Downtown Louisiana: Describing the Present.....	5
E. Downtown Louisiana: Looking to the Future .....	7
F. Key Points.....	9
II. DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT.....	13
III. CITY OFFICIALS AND STAFF DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT .....	25
IV. LONG TIME RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT .....	39
V. NEW RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT.....	53

*This Page Intentionally Left Blank*

## SECTION I FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted four focus groups in Louisiana, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the Louisiana community in regard to the Downtown area. The four groups included the following: 1) City officials and staff, 2) Downtown business owners, 3) longtime residents, and 4) Downtown business and property owners. Participants of all four groups were drawn from a variety of backgrounds,

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

### **A. QUESTIONS POSED TO BUSINESS GROUPS:**

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

#### **General Questions about Louisiana**

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

#### **Downtown Specific Questions**

04. Generally speaking, would you say that Downtown Louisiana is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?
05. Why did you choose to locate your business or make an investment in property Downtown (or not in Downtown, for other business owners)?
06. From what you hear from your customers, how “user-friendly” is Downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they’re looking for?
07. Is there any residential living in Downtown? Is there a demand or need for more housing Downtown? What kind of housing – rental, condominiums, single family housing, etc.? Who would be the target for that housing, students, elderly, etc.?
08. 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? What is communication like between business (or business groups) and the City’s administrator and elected officials?

## Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

09. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for Downtown Louisiana. 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?
10. Now, we would like to talk about the look and feel of Downtown. Do you think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?
  - Street repair?
  - Landscaping/beautification?
  - Green space?
  - Building repairs, renovation, 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 could the City administration or elected officials do to help your business thrive or keep your property values strong over the next few years?
13. 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 GENERAL GROUPS:**

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

### **General Questions about Louisiana**

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

## Downtown Specific Questions

05. Generally speaking, would you say that Downtown Louisiana 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 Louisiana? 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)?
09. Is there any residential living in Downtown? Is there a demand or need for more housing Downtown? What kind of housing – rental, condominiums, single family housing, etc.? Who would be the target for that housing, students, elderly, etc.?

## Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

10. As you know, the City is in the process of developing a master plan for Downtown Louisiana. 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?
11. Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of Downtown. Do you think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?
  - Street repair?
  - Landscaping/beautification?
  - Green space?
  - Building repairs, renovations, upgrades?
12. Of all the potential improvements we’ve just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the City?
13. What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most like Louisiana to resemble?

### **C. THE LOUISIANA 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?**

Participants described Louisiana as a friendly and welcoming small town on the Mississippi River with a strong history, excellent architecture, many nearby recreational opportunities, and a good sense of community. Louisiana is at the crossroads of State Highways 79 and 54, which gives residents easy access to amenities and jobs in larger cities such as Hannibal, Wentzville, Quincy (Illinois), and St. Louis.

Participants felt mixed about the direction that Louisiana is moving. This September, Wal-Mart is closing its location in Louisiana, and this store has been a draw for people in the surrounding area. The Wal-Mart is smaller, however, than a Wal-Mart Supercenter. Participants described Louisiana as in a state of evolution because it will necessarily have to change its focus, as a town, after Wal-Mart leaves. Participants in every group felt that Wal-Mart's departure will create both challenges and opportunities.

Downtown renovations have also left residents feeling optimistic but have also illuminated some of the great challenges the City faces in making the Downtown more viable. Sidewalks and streets have been partially renovated, but the unrenovated portions are a reminder of what remains to be done in order to become aesthetically pleasing and user-friendly. Also, the groups felt that the empty storefronts and second stories, as well as the "revolving door" of businesses that open and then close shortly thereafter, indicate that Louisiana is, in some respects, moving in the "wrong direction."

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

Louisiana residents do much of their shopping in Louisiana, including groceries at Kroger, everyday necessities at Wal-Mart, hardware and gifts. Most of the shopping is along the highway, but Downtown also has a number of shopping options for residents and visitors.

Residents often travel to Hannibal, Quincy, or St. Louis, however, citing both variety and the convenience as reasons. Residents particularly go there for clothing, shoes, children's items, and other items that are unavailable in Louisiana or for which Louisiana doesn't provide much variety. Participants also mentioned that community residents use online shopping to find a variety of items and to purchase big-ticket appliances and furniture. In addition, the participants stated that, other than Kroger and Wal-Mart, many local Louisiana businesses have 9-to-5 weekday hours only, which makes it inconvenient for many to shop in Louisiana.

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

There are a number of restaurants in Louisiana, including both chain restaurants and locally owned restaurants: Mexican, Chinese, fast food, casual dining, family dining, and high-end dining. The Eagle's Nest, a higher-end restaurant, is a destination for visitors from the area.

The participants overall felt that a little more variety in dining options would be welcome, if Louisiana could support that variety. Many visit Hannibal, Quincy, and St. Louis for a wider variety, or they combine dining with shopping trips to those areas.

For recreation, the Louisiana area and surrounding region has parks, the riverfront, a YMCA, hunting, and fishing.

For entertainment, the participants cited bars, a bowling alley, a drive-in theater during the summer, and a few annual festivals, but felt that entertainment—particularly for children, teenagers, and young professionals—is lacking in Louisiana.

#### **D. DOWNTOWN LOUISIANA: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT**

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

The groups felt mixed about the direction of Downtown Louisiana—some participants saw it moving in a positive direction, while others saw less movement in either direction, with a “revolving door” of businesses opening and closing. There was consensus about the overall positive results of the City’s efforts to beautify Downtown, though that beautification is only in one section of Downtown, and participants indicated that it should be a priority to extend these improved sidewalks and lighting through the rest of Downtown.

Priorities for helping Downtown Louisiana move further in the right direction included adding more retail and entertainment, focusing on the aesthetics of Downtown, filling empty storefronts, repairing old buildings, improving sidewalks, improving signage, improving the riverfront, and giving business and building owners incentives and education to help them succeed.

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

Business owners cited low cost, tradition, and the beauty of the historic architecture as major reasons they located their businesses Downtown or invested in buildings. Participants indicated, at different points in the discussion, that the City should focus on attracting a higher number of businesses in the area by providing information about grants and loans to renovate old buildings and to start new businesses, and improving the aesthetics and infrastructure of the Downtown.

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

The groups mentioned a number of reasons that they visit Downtown, including special events, restaurants, bars, retail shopping, banks, and other professional offices. Louisiana has a few yearly festivals Downtown, and most residents attend and enjoy these festivals.

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

The participants expressed some concerns about user-friendliness, including sidewalks, lighting, and business hours. Of some concern were the “perceived parking problem” and signage.

Pedestrian safety, particularly regarding the sidewalks, was cited as an issue. Downtown sidewalks are, in places, cracked or buckling, which could be hazardous to the elderly or to young parents with strollers. In many places, weeds are growing through the cracks in the sidewalks. Though the City has renovated some of the sidewalks, the remaining ones are in disrepair and, according to participants, make the whole Downtown seem a less desirable destination. Lighting is a concern both for aesthetics and for user-friendliness for much the same reasons as sidewalks—better lighting throughout would create a safer and more attractive Downtown.

Business hours in Downtown, according to the participants, are a significant issue, especially regarding evenings and weekends. Most of Downtown businesses are open only from 8:00 or 9:00 AM to 5:00 or 6:00 PM on weekdays, which makes it difficult for people who have jobs with a regular weekday schedule to shop in these businesses. Businesses that are open on weekends are only open Saturday mornings, not Saturday afternoons or Sundays, which is sometimes inconvenient for residents. Participants noted that these hours discourage the idea of Louisiana as a destination for weekend travelers.

Parking was a concern for some participants, though others noted that there is ample parking Downtown. The groups explained that many people perceive parking to be a problem if they cannot find a parking spot directly in front of the store they wish to visit, even though they may be willing to walk a much greater distance within a Wal-Mart or other “big box” parking lot. If, however, all of the storefronts were populated with shops and other businesses, and if sidewalks were repaired, the walk from parking spot to a business might be less of a deterrent to visiting Downtown.

Better signage in and around Downtown, according to participants, would help draw people Downtown from the highways and would help people find what they are looking for. One group suggested plaques and signage within the Downtown to explain the historical significance of certain sites, to show “before and after” pictures of Downtown sites and buildings, and to draw attention to Louisiana’s rich history.

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

Participants mentioned the radio, the Chamber of Commerce, the Internet, and word-of-mouth as ways they get information about Downtown business and events. Most felt that word-of-mouth was the predominant way that they got their information, and suggested that the City could do more, as Louisiana continues to develop, to market itself and its history to potential visitors.

**Is there any residential living in Downtown? Is there a demand or need for more housing Downtown? What kind of housing – rental, condominiums, single family housing, etc.? Who would be the target for that housing, students, elderly, etc.?**

There is some residential living in Downtown Louisiana, and some participants indicated that there would be a demand for second-story living, particularly reasonably priced, nice rentals, if the buildings could be appropriately renovated. Some participants expressed that more residences Downtown would create a bigger customer base for all of the Downtown businesses, and would also be an attractive housing option for Downtown business owners.

## **E. DOWNTOWN LOUISIANA: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

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

The participants suggested a variety of businesses for Downtown, generally focusing on independently owned specialty-type shops, restaurants, and entertainment, rather than larger chains. For retail and food, participants suggested more men's, women's, and children's clothing, children's toys, a shoe store, a bookstore, a coffee shop, art galleries and shops, an ice cream shop, a grocery store, a sandwich shop, gift shops, and any other type of specialty shop or restaurant. Participants noted that retail should focus both on tourism and on the everyday needs of residents. As some noted, the departure of Wal-Mart will open up a number of possibilities for businesses to fill the gap that its absence will leave.

For entertainment, participants felt that a variety of restaurants and shops with expanded business hours would be desirable. They suggested a movie theater, a teen center or arcade, anything focused on entertaining children, teenagers, and young professionals, outdoor music performances, and anything else that would draw people Downtown.

For recreation, the groups felt strongly that the river should be better utilized, and some participants suggested boat docks, skiing, and other water-related activities, including boat races, as had been held in the past. They felt that the City should work to develop the riverfront into an attractive destination. Some also suggested a bicycle trail through, a campground near Downtown, and a park by the riverfront so that residents and visitors can enjoy the beauty of the Mississippi.

The participants felt that more second-story residential space would appeal to young professionals and business owners and would keep the residents shopping, dining, and spending their money Downtown.

Participants suggested that the Downtown's purpose should not be to compete with large chain stores in Hannibal, Quincy, or St. Louis; but rather to offer a unique experience to customers, to fulfill the needs of Louisiana residents, and to make Louisiana a quaint, historic destination. To this end, many participants felt strongly that small business should be encouraged and that the City should find and offer incentives to potential building owners to fix up their buildings into usable retail and office spaces.

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

When asked about the look and feel of Downtown, participants felt that sidewalk repair, infrastructure improvements, and building repair and occupancy were of the highest priority. Though some downtown sidewalks have been renovated, there are still sections of sidewalks that are cracked and have weeds growing through them. Participants noted that sidewalks have not been finished, in part, because the City plans to improve the below-ground infrastructure, such as

water lines and sewers. Improving the infrastructure should also be a major priority, according to some participants. Finally, helping building owners repair their buildings, improving code enforcement, and bringing business in to occupy empty (but renovated) buildings were all steps participants indicated would help Downtown to be more bustling, populated, and aesthetically pleasing.

Other priorities included improving lighting and signage and filling gaps where buildings have been razed. Further, participants had varying thoughts on the caboose that is located Downtown—some participants felt it is an “eyesore,” while others felt that it is a unique part of Louisiana and a draw for visitors.

Regarding green space, the community would welcome “pocket” parks, more trees throughout Downtown, and a riverfront park as a gathering place and an event venue.

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

The groups identified as the highest priorities infrastructure, sidewalk repair, building repair, incentives and grants for potential businesses and building owners, improvement of the riverfront area, and code enforcement.

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

The business owners felt that the City could, in addition to all other improvements, offer or make available incentives for building repair and new businesses. They also felt that marketing Downtown in various ways would help the Downtown businesses thrive.

**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?**

Business owners were, in general, cautiously in favor of a special business district with an additional tax, but felt strongly that the funds would have to be carefully controlled and earmarked specifically for *Downtown* improvement rather than put into a more general fund.

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

The participants also mentioned a number of downtowns whose mix of businesses or aesthetics they admired: Hannibal, Missouri; Quincy, Illinois; Washington, Missouri; Hermann, Missouri; Palmyra, Missouri; Galena, Illinois; Burlington, Iowa; and Sisters, Oregon.

## F. KEY POINTS

### *Key points about the Louisiana area:*

- ◆ Louisiana is a friendly and welcoming small town on the Mississippi River with a strong history, excellent architecture, many nearby recreational opportunities, and a good sense of community.
- ◆ Louisiana is at the crossroads of State Highways 79 and 54, which gives residents easy access to amenities and jobs in larger cities such as Hannibal, Wentzville, Quincy (Illinois), and St. Louis.
- ◆ Participants felt mixed about the direction that Louisiana is moving, citing Wal-Mart leaving as both positive and negative, the Downtown renovations as positive, and the turnover of businesses Downtown as negative.
- ◆ Louisiana residents do much of their shopping in Louisiana, including groceries at Kroger, everyday necessities at Wal-Mart, hardware and gifts.
- ◆ Residents often travel to Hannibal, Quincy, and St. Louis to shop for clothing, shoes, children's items, larger appliances and furniture, and higher-end items; they also shop online.
- ◆ The participants stated that, other than Kroger and Wal-Mart, many local Louisiana businesses have 9-to-5 weekday hours only, which makes it inconvenient for many to shop in Louisiana.
- ◆ Restaurants in Louisiana include chain restaurants and locally owned restaurants: Mexican, Chinese, fast food, casual dining, family dining, and fine dining; The Eagle's Nest, a higher-end restaurant, is a destination for visitors from the area.
- ◆ A wider variety of dining options would be welcome in Louisiana.
- ◆ For recreation, the Louisiana area and surrounding region has parks, the riverfront, a YMCA, hunting, and fishing.
- ◆ For entertainment, the participants cited bars, a bowling alley, a drive-in theater during the summer, and a few annual festivals, but felt that there could be more entertainment options in Louisiana, particularly for children, teenagers, and young professionals.

### *Key points about Downtown Louisiana in the present:*

- ◆ The groups felt mixed about the direction of Downtown Louisiana, stating that it is moving slowly in a positive direction but still has room for improvement with respect to aesthetics and retaining businesses.

- ◆ Priorities for helping Downtown Louisiana move further in the right direction included adding more retail and entertainment, focusing on the aesthetics of Downtown, filling empty storefronts, repairing old buildings, improving sidewalks, improving signage, improving the riverfront, and providing business and building owners with incentives and education to help them succeed.
- ◆ The business owners cited low cost, tradition, and the beauty of the historic architecture as major reasons they located their businesses Downtown or invested in buildings.
- ◆ More business owners might consider Downtown as a location if the City focused on increasing the overall number of businesses in the area, providing information about grants and loans to renovate old buildings and to start new businesses, and improving the aesthetics and infrastructure of Downtown.
- ◆ Residents most often visit Downtown for festivals, restaurants, bars, retail shopping, banks, and other professional services.
- ◆ The participants expressed some concerns about user-friendliness, including sidewalks, lighting, and business hours, the “perceived parking problem,” and signage.
- ◆ Sidewalk repair and lighting, extending the current improvements throughout Downtown, of the highest priority to participants.
- ◆ Business hours tend to be inconvenient, mostly 8:00 or 9:00 AM to 5:00 or 6:00 PM, with limited to no weekend hours, making it difficult for many residents to shop at Downtown businesses.
- ◆ Residents perceive parking to be a problem, though there is ample parking Downtown; repairing sidewalks, filling storefronts, and making Downtown more attractive would encourage more visitors to visit Downtown, even if doing so meant a short walk from parking.
- ◆ Signage to and within Downtown would help visitors find and enjoy Downtown; historical plaques within the Downtown would also clarify the historical significance of various sites for visitors.
- ◆ Residents get information about Downtown through the radio, the Chamber of Commerce, the Internet, and word-of-mouth.
- ◆ Participants felt that the City could do more, as Louisiana continues to develop, to market itself and its history to potential visitors.
- ◆ There is some residential living in Downtown Louisiana, and the participants felt that there would be a demand for second-story rentals, which would create a bigger customer base for all of the Downtown businesses.

***Key points about the future of Downtown Louisiana:***

- ◆ The participants suggested a variety of new businesses Downtown, focusing generally on independently owned specialty-type shops, restaurants, and entertainment, rather than larger chains.
- ◆ New businesses, according to the participants, should focus both on tourism and on the everyday needs of residents. The departure of Wal-Mart will open up a number of possibilities for businesses to fill the gap that its absence will leave.
- ◆ Many participants indicated that Downtown's purpose is not to compete with large chain stores in Hannibal, Quincy, or St. Louis but rather to offer a unique experience to customers, to fulfill the needs of Louisiana residents, and to make Louisiana a quaint, historic destination.
- ◆ For retail and food, participants suggested more men's, women's, and children's clothing, children's toys, a shoe store, a bookstore, a coffee shop, art galleries and shops, an ice cream shop, a grocery store, a sandwich shop, gift shops, and any other type of specialty shop or restaurant.
- ◆ For entertainment, the focus groups suggested a wider variety of restaurants and shops with later business hours, a movie theater, a teen center or arcade, anything focused on entertaining children, teenagers, and young professionals, and outdoor music performances.
- ◆ For recreation, the groups suggested boat races, boat docks, skiing, other water-related activities, an attractive riverfront, a bicycle trail through Downtown, a camping ground near Downtown, and a park by the riverfront so that people can enjoy the beauty of the Mississippi.
- ◆ The participants felt that more second-story residential space would appeal to young professionals and business owners and would keep the residents shopping, dining, and spending their money Downtown.
- ◆ Small business should be encouraged, and the City should find and offer incentives to potential building owners to fix up their buildings into usable retail and office spaces.
- ◆ Regarding aesthetic improvements, sidewalk repair, infrastructure improvements, and building repair and occupancy were of the highest priority.
- ◆ Helping building owners repair their buildings, improving code enforcement, and bringing business in to occupy empty, renovated buildings would help make Downtown more bustling, populated, and aesthetically pleasing.
- ◆ Other aesthetic priorities included improving lighting and signage, filling gaps where buildings have been razed, and addressing any issues associated with the caboose.

- ◆ Regarding green space, the community would welcome “pocket” parks, trees throughout Downtown, and a riverfront park as a gathering place and an event venue.
- ◆ The groups identified as the highest priorities infrastructure, sidewalk repair, building repair, incentives and grants for potential businesses and building owners, improvement of the riverfront area, and code enforcement.
- ◆ The business owners felt that the City could, in addition to all other improvements, offer or make available incentives for building repair and new businesses and market Downtown in various ways.
- ◆ Business owners were, in general, cautiously in favor of a special business district with an additional tax but felt strongly that the funds would have to be carefully controlled and earmarked specifically for *Downtown* improvement rather than put into a more general fund.
- ◆ The participants also mentioned a number of downtowns whose mix of businesses or aesthetics they admired: Hannibal, Missouri; Quincy, Illinois; Washington, Missouri; Hermann, Missouri; Palmyra, Missouri; Galena, Illinois; Burlington, Iowa; and Sisters, Oregon.

## SECTION II

### DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

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

I guess I would say, since I'm probably the newest person in town here, that it's a place that's in many ways off the beaten path, and part of the reason why is that it's in a location that's not on the way to anywhere. We have 54, a 2-lane highway, a secret path from northeast to southwest, but we also have a lot of beauty here, a lot of natural resources, a river, a wonderful potential for our historic appearance. We're not on the beaten path, and it's one of our strengths, too. It's a really quiet area. My brother comes down and says, "It's so quiet here. People wave at me here." He's from Chicago, and that's unusual. The resources necessary, you don't need as much here. It's fairly inexpensive.

Probably, I might add, for a small town, we have a lot of history and great architecture that is a draw.

I'm with the Chamber, so I get the visitors, and that's the three things. Scenic, the trees and the river, and the architecture. They love to drive around, but they want to see the inside. And the friendliness. The one thing you do around here, is somebody's always waving.

**Moderator:** *Would you say your community is moving in the right or wrong direction?*

I'd say it's a mixed bag.

I'd say no direction.

I think that, economically, due to a plant closing and some other things, it's not as good as it was, but I think that the cooperation of the City and the business community has improved dramatically over the last four or five years, so that...you need to have a City government that's cooperative. So in that way, we're going in the right direction.

I think that we kind of live in a vicious little circle. Our demographic creates a group of people who have reasonable income but not discretionary income, so keeping our retail businesses alive, especially in Downtown... it's hard to support our businesses, because we don't have huge demographics. There's 18,000 people in the whole county. And without Hannibal, there's nothing within 20 minutes that has over 5,000 people. Our businesses have a hard time staying in business to wait for those people to come. Businesses come, they open up, people shop, but there's not enough to keep enough people coming to the Downtown center. Most of the people who survive down here are common to any small town. We're not strong in tourism, it's not a heavily traveled area. Hannibal has a lot of tourism, but getting them down the road to us seems to have been a problem. We have businesses that survive, but to add more to it is a problem because of our population base.

***Moderator: Where do you do your everyday shopping? Do people come to Louisiana to shop?***

Everybody shops locally for everyday shopping.

Medication, grocery...

Lumber, banking, insurance...

The market area, the food shopping is all on the west side of town. We have convenience stores Downtown, but that's it.

Clothing, they'll go out of town, or Wal-Mart. Dollar General has a few little things.

Most of your big ticket items are out of town. Appliances we've got here.

It's a struggle. People do drive out of town for appliances. But as a rule, we've been able to do well by offering service here. We pull about a third of our business from across the river in Illinois, too. A lot of them come here for cheap gas, and they go to Wal-Mart, and I worry that they'll just pass by us.

We do have a lot of shoppers from the Burlington area. They may come Downtown, but they definitely hit the west end of town.

***Moderator: What are popular choices for dining?***

You only have Eagle's Nest, K.C.'s Place, Pikers, and the new diner.

Fast food, Subway, Pizza Hut.

Runs the gamut from gourmet food at the Eagle's Nest, to K.C.'s, which is kind of a buffet.

As far as entertainment, there isn't much. Unless you like getting drunk.

Bowling alley. It's there.

If you don't smoke...

Entertainment, there's a lot of boating, fishing.

Yeah, there's recreation, but not nighttime entertainment.

***Moderator: Let's focus specifically on Downtown. Do you feel Downtown is moving in the right or wrong direction?***

It's been flip-flopping. For every business that opens, one closes. You'll gain two, lose two. I was told in the 60's and 70's that everything was solid, but now every other building or less is occupied.

It was the 80's.

We started in 81, but closed in 85. We had a clothing store.

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

We bought an existing business.

The banks are self-explanatory. They've been here forever.

When I came to town, it was 1964, and you couldn't find a parking spot on Georgia Street. That was the place to be. We had clothing, shoes, video stores, from 8 to 5 or 6 at night. 8 to 8 during Christmas. And you had people coming in.

It hasn't been like that for 20 years.

That's one of the things that's different for me. I never knew it that way. I came from a place with the same scenario. You go back to places that were full of traffic on weekends, and you go back today, and at 6:00, every parking lot is empty, everything is empty. Everyone thinks it's dangerous, and it's just deserted, that's all. We're not unusual. There, the surrounding area took up with shopping malls and strip malls, and that's kind of what happened here with the Wal-Mart on the west side of town...I think that's just the nature of society. I came here because I found an inexpensive place to do what I want to do in life. The cost of property here was reasonable. I looked in St. Louis, and it was unaffordable, and here I found beauty and history in addition.

***Moderator: How user-friendly is Downtown? Is there enough parking?***

(Laughter.)

Depends on the block. Elks owns half my block, but on my end of the block, the post office has a constant turnover, so there's a lot of cars in that area. \_\_\_\_\_'s got the side lot there, over by the banks.

We have a lot of parking.

Eagle's Nest probably has some problems.

They don't. They use our lot.

If all the stores were full, there would be a big problem.

Some of the owners and employees park in front of their stores. But you go to a mall, and you're going to walk 2 blocks, but there's a perception change. Here, anything outside one car length is too far.

Sidewalks are a big issue.

(many people agreeing at once.)

...potholes...

...broken...

If you had businesses Downtown, I don't think you would have complaints about the parking. Now, because there's no business, they get upset because they can't find a spot in front of the business, and they don't want to walk, but if everything was busy, they'd walk.

When you walk in a busy area, the window-shopping keeps you occupied. Plus, the being deserted doesn't feel comfortable. It's safe, but...

It looks scary.

Some of the buildings have issues, and that's a whole bag of worms.

***Moderator: Is there a perception that there's not enough parking?***

Yeah. You hear that. They've proposed making a parking lot from a park area for like 9 cars. It wasn't unusual to park around the corner and walk. Now we have plenty of parking, but it's not exactly where we want it to be. If you go to Wal-Mart, you walk further than a block of Downtown. It's more perception, and also that the stores being empty, it's not an enjoyable walk... too many empty stores.

***Moderator: How convenient are business hours?***

During the week, it's pretty standard. 8 or 9 to 5. Saturdays, you might as well pull down the shade at noon. And there's basically nothing open on Sunday.

A couple places are, but not much.

Where Wal-Mart and Kroger are open 7 days a week.

'Til 8 or 9.

The drugstore is open 'til 6. People that work, that don't get off until 5...back in the 80's, we were open 'til 6.

***Moderator: Do you hear from people that they would go Downtown if business hours were better?***

Once Wal-Mart's gone, I think people will start to consider coming Downtown and staying open later. I would think that, I'd be willing to see people open later in the morning and stay open later in the evening. I could see 10 to 6:30. If you played your cards right, you could cut your hours but have more business. We're losing Wal-Mart, and that's the major one. If you want to try to draw back those people, you're going to have to be convenient.

We don't have anything Downtown that Wal-Mart carries.

That's a whole other issue. Yes. We need to offer...

...Consistent hours would be nice. Somebody says, "This one's open at 8, this one's open at 9."

That's how independent business works. I don't want to be dictated to. That does vary.

Almost all of us are mom and pop shops, also. The husband and wives, and that's it. Hardly anyone has half a dozen employees.

I rehabbed a building for a number of years, and I found it strange that the lumberyard was closed at noon on Saturday and not open on Sunday. That drove me to Quincy, to Home Depot. On Saturday, the day when people have time to do things, it's closed. Quincy's an hour and a half round-trip, and I used to make it a lot. There were things I would've like to have on a Saturday or Sunday, and the lumberyard was closed.

***Moderator: How easy is navigation?***

To find the Downtown area, you can see it.

If you're coming across 54, though, it's not well marked.

When people call from Illinois, they can find us. Is somebody going to find us without asking, though? I don't know.

Locals can find stuff. But if we want to be able to extend it such that people who are on the highways, to direct them to Downtown...a good portion of them have probably never been Downtown. They have to make all the effort to do that. There's nothing that directs them Downtown. Some better signage. Historic signage. A sign that catches the eye. Those are little things that can help.

If you pop off 54, you'll find the newer shopping areas long before the Downtown. For Downtown people, that's an issue, because they get there first.

***Moderator: Is there much in the way of residential living Downtown?***

Very little.

Far less than in the 70's.

Far less than we'd like to see. That would bring more people to Downtown. Everyone has people who come to visit. If you had more people living Downtown, you'd have visitors for them, and people right Downtown.

***Moderator: Is there a demand for Downtown housing?***

Now? Probably not. We've got so much open real estate.

The rental market is pretty full, though. I keep hearing that there's not any good rentals out there. People have lost their homes.

As far as Downtown goes, the issues have to do with building conditions. What would it take to rehab the residential space?...The buildings aren't really set up for it.

(agreement.)

You could set up an artist in some of them, but families...the overall conditions of the upstairs are problems.

Some are rehabbed into bed and breakfast rooms, and that could be converted into monthly rental.

I think on that subject, the loft-like ones, on 3<sup>rd</sup> and Georgia, those are almost always rented.

Yeah, they're always full.

(agreement.)

And the old hotel.

Yeah.

I understand those are all occupied.

They're changing the bottom one into a rental.

To some degree, yeah, it appears that, if they're all rented, there must be some sort of a demand there.

The Elks have some rented.

They usually do.

Yeah.

It almost appears that if the housing is good...

It doesn't look good, though. One of the programs we tried is we tried to convince business owners to put drapes or blinds on the empty upstairs windows. We have a lot more that are empty than full. But the ones that have been improved are rented.

Yeah. And we don't have to ask those buildings to put up drapes or blinds. It makes a difference for a building to look lived in.

Having a store empty is not unusual, but to have stores and residences empty make it seem deserted.

And I think, if you're going to get somebody to invest in Downtown, and if there's a long-term tenant, that solid income makes it easier for people to invest. A vacant building is all risk. There's nothing you can hang your hat on.

Plus, any of those will need appliances and will need to shop Downtown.

The condition of sidewalks, streets, and buildings become problems for investors. The infrastructure's weak.

Who's going to put in a quarter million into a building with crumbling sidewalks?

And if your neighbor looks like crap?

Earlier this decade, when there was some rehab, it became contagious. Whether they were inspired or shamed, all these buildings were improved and lifted. It was amazing. I'd like to jumpstart that again. I don't care if it's out of shame.

Pride and guilt work well together.

**Moderator: How do you communicate with your clients about Downtown or your business?**

I do it on the phone. I send out brochures, too.

We have a website.

There's a Chamber office.

We have a radio station Downtown that's listened to a lot within the community. We have 2 newspapers, one in the community and one in the region. A lot of it's just... routine. Things happen. Everybody knows. Everybody knows when festivals are. But stuff like the Elks and Rotary events, special events, signs on the streets and posters in the windows. We're not that large, so word travels fast. Something weird happens, and everybody knows it.

**Moderator: Let's talk about the future of Downtown. What sorts of businesses would you like to see?**

A mall type area needs some sort of anchor.

I thought that was you.

(laughter.)

Some type of a grocery. Otherwise, you need to go all the way to the west end of town.

You also have senior citizen complexes here, and they could shop there.

Of all the things, that's the one you most often hear. Nobody wants a Kroger or a large place. Something small. That would allow those residents to shop without having to drive. If Downtown is going to be a community where people live and work, they have to shop there too. You have to provide the basics to keep them here.

The Downtown's very limited. If you wanted to open a grocery store, your building size and parking...it's real tough. I think that's a disadvantage. If you want to open retail, size and parking and traffic is hard to come by.

And these are older buildings. There's a lot of work. And most of Downtown is in a historic district, which brings requirements that are costly. But if you do it correctly, it does work.

I think that, potentially, one or two upscale flea market or antique stores could work well. If there's three, they'll do better. People will drive for three choices, but not for one. That would work nicely for Downtown historic district. People who have a fondness for antiques are good clientele. They have discretionary income, and they might want a nice lunch. They're going to spend a little money. A little ice cream shop. A lot of places would do better.

We did have one for a year and a half, and it did pretty well, and health issues with the owner closed it. It wasn't really the business.

People come into town and ask about antique shops, and I have to tell them to go out of town.

Those are also the kind of people looking for art, and we have a couple artists in town. If you want to make a living, it's almost impossible as an artist, unless you have wholesale income or shows or whatever.

Those would be the only ones that we could target. The retail shop is to be looked at as a little extra income.

The pewter people have been very surprised by their retail business here. Their sales are much greater here than in Clarksville, which has a heavy emphasis on artists. It's heavily populated by artists. What we do offer there is a low requirement for living here. Many artists that have come here have come from somewhere else, because it's inexpensive to be here.

I don't know what direction this is going to go, but if we ever do want to focus on recruiting certain types of businesses, I would think that bringing \_\_\_\_\_ into that is important, because they have good connections.

(agreement.)

The key, though, is that this is going to depend more on tourism, which...we have to have enough tourists to support the businesses, but we won't get the tourists if we don't have the businesses. It's a chicken or the egg problem. We haven't reached a tipping point to become a destination.

All the more reason that the recruitment of artists has to be the right type of recruitment.

(agreement.)

Is there any other business that would work in Downtown? We had other businesses Downtown.

Jewelry stores.

Movie theater.

I think a movie theater would be a big draw.

We'd be limited to the property Downtown.

I'm just not sure there's enough people to support it.

The one in Elsberry has been surviving. A wonderful, small, refurbished theater. They play up-to-date movies. It's still open.

It has a draw because it's refurbished. But they have up-to-date movies, so they pull in both ways.

In the summer, we have a drive-in across the river, but the rest of the season, everybody rents movies.

Or you have to drive 45 minutes to get to a theater. Except Elsberry.

They should advertise it better.

Maybe some sort of a fish and tackle and game thing. Sporting goods type thing, because we do have a lot of recreational things.

I thought it'd be nice to have a bike shop. You've got bikers that come here a lot. Get more people riding bikes. And somebody that could work on bikes.

Bike rental would be nice, too.

But then again, we need to have better sidewalks. They can't ride on the street, and our sidewalks stink.

All this comes back down to...I use the example of Saugatuk, Michigan. They're a weekend community. It's full of people who commuted two and a half hours from Chicago to get there. We could, for St. Louis, be a weekend community, like Washington and Hermann were, and now they're suburbs of West County. We could be a weekend community, providing art experiences here, maybe. Paint for the weekend. Rehab a home here. Get away from the City, have some entertainment. Restaurants, a theater, an art experience, and they get hooked on it. Saugatuk is very much like we are. The place is packed with people. The reason they do that is, they're a Lake Michigan community, but they're not near any large population centers. They have the things that attract the people. They provide the experience. We don't have those. And it becomes the chicken and the egg thing. When I first traveled to South Haven, it was beat up and run down, and it's really nice now. We could be nice. We have the river for recreation. We could be a weekend community like that. We already have some weekend people, and that's a type of market that adds to tourism. Once you get people out on the streets at night and the visitors walk the streets because everybody's out. They make money somewhere else and come here and leave it. I've always thought... retirees fall into that. People who are still active, not seniors, but younger retirees. We're far enough away. We have people in town that commute to

St. Louis, but we're far enough away that if something were to happen, you could go back home to St. Louis. If you get further than we are, it becomes a problem. We're a good distance, and we have the beauty, the river, the quaintness.

**Moderator: Let's directly address the look and feel of Downtown. What are the priorities? You mentioned streets and sidewalks, but what else?**

Streets and sidewalks.

Yes.

There's one business, the Rexall building that came tumbling down, that's a real eyesore.

We've become numb to it, but...

But it's an eyesore.

And that's not the only eyesore. You talk to business owners across the street from some of these...the Elks building looks like it's going to cave in. We're so numb to it that we just drive by. But somebody comes in, and they ask, "What the hell's wrong with that building?" There was a group asking about hanging curtains upstairs, and we went out and bought 7 yards of cheap lace for 8 bucks, and it was great.

And you were the only one in the area doing it, and that made your building look so great.

(many people agreeing.)

If we keep plugging it...

It costs almost nothing.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

The new sidewalks, they're nice. But the old part of town...

I have a friend who came in from Denver, and he's a runner, and he says, "The sidewalks are so bad that I'm surprised that people even think the businesses behind the sidewalks are open." The City keeps telling us they're going to improve them. So businesses that are even willing to fix the sidewalks, the City tells them, "We're probably going to rip them up to improve the infrastructure." They've done the first three blocks, and they have some guidelines now. Some people have been willing to fix their sidewalks, but the City keeps saying that they may rip them up. It would be wasted money, then. And the City doesn't have the money to fix the infrastructure. And losing Wal-Mart and our car dealership, we're really hurting...and from the viewpoint of Wal-Mart, it makes sense that they moved to Bowling Green.

Wal-Mart could've expanded right where it was.

I never understood why they didn't take over the whole mall.

But they're leaving.

Part of that has to do with the 61 corridor and the transportation along it. I attended a MODOT meeting in Mexico about the 54 corridor, making it 4-lane from Mexico to Bowling Green to Louisiana, and then hopefully across the bridge.

They have to build the bridge, first.

And they might not follow the same route.

As long as it's through Louisiana, that's okay.

This is on their radar, though, to improve 54. If the communities along 36 help, that would be great. 54 has a lot of potential, and if they 4-laned it, it's a great road, and it's a shortcut. That would help bring people in. People know that shortcut on the way to Lake of the Ozarks. Truckers know it. But it's not a well-known route.

And with flooding, people were traveling 120 miles to get to work 10 miles away because of flooding.

***Moderator: What could the City do to help your business thrive?***

I think that, to some degree, they're restricted in budget. Even if they weren't, there were still some things they could do. They may be inclined, with more money, to do the sidewalks and infrastructure and lighting Downtown. I was told that back in the 50's, there was a tax passed for the sidewalks, and it never did happen.

If you would endure what you'd have to do to get new sidewalks, your business might close. The kids used to come up the road to us, and all that construction changed their habits.

(agreement.)

It'd have to be done better than what we went through.

But it still has to be done. But we need to learn something from the first time it was done. Maybe more sectional.

Yeah.

That's the one thing I can think of.

The other is that we have had owners of properties who only own it. They don't maintain it, they don't improve it, and because of that, buildings have been lost. The Rexall building was architecturally significant in this town. It had large windows. And it was 4 stories. I offered the man that owned it \$15,000 for the top floor, and he wouldn't even call me back, and it became so decrepit...

...because he didn't maintain it.

Yeah.

There's another piece of property by the Elks owned by some people in California, and it has a tree growing out of the façade. But even some people in town have those problems.

The City needs to step in and enforce the laws that are there. Because it's an old community, there's a good ol' boy mentality, and I see that in Downtown. People ignore the buildings—

--and it hurts us all.

It hurts the whole community.

If we don't save what we do have...I didn't move to Hannibal because there were so many gaps. It looks incomplete. If we get too many gaps, it'll just be a series of small examples of what used to be here. The Rexall was very sad to me. It was one of the buildings that brought me to town. And somebody neglected it. A number of people have bought buildings and just let them...we lost a theater to fire, but other buildings have been lost, too, because of neglect. The whole block out here got lost. We don't think of east of 3<sup>rd</sup> as Downtown, but it is, and there are a couple there that need some work. For an identity of all of Downtown, we have to save what we have, and hopefully put back some appropriate structures in the empty spaces. If we don't get on board pretty soon, we should forget about it...

***Moderator: I have just one more question. What are your thoughts on a special business district with a sales tax specifically collected to fund projects for Downtown?***

A TIF?

***Moderator: Not exactly. A special business district with extra sales tax.***

If they generate that kind of income off of it, it would have to be earmarked for that.

(agreement.)

And it's got to be followed up...

I don't trust anybody...

My retail business is very small, so I don't have an issue with that. But if I had a big retail business...

I was against the tax for the hospital. When tax gets up to 8 or 9 percent...

It depends on how high it is. You don't want to push yourself out of the region. But if you exceed Bowling Green...

But we're less than that now.

I would support if it was specifically earmarked and if it had a timeline on it.

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

## SECTION III

### CITY OFFICIALS AND STAFF DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

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

It's a tight-knit community.

Very friendly, helpful.

(agreement.)

We need help.

Yeah.

I would tell people that it's a nice place to live, that it's close enough to the larger cities and close enough to different things, and there are things to do, but it's quiet. Too quiet, but quiet.

We have the beautiful river.

It's a great resource.

*Moderator: Where do people work?*

That's the problem.

We've lost a lot of industry, and a lot of jobs are service positions that don't pay well and provide few benefits.

We do have four major employers, including the hospital.

We're lucky to have a hospital here.

(many people talking at once.)

For a little town of 3800, we have our idiosyncrasies, but when you come into this community, you're accepted. You're not a foreigner, you're not an outsider. I came here 50 years ago, and we were only going to stay a couple years, and we're still here, and the town hasn't changed that much in that area. We had a lot of industry. Our town had a population over 5000, the city limits were confined, but we still have for a town our size a lot. Our major employers are outside of city limits, but they're close, and they employ a lot of people. We have Stark Brothers nursery and Stark Brothers fulfillment center, and it's developed as a huge thing. It's a large, large business now. The downside, of course, is the economy has hit us hard. We are losing our Wal-Mart store, which was the smallest in the Wal-Mart system. They're building a supercenter 12

miles up the road. We do have the river, and the river was a big plus, but now it seems like the interstates are the big pluses. We have two major highways, two major railroads, barge traffic, a port authority that's the only one between here and St. Louis and, I think, Iowa. The Smith Quarries only have this port authority. We do have mechanisms as far as transportation. We're 11 miles from an interstate to the west of us and 23 miles from an interstate north of us.

One of the things I see going on is people who have retired seem to be attracted here. A lot of people in my neighborhood are retired folks that want to get away from the City, and the architecture, the river, there are a number of reasons, but a lot of folks retire here. That's started fairly recently, maybe 5, 10 years ago. My neighborhood, people from Florida just bought a house. A lot of people are doing that.

***Moderator: Where do people do their shopping?***

I try to buy local.

There are a lot of people that travel 40, 50, 60 miles to go to Hannibal, Quincy, Troy, Wentzville, even St. Louis County, like Mid-Rivers. People do travel some distance for shopping, because the things they want are not readily available here, and it's an opportunity to go somewhere, go shop and go out for dinner. It's like a little trip. Mostly, though, a lot of it is that it's not available here.

We're less than an hour from Quincy, Illinois, which has a population of 50,000, and we're 40 miles away from Hannibal and an hour from St. Louis County. We know that we're in a mobile society now, but when gas got up to 4 dollars, people stayed closer to home.

***Moderator: What can't you get here?***

We don't have a car dealership.

Any type of clothing, other than Wal-Mart.

Shoes.

Clothing, jewelry.

Some of the things we have, but not the selection that people are looking for. People want something a little different.

And name brands.

And you have sizing issues, too. A small store can't carry everything. We do have niche businesses, like the pewter store. Jewelry at the local drugstore. But you don't always want the niche stuff.

If you're on a mission for something, you've got to go somewhere else.

A lot of people don't realize that the appliance store matches prices. A lot of people will go to Quincy.

I didn't know they match prices. You can do that in many different places.

(agreement.)

I certainly buy appliances locally, because if you need service...

We don't have a furniture store here, either. That's another major thing to me.

***Moderator: Are there ample grocery stores in town?***

We have two. Kroger's and a discount grocery store.

People still make a trip to Sams and Aldi's.

We need a little market Downtown. That's on the west side of town, and the majority of people live on the east side of town, and it's hard to get to groceries. The older people would have trouble getting there.

We don't have a lot of entertainment options. I don't consider a bar an entertainment option.

(laughter.)

We do have a bowling alley.

And it's a remarkable place. She's done a really good job. People from Louisiana don't use it. Most of her traffic's from Bowling Green. And we do have a video store Downtown.

We have a pretty, historic Downtown, Victorian, but we're in dire need of an anchor store. Something like a Ben Franklin, something that can be an anchor store that can get other stores to move in. They're absolutely right, the grocery stores are on the western part of town, and if you had a little convenient store somewhere around...

***Moderator: Before we hone in on Downtown, let me ask you, do you think you have enough dining options?***

We have a lot of different places, but we don't have variety.

Nothing's open on Sunday.

Subway. Hardee's.

I mean, a place to sit down.

(many people agreeing.)

We had a Mexican restaurant, and we lost it.

There's quite a few places to eat in town given our size. You drive to Vandalia, and it's really slim pickings. But some people do go out of town to eat. A lot of people come here to eat, too.

For the Eagle's Nest.

A lot of people come from Mexico. My son lives in Mexico, and he has three or four patients that are mentioning to him that they came to Louisiana for the Eagle's Nest. Three or four couples a couple of times a month won't support a business, but there are people from out of town coming here.

People come for K.C.'s place, too.

After 2:00, there's no place. For dinner.

Hardee's or Dairy Queen.

Memorial weekend, nobody was open Monday. People were getting ready to go home, and they couldn't find a place to have breakfast.

Holidays. Everybody takes the day off. All of our businesses shut down at 9 or before. It'd be nice to have something open longer.

**Moderator: What about recreation?**

They hunt, they fish.

We have a wonderful YMCA, and it's for the surrounding area as well, but we're fortunate that it's in Louisiana. They're constantly expanding. I think phase 3 is going to be the aqua center, and we have a City pool, and we're keeping that open.

(laughter, side conversations about individuals in the group.)

We have a pretty strong youth recreation program, so that's a positive thing there. I think the area we missed out on is for 25 to 35 year olds to do here. We run into the same problem with the older teens, before they can drink legally. That is an issue in the community. I think part of that retirement thing, a lot of the kids that graduate, they leave and they don't come back, because there isn't much to bring them back and have them build a family with us. And single kids and young people have a really difficult time in having activities and recreation and things to do that would keep them around town. With some of our events, LEDC tries to provide something for them do to. But I think a lot of young people head out to other places.

If we had a drive-in or a small movie theater... I have a 4-year-old, and the Y is kind of limited for the smaller kids, and he's too young for Scouts. There's not a lot for the real small kids.

**Moderator: Let's focus on Downtown. Do you think your Downtown is moving in a positive or negative direction?**

I'd say, 5 years ago, it was starting to really fill up. Several shops, antique shops, things going on there...and then, as the economy turned, and as we lost other businesses in the community, those shops closed. We had that kind of occurrence. And then, we don't have people who are interested in buying a building that needs work. It's hard to attract somebody who wants to run a business in a building that needs repair.

And parking is an issue.

For years, we had too many absentee landlords, and they let the properties run down. And slowly, that's turning around. It's becoming more local, and we're doing more to force absentee landlords to keep their properties up or demolish them. We have very good code enforcement rules and regulations, we have a good code enforcement officer...

Prior to a few years ago, we didn't have it.

Yes. The community ran itself down for about 20 years. The homes and businesses and everything, and in the last 5 or so years, we've really started on the comeback, and you can't do it all in 5 years, but it has really moved a long way, and we're going to keep going.

I think your point may be stated another way. Things just ran down over a period of time, and I think that's a big question, is, do we want to let them continue to run down or do we want to draw the line? Code enforcement has been a big step in the right direction. I think that's a very positive thing, and it checks some of the decay.

Also, we have a historic preservation commission, and that's been a positive, although they're perceived to be an obstacle because they have to enforce their guidelines. I think we have difficulty with some miscommunication between building owners and how to make the best use of the resource that is the historic preservation commission. Sometimes you can draw a line, but if it isn't a flexible line, we create some of our own problems, because people will refuse to do what they need to do. When I was younger, people lived upstairs in the buildings, and we had Downtown foot traffic, but now we don't have that.

We had some people who came in to invest in our Downtown, and they ran out of funds.

We had signs on the entrances to the town that said, "Stupid people live here."

(laughter.)

We had people come in who were not necessarily ethically inclined.

We didn't have all of our codes and the HPC in full force, so when \_\_\_\_\_ moved in, there wasn't time limits put on him of when he should get his properties fixed, and he's had free reign.

He's done really well. Just look at the Grand Hotel. But we're in the process of moving forward again.

Downtown has had problems before with parking, and our stores used to stay open longer than they do. The stores started closing, and they closed at the time that the plants were letting out, so when people finished work, the stores would be closed.

And because Wal-Mart was open until 9, some of our other stores closed early.

You can't stay if you don't have customers.

We had parking problems created by the store owners and so forth.

Still is.

We can solve the parking problems.

We've become a very lazy society. If you can park at the other end of the parking lot at Wal-Mart, it's shorter to park down half a block and walk.

Yeah.

Years ago, the City bought a lot down here, and that was a City parking lot, which is a full block away from all the businesses. Would they use that? Hell no, they wouldn't, because that was too far away. And they're right. If they can't park right in front, then they'll drive around the block 5 times. But you go out to the shopping center, and they'll park a half-block away.

Yeah.

(agreement.)

I see the shop owners, too. The drugstore, they all park on Tennessee street and walk. We park behind our store. At the law firm, they line up right in front of my store. I don't think it's a parking issue. I think it's a perception.

We've tried to create parking by tearing down buildings, but it seems like contractors think that we're a cash cow, and the lowest bid we got was 25,000 dollars. We're resubmitting. We're authorizing 10,000.

I think, too, that we're lucky that we've got 2 banks Downtown. And the drugstore. It would be deserted without that. In our community, our bankers truly have bankers' hours. They're resistant to do anything until they're forced. We've been trying to figure out who can pick up what so we can have some convenience, and some of our proprietors, it's what's convenient for them, not for the customers.

The banks are open from 9 to 2:30. That's the business day. And 6 on Friday. And half-day on Saturday morning, from 8 to 11.

And that's problematic.

And our lumberyard's closed on Saturday.

On Saturday afternoon, it's like somebody's rolled up the streets and sidewalks.

And on Sunday, if you're doing a remodel on your house, forget it.

That's when people remodel, on the weekends.

We got lazy because of Wal-Mart, but there's a vicious circle, because if you don't have the customers coming in... there's a big difference in cost, and people are going to go for the better deal, but our folks have to make some money, and we're caught in this loop.

But the lumberyards can't buy the paint for what Wal-Mart sells it for. Wal-Mart buys in such volume.

That's with everything, though.

But when Wal-Mart's gone, it's going to be a whole different picture. Then, ask yourself if you want to drive 20 miles to save that money. There's some real dynamics that are going to change. Some of it will impact Downtown. There's only a few spots Downtown where you can get delivery in the rear, which is a problem. I don't think the Downtown is going to attract staple kinds of businesses in most places. You're not going to get shoe stores and dress stores. Then, you get into, there's a lot of specialty stores, and that would be anything that's not at Wal-Mart. When Wal-Mart goes away, that's going to open up some areas that it's hard to compete with now, but I think the other thing is the specialty stores where you've got... the flower shop is a good example. They're located Downtown, they have good traffic, good hours, that's sort of the model thing. The movies or these sort of niche stores, even the antique, the knick-knack tourist places...if you look around the Eagle's Nest on the weekend, there's a lot of traffic coming in. The restaurant's open on weekends.

Yeah.

And the winery.

That's an attractor that gets people to stop. That's an area of specialty. She's got a fairly extensive retail operation going on there, too. To me, if you have three or four of those instead of one, that becomes more of a destination for people. It becomes something to promote.

We also have a problem with the sidewalks. We can't get Ameren to help us with the light poles. Our sidewalks are in terrible condition. The middle section with the grant looks nice, but the rest... I would go and spray the weeds out of the bricks. We're missing something. That sense of pride. But when you have sidewalks that are cracking and bunched up... a friend came to visit and said she wouldn't know we even had stores because of the condition of the sidewalks.

It's not pleasant.

And it's not conducive if you're disabled.

We're going to lose 147,000 dollars in sales tax when Wal-Mart moves on September the 8<sup>th</sup>, and we've tried to counter this, we've sent out letters to businesses in Louisiana to talk about what we can do to help the economy and how we could work with each other. The first Mayor's breakfast meeting, at 7:45 to 9:00 so they could get to work, about 30-some businesses were there out of the 153. The second meeting, to go over the results of the first meeting and to talk about what we could do to pick up the loss of Wal-Mart, we had about 30?

40-some.

About 40-some. We're going to have one more to go over these surveys. People walked the aisles of Wal-Mart and we're trying to keep businesses from duplicating each other so they can make more money. We'll have the third meeting soon. But we sent out 153 letters, and we'd get a lot more response...we've had a lot of businesspeople flat forget, but it's not that we're not trying. We're not blaming Wal-Mart. They're going to go where they want to go. They're bigger than the government. They're going to do what they want. They're moving because of logistics. We do need help on what businesses to bring in, on what we can do to make ourselves more attractive. We need help with our historic areas. We've got some store owners that can't do it on their own. This is what we're hoping from the DREAM initiative. We have homes throughout the community that need to be demolished, and we have a number of people that need help fixing their homes up. We have found that with strict code enforcement, people are fixing their places up. Sometimes we can't see the forest from the trees. My children came in, and they said, "Look! Louisiana's so clean. What happened?" We don't see it. They're looking at what they left. The class came back for a reunion, and they said, "What an improvement!" We need to give ourselves some pats on the back. Are we trying? Yes. And we're going to continue. Are we available for new ideas? You betcha.

We do have the murals. We have beautiful murals. I'm going to go back to an earlier comment. People here are not very thick-skinned. We have these beautiful murals, and some of those individuals who started that got offended, and they don't want anything to do with the Downtown organizations. We can't even get them to put a brochure out for a walking tour or driving tour to see 26 really lovely murals. There's a pattern here that when a person gets offended, then screw the City, instead of looking at the greater good. When they do something positive, the City isn't these people, it's the rest of the community, and they lose sight of that.

That's an idiosyncrasy of Louisiana.

I think a lot of people are afraid of change. The gambling boat thing, they offered so much to us, and the older people turned it down, and now they're kicking themselves.

The gambling at LaGrange brings in over a million dollars a year. We could certainly put that to good use. LaGrange, when they first voted the boat in, it scared them to death, and they hired four new policemen and four new police cars, and they had to get rid of that, because they haven't had one crime there.

I don't think St. Louis has had any big problems related to that.

It is church-related here. People are very staunch in their beliefs. That was bigger than crime. There were intense beliefs.

***Moderator: Let me ask one more thing about Downtown. Do you think there would be an interest in Downtown living?***

Yes.

Definitely.

(unanimous agreement.)

When I was fresh out of high school, I would've loved something more affordable in a better location. There are a lot of cheap apartments, and there are a lot of really nice apartments that are two expensive, and it's just one extreme or another. You need something in the middle.

But you've got to get the buildings fixed up. There's one real good building Downtown that has a very nice apartment, but the rent's outrageous.

The sale prices for the buildings Downtown is outrageous. You can rent in the strip malls, too, cheaper than you can Downtown. We're not making it easy for people to start a business.

The stores are smaller, and they don't have basements. There's no stock area in the back. Specialty type things would be great, because you don't have a lot of freight.

The big trucks going down highway 79 is a problem.

And getting on Georgia Street is a big problem.

(agreement)

They were smaller trucks 20 years ago.

But you know, it's the chicken and the egg situation. If we had more people Downtown, would that create more business? Or do we have to get more business to get the people back Downtown? Which one has to come first, or do they both have to come together? If we had 50 people Downtown but no business, would they stay? And if we had all business and no people...

You get housing Downtown, and you've automatically get foot traffic.

***Moderator: Let's shift to the future of Downtown. What kinds of businesses would you like to see Downtown?***

Groceries.

Antiques.

Little specialty shops.

We have talented artists, and LEDC has talked about having a building with like a co-op gallery that shows off local artwork.

I think Haynes Antiques, high-end antiques, was really nice.

You didn't feel like you were getting ripped off.

There was another business that was a co-op, and it had potential, but it got closed because of a change in ownership. Those were pretty diverse.

I think we could do well with incubator type shops. Helping people develop an entrepreneurial... I think we could do really well.

(many people talking at once.)

The upstairs of that building is gorgeous.

**Moderator: Is it open?**

No, but we can get in it.

\_\_\_\_\_ uses it as an annex.

They have brand new furniture and beautiful TVs.

And there's a need for something like that, because we only have one motel.

It's very clean.

And another bed and breakfast would be great. We only have \_\_\_\_\_ at this point, and even she says that competition helps.

And some people from bigger cities want to go to small towns to get away and spend the weekend, and they want something nice.

It wouldn't hurt to have another one.

It would be wonderful if there was like a movie theater with a maybe bring-your-own-dinner or something. We really have to have some kind of entertainment component, but always, do we have enough support of it to maintain it? How do we sustain a riverboat? But a movie theater is for all ages, and it could work. I think that organizations try to do fun events, but it's always just over a weekend. We have to have something that provides a constant source of entertainment.

For a long time, we've tried for funds to do a riverfront. There's a whole block we could buy over there. It's just an empty block, right in the center. We thought about... the man probably would've donated the whole block to the City, and we thought about a civic center, an amphitheater, beautifying the riverfront. We have an undeveloped riverfront, and it's one of the prettiest spots along the Mississippi. Unfortunately, we weren't powerful enough to get that funding. And, quite truthfully, even though we're the 7<sup>th</sup> largest county in the state, we're also the most sparsely populated. The largest county in Illinois is just across the river, and it's really small.

We'd like to see the streets and sidewalks done, and the lightpoles that match.

(agreement.)

And I also think that specialty businesses and things, people who do woodworking or a co-op with locally made products and advertise them on the Internet or whatever...I think we're going to have to use other means than what we've typically known as the nice little shop. There used to

be a jewelry place in Clarksville, and they took all of their jewelry stuff and only do it online, and I've talked to them about coming up here, but they didn't want to deal with it. But if we could attract businesses that produce stuff that's sold *from* here but not dependent on our community to support it, that could work really well. 10 years ago or so, we had the Providence Art Project, and that was really significant because there had been a real effort to create sustainable housing for artists, and then some funds dried up and people moved to other places, and that brought people in. People do come into town asking about the artists. I think galleries would work well, but you have to sell something, and do we have enough volume? We could advertise it more, but it's the chicken and the egg.

We still have the 50 miles of art.

It's folding now.

Is it?

It's not such a big stretch of artists anymore. If the individual city wants to participate...

Right now, we only have 3 artists that would.

We have a lot of artistic people. That's a problem, the whole participation issue.

After the breakfast and all that...

Even for the focus groups...

We've found that when we started inviting the businesses, the west end of town felt left out, and I don't feel bad about it anymore, because they didn't participate in any of our meetings.

We could do antique and used books, because those are things that people will seek out and you can mail them out. It wouldn't be dependent on foot traffic. But we're going to have that issue before we can attract enough people. I think that it's a cultural thing. I don't want to be dismissive, but because we do have a low socioeconomic status, a lot of our folks don't have a taste for dipping sauce or high-end wine. We have those dynamics, as well.

(agreement.)

A hairdresser could succeed Downtown... A veterinarian. We have a chiropractor, a doctor's office, the drugstore.

We used to have attorneys Downtown.

**Moderator: *Would you like more restaurants?***

Only if they're totally different.

None of ours are open on Sundays except the Eagle's Nest.

There's not enough variety.

I think there could be a sandwich shop or some kind of specialty thing.

The donut shop, that's an interesting phenomenon. He started the donut shop, and it's operated quite well.

You had to travel 3 miles to Kroger to get a donut before then.

I wouldn't have thought a donut shop would've made it.

They serve breakfast, not just donuts.

And I think that's a neat reflection. Now, at the pizza place, they say, "coffee drinkers welcome." We don't have any place for people to hang out and talk.

Have a coffee break.

That's important to this community, I think.

(many people talking at once.)

***Moderator: Are there other downtowns you've been to that you'd like Louisiana to look like?***

I'm not going to comment about what we want it to look like, but we had a speaker at our church Sunday who spent most of his life in Washington, Missouri. My wife talked with him, and they got to talking about Wal-Mart leaving, and he suggested that we go to Washington and talk to those people. They survived the loss of Wal-Mart. Maybe we should do a little extra research and get a better idea of what can or cannot be done.

That's a big part of what LEDC has done. If you talk to the board members, they've been to a bunch of the towns and cities, and that's why we got involved with the DREAM initiative, because we've seen the success of it. I like Clarksville and Old Town St. Charles.

The cobblestone is really intense, too.

I like downtown Palmyra. It's clean, has nice sidewalks, you can park. It looks really nice.

I'd like to see lights in the windows Downtown. I want it to look like there's life Downtown. I'd like the caboose gone. I was looking on EBay, and there are people who would buy the caboose if we could get permission to sell it.

Even that caboose could be a wonderful sandwich shop. You have to make it into something other than what it is right now.

If you don't do it, it needs to go down 3<sup>rd</sup> street by the train depot. Why it's parked in the middle of town, I have no idea. As I told you, my friend \_\_\_\_\_ from Arkansas, said, "What in the hell is a caboose doing in the middle of town?"

We're used to it.

We used to have a wonderful theater, the Clark Theater, and it burned down. Everybody in town gathered around to watch it burn. It was a sad day.

And I think that one of the things that concerns me is, what do we have that will meet the needs of our minority populations Downtown? We have African-American businesswomen who are successful, and we don't do very much to encourage that.

Or Hispanics.

Or Polish grandmothers.

(laughter.)

I think that if we could do something more like that, it would attract people who would come purchase or look or buy. We tend to be very white in our thinking, and a lot of people forget that we have other populations, and not all of them are troubled.

\_\_\_\_\_, you're from St. Louis. You've been here long enough. What are some of your thoughts?

I take the 5<sup>th</sup>.

That's unfair, because you're the City Administrator.

I see HPC as being extremely prohibitive for development to the City. There are other issues. In my perspective, you need to start with the infrastructure before you do anything. Otherwise, you'd be busting up new sidewalks that you just put in. The other problem is the economy and revenues. It just doesn't support...we have a 5-year plan, but we don't have the money to do it. That's my take. The other thing that I've seen is that you can have a nice house right here, and two houses away, we have a trailer. We have to get to the point....

Rezoning...

Those are the things that I foresee the DREAM should address those issues first.

I didn't realize that the DREAM was going to have help for people to fix up their homes, and I think that's a plus, because this is reaching out into the community. We need outsiders looking in. But we all have something that we can offer and that...we're willing to try. We're all willing to try. We'll try to stay positive.

And I foresee that with some of the Downtown stuff, is the Brownfield situations, with the lead paint and the asbestos, and that becomes an extreme nightmare.

There are resources to help with those specific things.

I realize that. I went to the conference... but can the City collaborate and go after Brownfield money? Yes we can.

But the owners need to be willing to do the work, too. They sometimes don't even fill out the application to get the money.

(agreement.)

HPC is quite willing to help out.

They can't talk to you until you've filled out the paperwork.

(many people arguing about HPC's operating procedures.)

\_\_\_\_\_ was right in what he said about HPC. This was the first perception of it, is when they first started, it was bad. But that's not the case now. We've got to get this across to the people involved. We are willing, and we will work with them, but once you cross that line, then they can't.

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

## SECTION IV

### LONGTIME RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

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

We need some more jobs.

Yeah.

Well, I would like to see some good paying jobs here, something to keep people here.

We don't have a whole lot of shopping opportunities or stores, especially with Wal-Mart leaving. We've got to get some entrepreneurs to fill in some gaps for us.

What Wal-Mart took away.

Furniture stores, clothing stores, shoe stores.

What we do have is not a lot of traffic or long commutes or the hecticness of the City. It's a softer, gentler way of living, for people who are tired of the grind of the City. Riverfront, parks, the people, everyone's friendly, we take care of each other. It's just a better way of life, a good place to raise children as long as the whole village is raising them. You know what your kids are doing because people will tell you. That's an advantage for people.

We have low taxes.

I think we have a pretty good school system, myself.

And our City services are on the upper end of what we can afford.

I think among the City services, the county hospital is an absolute plus.

The hospital cannot be overlooked as an attraction for this community.

I think the natural beauty is something we take for granted, but if you go to Kansas and come back, this is really pretty.

This is one of the prettiest and oldest on the Mississippi.

I think our City is clean.

It could be a lot cleaner.

A lot of culture in Louisiana.

I think it's a big point, you look back at how the City was 20 years ago, what the Downtown looked like, all the empty stores, and now all the people take pride in their property and we're seeing positive changing. Rehabbed properties. We're a small towns, and we'll have little local fights, but for the most part, we get along and like to see the town do well. A lot of positive things.

We don't have serious crime.

We don't even lock our doors when we leave home.

My husband really complains to me because I leave my car open.

(many people talking at once.)

We don't have a lot of house robbery.

The beautification started a while ago.

I think it's been a big difference. The Downtown lights, the beautification.

We have a lot of beautiful churches. Everybody keeps them up.

That's another thing. We don't notice, but somebody from outside would notice them.

And we've got a lot of beautiful parks that are very well maintained.

I was asked who did our Henderson park. Where'd we get the material?

Rotary club.

(side conversations about the park.)

***Moderator: Where do people shop?***

More and more people are going on the Internet.

Or Hannibal or Quincy.

We don't have a choice, because Wal-Mart came and killed our Downtown. We had clothing stores and hardware stores.

(agreement.)

Montgomery Ward, Sears.

We had everything.

Shoes.

Bowling alley, two movie theaters.

Fourteen bars.

(laughter.)

We had a lot of businesses here, too.

(many people talking at once.)

HPI left here because it was cheaper for them to rent property than own it. Same thing with Sunoco. Our Sunoco plant was the most profitable plant they had, but because of federal taxes, they closed it down.

We had a prison camp here.

I remember that.

(many people talking at once.)

I think it's an evolution now. We're at the same place we were in 1900 when they were blacksmith shops here and all. We're stuck getting out of heavy industry and making that transition. We've got to take our opportunities as they come, you can't turn their back on it. The casino idea would've brought jobs. Same with the prison. We should've lobbied harder for it. We've shot ourselves in the foot a couple times... I can be against the boat, and that's fine, but if you have a job, it's easy to deny everybody else an opportunity. We could've held on to things, and we have to learn from that lesson. Take advantage of that opportunity.

Louisiana was handed a gold platter back in 72. Momo was a huge opportunity.

***Moderator: Momo?***

(many people agreeing, talking at once.)

Sasquatch.

I see Bowling Green growing, but what is wrong with us being a bedroom community where people live here, work in Bowling Green, but they have this wonderful town to live in and pay taxes in, but they have jobs not too far away.

I don't think there's anything wrong with that. If we could guarantee that we have a job.

We can't just say, "Let's do for Louisiana." We've got to expand out in our thinking.

I think what \_\_\_\_\_'s saying is with the boat and the prison, you get a dog in the manger attitude. People price things too highly. Some of these buildings cost 500 dollars a month.

I've been preaching to these people to rent it out for 200 a month for six months, and then when you get on your feet, raise it. Try to get something going.

I started my first business in Paris, Missouri, and you don't have money, and it's the same way for any entrepreneur. A gunsmith or an artisan...that overhead is the difference between making it and not making it. We do have empty buildings, and we do have opportunities for people, and we've got to make the building owners give up a little bit. They're making nothing right now.

I'm not pointing my finger at the Bank of Louisiana. The upstairs is livable, and the downstairs was occupied, and they want too much money for it right now.

That's the way I feel about the Pike County Hospital. We wanted to do something with that.

It's still a good building.

But it's just crawling with mice and rats.

And it's moldy.

There's nobody in it.

It's empty.

Who's going to pay 300,000 to buy it and then have to renovate it?

***Moderator: Do you have enough dining opportunities?***

We've got a lot of dining.

(many people talking at once.)

The Eagle's Nest.

I went out to Pizza Hut the other night, and it was jam packed.

You've got the Lakeside, Jimmy John's, China Buffet, Pizza Hut, Eagle's Nest, K.C.'s...there's 8 or 9 places in town.

There's still room for the right kind of place. Not real fancy, but good food.

(many people talking at once, side conversations.)

I get concerned about our infrastructure. Personally, I have no water pressure. If you can't turn one thing on unless you turn another thing on, that shouldn't be. Who's going to want to live here?

We need to get grants for that.

The whole City, from within, needs to do something, too. Nobody's saying nothing. Nobody wants to be the whipping boy.

Maybe the City doesn't have the money.

But if you keep thinking like that, you won't get anywhere. We've got one of the biggest riverfronts on the Mississippi.

(arguing, side conversations.)

***Moderator: Let's focus on Downtown. Over the last 5 years, do you feel your Downtown's moving in a positive direction?***

If we could get rid of that vision of pre-Wal-Mart, we could make it move. Ever been to Sisters, Oregon? It's the most beautiful place I've ever seen. It's antique shops, stuff like we're trying to do here. They have done...I would love to find out exactly what they did and what they do and how they went about it.

Right now, we need supply places. I know antique shops are fine, but we need something that will clothe your child or buy a toaster.

We've been focused on bringing in the outlets.

(many people talking at once.)

We need to see if Dollar General can change their format and not have so much junk, and expand other departments, maybe even their groceries.

Do they have that in other cities?

Yes.

Fulton, Missouri, it's as big as Wal-Mart.

(agreement, many conversations.)

We've got to get some help. If we did get a boat, people would come and stay and walk around. But we've got to have a draw here. You can get people to the river and the bridge, but there's nothing for people to do here.

LaGrange got the boat, and their town is just as clean...

They bring money in.

Everybody said it would bring prostitutes and all this stuff, but it's a beautiful town. They got a lot of revenue there.

I think, \_\_\_\_\_, you hit it. What we're looking at is the big depression. I was in Las Vegas, and it was packed. In St. Louis, you can't tell there's a depression. People are spending money and going out to eat. I think here that the City council has done a great job fixing up Downtown. We have to keep our mind open that people still want things to do, places to go. Every year, people are going to graduate and want houses and motorcycles...I think the opportunity is still here. If we have a hotel system or a boat...all the motorcycle people drive through here, thousands...

I talked to somebody that was in my office this morning, and the boat word came up, and I said I knew we didn't have more licenses for Missouri, but there are places where these boats are where there's several and some of them are struggling, and maybe we could invite one of them. Some of them are contemplating going out of business because of the economy.

You're going to have something here for people to come here.

Every year, people called the Chamber of Commerce, and they wanted another hotel or motel on the river.

You still have to have something for you to do.

Half of our riverfront's owned by the railroad, though.

That camping was important to them, too, on the riverfront.

I don't think the campers are going to spend money in our town.

I tell you one thing that Louisiana needs...we haven't got a place that will accommodate 300 people for a wedding or whatever. Even the fairgrounds, that's about 300. So, something like that could bring a lot of revenue to other people. Not a convention center or anything, but a place that will accommodate people.

You've got to have a reason for people to come here, to do something.

We don't need to draw a thousand. If someone comes here and tells his friends or his wife about Louisiana, and brings one person...the concept works for everybody.

I can remember when that riverfront was packed with people watching the boat races.

That's an idea, too, is to put the docks back on the riverfront.

We're not using our riverfront.

That was the biggest boat race on the Mississippi.

When Twin Rivers came over, they have a nice business, but there were a lot of people with boats on the riverfront. People used the river. People were skiing and doing stuff on the river.

We're getting a carnival again this year, but that was...that was 2 or 3 times a year. It is a pain, and it costs a little extra...

But you make up for it on the other end.

***Moderator: How user-friendly is Downtown? How is parking?***

People don't complain about it.

If we ever had parking problems again, I'll be the first one dancing in the street.

(agreement.)

We have some really wonderful businesses Downtown, but we just don't have enough.

***Moderator: What about business hours?***

That's a problem. Nobody wants to work on Saturday.

People come to the Bed and Breakfast, and they want to walk the town, and they complain that nothing's open. They want to come from the City, walk to the riverfront, go out and eat, shop...they want to get away from the City.

They do love the antique shops.

But they weren't open.

I called every one of the antique dealers, and they say, "We'll be open when we want to be open."

And the lumberyard closes on weekends.

(many people talking at once.)

Antique shops should be open.

You've got to look at it from the view of prior to World War II, before all the heavier industry here, it was all geared toward the war effort. Here you are, after World War II, Hercules still does what they do, but you're having a change in what's going on in America. Now people use the Internet, people order stuff. \_\_\_\_\_'s business, it doesn't even look like it's a recession. The fulfillment business. They do a great catalog business.

It's the biggest workforce in Louisiana right now.

Part of what you're saying is us getting used to a transition. We've got to have a financial community that will back business. A grocery store, another automotive... they've got to work on making the SBA loans available...we're living in a transition time. It's so much better than 15 years ago, though. Eagle's Nest, Pikers, the Donut Shop, the Water Tower, the apartment building...the community has done a lot.

(agreement that Downtown Louisiana has positively transformed.)

We ought to get over the “woe is me” because of Wal-Mart closing.

Imagine those small businesses in Bowling Green.

And we’ll still have the river and the rail.

Now’s the time for people to invest in the right thing.

I think we’re getting a Radio Shack here in town.

A lot of things are going on, because this is a planning time.

(side conversations.)

I had a patient of mine from St. Louis, and they came from Mexico, and she said that her husband was transferred to Mexico out of Wholesome, and it is a changing time. We’re going to have to learn to survive through it. Keep our population healthy. I think we’ll get there. If you look at where we are, we’ve come a long way.

(agreement.)

We need some really big help with infrastructure. We’re going to lose 250,000 with taxes from Wal-Mart, and you see our streets right now...what are we going to do?

We need some infrastructure to get somebody here.

But it starts at home first. The City itself has got to do things.

We need a good grant writer.

Get some grants and clean our City up.

Somebody to give us money?

We can apply through the federal government.

Most are not for infrastructure.

There’s always a catch.

Usually matching funds.

We have had new people move to our community, and they seem to be the workers. They’re at all these meetings, they give their time and talent...I’m seeing an awful lot of the newer people getting involved and having the enthusiasm.

(agreement.)

Some of the older people are tired of trying, too.

But that's not going to help us. If the newer people are enthusiastic and willing to work, it's an asset for us. They are workers.

**Moderator: Did you use to have a lot of people living in second-story living Downtown?**

Years ago.

Everything was full.

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

Everybody's dream 20 years ago built outside of town. Subdivisions and stuff.

(agreement, many people talking at once.)

If the City would get together and make our City look good...make things start happening.

**Moderator: Would people be interested in living Downtown?**

Yeah.

Sure.

Young people who teach or are in nursing.

If the City looks good.

Yeah.

**Moderator: Let's look to the future of Downtown. What kinds of businesses would you like to see Downtown?**

Clothing, kitchen appliances, dishes, pots, pans, hand mixers, whatever.

A hotel, a restaurant, apartments upstairs overlooking the Mississippi.

You've got to find something for kids. A movie theater would make a big difference. There's nothing for kids to do.

If people are driving to Vandalia to see a movie, why would you live here rather than Vandalia.

To keep your young people, you need something in town.

I think the bowling alley in recent years is revived.

I'm going to be realistic. I dream about a nice boat down there and a nice park down there, and I think everything else would fall in place. We get some good revenue for our streets.

Your park, don't give up on that. You've seen the work we've done, and that's just half of it.

You're talking about the riverfront park?

Yeah. If we could get the railroads out of there, if they would just loosen their grip...

If the City would make an apology to them...

They can't close the crossing because of the river's flooding, but they've proposed closing down other ones, and they got mad at the mayor, and... to get even, they stacked railroad ties on the riverfront...

They own a big part of the riverfront.

Both railroads do.

We need to start working together.

Somebody's got to say "I'm sorry."

(side conversations.)

We have to make people think that this is the place to be. Clean and nice.

(agreement.)

I envision the boat races back on the riverfront and hot dog vendors, that would generate revenue and bring people Downtown.

If we get them to come to the riverfront, they've got to come through the Downtown. We've got to use the riverfront. This is the only river town I've been to that's never used the river.

A couple of pipeliners up on Main Street, they say we're missing the boat in the evening. You could have blues people playing for the crowds Downtown.

There's two or three people who would holler about it.

(agreement that outdoor concerts would be welcome.)

You could do it like Pittsfield. They have it in their town square about 3 times a year.

Twice a month in Hannibal park, they do it. It's great.

You could do a skating rink. There's a lot of things that can be done.

It doesn't have to be complicated.

(many people talking at once.)

We've got some great bluegrass musicians. I'd like to see a business come in that provides services to people. We need sewer and water and grants to build.

Who in the City writes the grants?

\_\_\_\_\_ does it.

Is he doing that?

Yeah.

We need somebody to work overtime on it.

And he knows a whole lot of them. He's going on the City's side, not what we're talking about.

We need someone whose job it is, though.

As far as revenue, have a bicycle trail to bring people through town. They were talking about it.

It died at Clarksville.

They need to work on that.

We have 1000 motorcycle people coming through here, and there's no place for them to come and have a beer and four sticks.

We're not talking about Hell's Angels anymore. Get them to stop here.

Because of the railroads being involved... couldn't we issue a liquor license?

(many people talking at once.)

A bicycle trail is kind of vintage.

That was a big thing for a long time. We had part of it already marked off.

Clinton Springs, one of the prettiest spots along the road. If Louisiana kept the grass cut, the State was going to put different rocks up there...

One of our best historical landmarks...

(many people talking at once, unintelligible.)

The grass is this tall.

It's terrible.

I figured that that State owned it, and they told us if we would keep the grass cut, they'd put new rocks in. That spring is one of the oldest things.

***Moderator: What would you change about the way your Downtown looks?***

I don't see nothing wrong with it.

There's too many empty buildings.

If you've got businesses in there, the buildings will be taken care of.

People come in, and they say, "Oh my god, what happened to that building?" There's a 3-story building that's the ugliest thing you've ever seen. At least they could board it up and paint murals as if it's a building. Go into Bank of Louisiana and look out their window.

If you walk down the street, all the cracks in the sidewalk and patches of grass, they're weedy. The store owners ought to buy weed killer.

It all comes back to the City.

A little Round-up will take care of it.

It just looks like we don't care when you walk down the street.

Some towns don't even have a skeleton to start with, and we've got such a pretty start.

This old hotel has 40 rooms, and you can see where it used to be. You used to be able to catch a train to go anywhere in the United States.

We need to get a short line in and out of here.

I'll tell you what the young people did, when my husband was, you know, people would go to Hannibal to watch a wrestling match on the train.

There's not a whole lot we can change about the Downtown. It's a designated historical district.

Clean it up.

Can you undo those historic things?

It would be tough.

A whole lot of that gets tighter and tighter.

Well, my husband owned the station back in 1955, but he didn't own the building, and it was his call for me to buy that.

I think the start of the Downtown and Georgia Street district needs to be finished, so it's one element... sidewalks, street lights, the infrastructure when that goes.

And the light makes all the difference in the world.

(many people talking at once.)

A lot of donated money for that.

It didn't take a long time to get \$60,000 to do the streetlights.

We also need to work on securing and widening that 54 highway bridge. It's a big trafficway.

Somebody needs to get on that and make sure that 54 comes through here.

(agreement.)

This town has as much history as any town in Missouri. It's in books.

If we lose that bridge...

We ain't going to.

They lost theirs in Hannibal.

(many people talking at once.)

The Hannibal excursion, their cruise, that's going downhill. I had a thought that we could go to Hannibal and see what the feasibility was of having a turnaround, take a load of Hannibal folks down here, spend the night at our Bed and Breakfast, go down to Pikers and eat, take a load from Louisiana and take them up to Hannibal.

We can't just have Pikers.

They have people from all over the world come in there.

The Mark Twain riverboat?

Yeah.

They advertise good.

The revenue isn't what it once was.

For \$800/hr, you can rent the whole boat out at Lake of the Ozarks.

You could do 2, 3 hours coming down to Louisiana and to Hannibal. Switch groups.

**Moderator:** *I have one more question. Have you been to other downtowns that you like the look of?*

Galena, Illinois.

We went to Galena to get information on how they did what they did.

What'd they do?

The downtown has cobblestone streets, and it's rebuilt, and the shops are specialty shops. There's several blocks, and lots of Bed and Breakfasts.

US Grant's house is there.

That's a pretty little town. It was busy, but there were a lot of people around.

Burlington, Iowa, they did the same thing.

Beautiful.

I think we could do that. Where do you think that 79 bypass is going to go?

Right across the top of that.

(many people talking at once.)

I don't think you're going to have anything like that Downtown unless you can reroute your truck traffic. Even if you cobblestone this, and if the drugstore leaves, you'll have even more room Downtown.

I understand it's going across the hill?

Yeah.

Dollar General's next to Kroger's.

**Moderator:** *I think you've answered everything. Thank you very much.*

## SECTION V

### NEW RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

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

I think the first thing that comes to mind is that it's a historical riverfront town, nostalgic.

The people are just really really friendly, but I'm from the East Coast.

(laughter.)

Me too, and I came here, and it's a big difference. The Midwestern open-door atmosphere.

Very much so. I know we met every minister when we first came up here. Every minister in town came.

I came because of the river and my studio space.

Here, Clarksville, and Hannibal have the nicest...

Quincy's like pulled away from the river.

Me, I had an opportunity to come here but I had to choose between somewhere else, and I didn't want to go to Augusta, Maine, but Louisiana, Missouri, "where the heck is that?," but when I first came here, the cost of living...real estate was extremely inexpensive. In 1996, the house I live in today would've been like \$300,000 where I came from, and I bought it for 74. A lot has changed, but the cost of living here versus heading down where you came from, it's a lot cheaper. That's a plus.

Along with that, the real estate taxes are much more reasonable.

When we did come here, we had a house in Minneapolis, and taxes were like 8000, and they'd go up by 1000 a year, and you literally could not afford to live there.

I moved here in 1996, but I moved away twice. Michigan for 6 weeks and Texas for 6 months...there's something about this town that grabs you. If you stand back and look, it doesn't have a lot of amenities, but there's something about this town.

The people. I can't tell you how welcomed I was made to feel. And it's nothing you expect.

Even if you're brand new here.

Yeah. When I moved back here, it was coming back home.

Very much so. If you are in a business, you meet everybody.

When I first came, everyone I met was extremely friendly, but some of the old-timers, a lot of their reaction was, "You moved to Louisiana?" I see a lot of newcomers who realize the potential of the City, but the old-timers...

The old-timers haven't realized what they have.

I've been around here most of my life, and there's times I take everything for granted, but then you look out over the City, and it's picture postcard.

(agreement.)

When the trees on Georgia street are blooming...

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

We're not moving. Let's go back to the old-timers. There's an attitude, and I've actually heard a woman tell kids at a high school career day that they don't want to stay here because they can make more money somewhere else. We need the kids to stay here.

We're losing our future if the kids move away. In the last 5 years, I had to hire 2 managers, and I couldn't find anyone around here who was qualified. I had to go outside. The jobs were \$65,000 and \$56,000 a year. That's good money.

\_\_\_\_\_ moved back.

But they left and moved back.

\_\_\_\_\_ moved back just after college.

This town is great for people who don't have children and for people who are older. There's nothing for kids.

And I wouldn't send my kids to these schools.

When I moved here in 1996, there was a lot with this town that was in bad shape. Not just cosmetically. Law enforcement, drug problems, and so on. And where I live today, one thing I can say is, our former chief of police fixed a lot of things. Downtown is a very pleasant place to walk now, and somebody fixed that. It didn't happen overnight. That's a positive move in making this town more attractive.

I think what's happening is that it is becoming a destination.

Like with the farmer's market. We draw from the whole area. Including, now, St. Louis.

Because of the historic buildings.

I moved here from St. Louis because somebody told me there was an art studio I could rent, and I bought it within the first year.

I'm kind of curious. Where I'm from in New York, it's about 5 hours from New York City, and after 9-11, people moved away from the City. And you can see that from St. Louis, too.

I had looked for probably 2 years for a place I could live and work, and I couldn't afford anything.

Do you feel safe here?

Absolutely. There are 2 families that live on my block, and I have a business, and I don't think twice about it.

I'll walk down to the river at 11 at night.

You couldn't have done that 8 years ago or so.

You see an improvement since 13 years ago?

Downtown, since I've been here, 90% of the businesses are gone.

It's a revolving door.

In the last 15 years, it's been like that.

A lot of that is folks who start a business, and everybody has... like going to the grocery store when you're hungry and buying too much food. People are disappointed.

You better believe it.

But have you seen growth?

This past year, business has probably doubled.

Patience.

It's been advertising, getting to know people, people getting to know us. First of all, if they could find us. Also, expectations. When we started our business, we expected that we were not going to make any money the first five years.

***Moderator: Let's focus on Downtown. Why do people come Downtown?***

Architecture.

Atmosphere.

And the river. And here's this gorgeous Downtown with a gorgeous view of the river that is untouched.

You can watch the barges and the boats.

And the houses. People do the house tours. And they're all Downtown, more or less.

You think about the amount of businesses Downtown, most have been there for years. Eagle's Nest is an exception. The banks, Family Drug, \_\_\_\_\_.

Is he the...?

Accountant.

And the flower shop, Rainbow. A lot of them have been there a long time.

People don't come for the little shopping thing, because we don't have cutesy stores and boutiques.

You can't just have one or two, though.

It's not a shopping destination.

That's why a lot of the specialty shops don't survive. Because you need more than one.

I do photography in my building, and many people say, "You're never going to survive in Louisiana," but I've sold in art shows and online.

There is no studio photography in Louisiana, and my kids had to go to Bowling Green to get pictures taken. Studio photography would survive.

And film developing, with Wal-Mart moving out. People are still using film.

***Moderator: Let me ask you about the user-friendliness of Downtown. How's parking?***

There's plenty of it.

(laughter.)

There's the caboose Downtown. It's a destination. People come here and take pictures of that thing. And they wanted to move the caboose because we needed more parking. And it just, everybody came to the realization that you can find five parking spaces within a half-block of anywhere.

If you do your history on Louisiana, and you start looking at those old pictures, there was no public parking and Downtown was booming.

You parked and walked.

The grocery store was down there, everything was down there, and you walked.

It's a walking Downtown anywhere.

(many people agreeing.)

I really think that this Downtown, if there were stores, the walking Downtown would come back to life.

***Moderator: Do others in town think there's enough parking?***

I haven't heard that as a topic.

I think the only concern would be that the events center, I'm not sure what the capacity is for that, but the parking for that, I think that could be a concern unless the churches let you park in their parking lot.

Isn't there a union parking lot somewhere there?

They don't want you to park there.

Same problem when the events were happening at the Masonic Temple.

This is 2009, though, and now you're going to have issues with ADA if you don't accommodate. Some sidewalks have been redone and have ramps. That is a topic. And we need to be careful.

The sidewalks are one of the biggest issues.

That's the biggest complaint I hear is that they did the sidewalks for one block and didn't finish them.

They're a huge eyesore. They're crumbling and collapsing.

There was some major issue why they didn't do that.

It was an infrastructure issue. Water, sewer, and they need to replace all of that underneath.

We take care of the street lights, and we...you know...we take care of those. We were waiting to find out what they were going to do, and they had problems. The whole idea was to go up another block.

They ran out of money?

Yeah. More, though, somebody let the ball drop. And they changed administration.

The part they worked on is beautiful.

Also, people complain about the whole.

The one-and-a-half story formerly four-story hole.

If people are walking, you see them staring at the hole.

Put a wall in front of it. Do something about it.

Where I come from in New York, they had a building collapse, and they couldn't afford to put another building in, and they filled the hole with a metal façade, and there's nothing behind it but grass growing.

There's no money.

There's grant money.

If you just put a park in there.

There's more to it, though. They are working on this issue. There's several different groups. They're trying to get the one behind it torn down to do all that infrastructure.

When I was involved, nobody had the money for it.

***Moderator: How are business hours Downtown? Are they convenient?***

No.

No, they're ridiculous.

Absolutely not.

We're not retail-oriented, but when we need to go someplace, we can't.

They're all family businesses, but how many hours can you put in? But you can stagger. You can do noon to nine.

A perfect example is, you can't accommodate everybody, but... I mean, the lumber store. If I don't make a trip to the lumber store at noon. I don't go to Wal-Mart if I can help it, but the lumberyard closes at 5. If they just stayed open until 5:30...

We're open until 6, and everyone comes after work.

That's when I come. I don't go at noon, because then I can't get lunch.

There are two hardware stores Downtown, and they have the exact same hours.

Don't start any weekend projects.

Do you know how many times I've had to drive to Hannibal to get something?

Or St. Louis. We want to shop locally, but we can't.

(agreement.)

**Moderator: If you're not familiar with Downtown, how's navigation?**

I think you can find it pretty easily.

Most things are on Georgia Street.

From 54 or 79, you'll find it.

Some businesses could advertise their products better.

From 54, we need a sign to say, "This is the way to Downtown."

From St. Louis, people will come from 54, and I'll take people to Eagle's Nest, and they didn't know it was down there. We could use a sign.

(agreement.)

Is there a sign on 54?

It says business district, but that sends you to Wal-Mart.

You need to have a sign that takes people Downtown. Something that says, "Historical Downtown, 3 miles that way."

One on 79 and one on 54.

People coming in from Illinois, they cross the bridge, they stop for gas, and then they keep going 3 miles, and they could've gone 7 blocks.

Speaking of signage, this is being worked on, but it would be really nice to have uniform signage at all the entrances to the City.

We're working on that. We have a design.

A scheme that fits.

**Moderator: How do people get information about what's going on Downtown?**

Radio.

Website.

Word-of-mouth.

I'd say that's the largest one.

And there are posters for big festivals.

And the farmer's market poster.

I think the word-of-mouth over the years.

Most of these things are not new events. They happen every year.

But if you're new in town, and you're going, "What is this?" Colorfest? What is that?

Speaking of not explaining things, the newspaper has this bad habit, they assume you already know what they're talking about. They just name the name of a thing and keep going... and buildings referred to by the name of somebody who lived there years ago rather than an address.

(agreement.)

They need plaques about what they used to be, if you're going to be calling it that.

People venture this direction to see the history of it. There's a tremendous amount of history with Stark Brothers' nursery.

If there were boards that tell the story, that would draw more interest.

I don't know if you guys have ever been to Union Station, but around the balcony, there were plaques that tell the history. That would be great Downtown. You can see now and see yesterday, a then and now.

Yes, that would be great.

The CD that the Chamber did, there was a lot of interest in that.

It would be nice to have something like that.

Yeah.

(agreement about before-and-after pictures.)

One of my favorite books about St. Louis is *St. Louis, Then and Now*.

The flood pictures, down by Eagle businesses, that was amazing.

You think about that, and how high was it in other places?

**Moderator: Is there much residential living Downtown?**

It's available.

There's a fair amount of apartments in the Downtown buildings, and some of them are pretty bad.

And parking for them is an issue.

But there are some nice ones. Recently renovated. And a lot of alternative housing. Water Street, my whole block is for sale and for rent.

Louisiana, at the turn of the century, city limits were at the old hospital. There was nothing beyond that. And the population then was 8000 people. They all lived down here.

At the time, Bowling Green was less than 2000.

***Moderator: Is there a demand for housing Downtown?***

If we're going to grow? Or as is now? There are some empty apartments now.

Today, present-day, no, there's not a need, because there are jobs lost and real estate for sale, but with any recession, there's always a big boom after that. Eventually, I think that there could be something. It's got to be attractive though.

It seems that there are a lot of empty second-floor apartments used for storage.

Some don't have electricity.

They need renovations.

Yeah.

Occupancy issues.

Some of them are scary.

They make you wonder, how's below it looking?

And the whole ADA issue.

One of the biggest fears for anybody, and I've strongly looked at buying some real estate, but a lot of people say, "Don't do the rental business." Are people disrespectful to the property?

We have rental property, and, eh.

You almost have to have a screening company for renters.

And there's nothing like that here. I have friends who moved out to Oregon who want to rent out their property here.

We need a management company.

Someone was saying that there are 85 houses for sale.

There's a lot.

In 1996, I had a choice between two houses. And that was it.

My uncle's been looking here for 2 years now, and his biggest problem is that a lot are in bad repair. But realtor.com has 8 pages worth of property, from \$6000 to \$385,000.

Repair and small square footage are the major problems.

There are some that I could load on to my pickup truck.

There aren't that many foreclosures in the area.

(agreement.)

Unfortunately, when those houses sit empty, they start going downhill.

(agreement.)

If anyone wants to buy real estate, most of the homes have some kind of age on them. The youngest house that's in town is probably yours.

Yeah.

There was one just built up there.

There was a stretch of 10 years when there wasn't a house built. There's not a lot of new.

I think the question I would have would be, is there any kind of grant money available that the City could point someone to in order to renovate the houses?

***Moderator: Let's look to the future of Downtown. What sorts of businesses would be a good fit? Or that you would like to see Downtown?***

I think, when I came here, there was a big push on bringing artists in. That didn't happen. And that's, yeah, fine for tourists. People don't make their living on visitors coming in every once in a while. I'd like to buy shoes, clothes, all the necessities.

A little grocery store. Something for kids to do. A teen center.

A movie theater.

You go to that drive-in over there, and it is jam-packed. But either you drive over there during the summer, or you go to Vandalia, Hannibal, Quincy, or Troy. People take their entire family and their kids and kids' friends, they go in truckloads.

With Wal-Mart closing, I think it's, on the positive side, there's some great opportunity for business to be reborn Downtown.

Yes.

10 miles away is 10 miles away. If you make it accessible here, you're going to get it.

Even with the smallest Wal-Mart we have right now, we go to Hannibal once a month.

If we want to attract young families, we need a place to buy children's clothes, toys, bikes.

Christmas presents and stuff.

You have to go somewhere else. We have to think about that. To keep people staying in this town, we have to think about young families. Good education, not having to drive miles just to buy a pair of shoes for their kid...

Family activities.

I agree. I think we should have things that will attract new families and old families. But look at the businesses that have come and gone. They're not everyday things.

There was a stained glass place.

A lot of times, things like that are never open, either. But being able to get all 5 things you need within a 3-block radius, that's perfect.

(agreement.)

...that place didn't do their homework...

There's a lot of people that don't do their homework.

The other thing that's really important, and that's what you're doing, is putting the horse before the cart. Make the building inviting. The Head to Toe came in, and the movie store Downtown, they don't look inviting.

And they're renting, so they can't.

If you're going to put in a clothing store, you better make it presentable.

Like the café next door. I'm not sure I want to eat there.

It's never open.

And he says it's one-pot cooking. He serves one thing, and that's it.

We need some people with more ambition than that.

We used to have jewelry stores. Struthers Jewelry. You could buy a nice watch. You could buy a Christmas gift, and they'd gift wrap, and they'd repair watches and glasses.

My daughter had to buy a gift for a bridal shower, and she bought something from Leslie's, but we need more gifts.

Last Christmas, I was going crazy, and I shopped locally, and I ended up finding what I wanted. I went to ASL.

Those are nice people.

(many people talking at once.)

...we're talking about how ill-prepared Head to Toe was, and I'd like to see schools offer entrepreneurial classes that show people that you don't need to get a job from someone else. Give people the idea of perseverance and a game plan.

Our Chamber of Commerce should be doing that, too.

People should be sent there if they want to open a business.

From someone who worked in education for 30 years, this is a small school system, we don't have a tax base to support more than the core classes that they have to have, and they have to provide an education to pass the MAP test.

That's where Bowling Green got in trouble.

So you've got to bring people in to build that tax base.

You can do whatever you want with your property, but the lady who bought that building, that was a big mistake.

We lost that little train thing.

That was hard-headed foolishness.

There's that non-progress attitude.

That was when the proposal to bring the casino in was, and they rubbed their nose in it, and it's in LaGrange now. They didn't even investigate it. That's the "originals."

And a lot of them don't even live here anymore.

***Moderator: What about the look and feel about Downtown?***

It needs trees.

People aren't going to sit on benches without shade trees.

There's not a tree Downtown.

When they did have trees, they had the wrong species, and they snapped.

They were Bradfords, and they split off.

I like the view.

You want a tree that isn't going to grow too big.

There are trees that do well Downtown.

\_\_\_\_\_ from Stark, and with Kids in Motion, which is a project we do here in town, they are replacing a lot of trees and planting trees in the cemetery, and we asked \_\_\_\_\_ about the type of tree that needs to be planted, and he's talked about what should be planted Downtown and in the riverfront, but we can't expect Stark to donate everything.

The current administration doesn't like trees. Decisions are made up here, and we don't know about them.

Down Georgia Street, those are beautiful. And those were Stark.

It's very bare Downtown.

We need sidewalks, we need foliage to make it inviting.

We need weed eradication on the sidewalks.

We need the new lampposts to extend all the way. Those lampposts were supposed to go down Georgia Street and to the riverfront.

That would be beautiful.

Those things are very expensive.

I'm just amazed that on our corner, there are four. Do they really need four?

(many people talking at once.)

...I like the idea of connecting the Downtown to the river front...

...they were too bright and burned out too quickly...

***Moderator: What about parks or trails?***

The riverfront.

Yeah.

I'm on the riverfront development project, and that's been going on since 1945. We have a lot of parks in our town, but Downtown has limited park space.

There's no little pocket parks.

We could call this a park, but we have visitors, and it would be nice to have a little more space. That's where the riverfront comes into play.

That empty lot is an incredible part of the riverfront. The development plans always involve buildings.

I never understood the whole Civic Center thing, though. We don't fill what we got.

(many people talking at once...)

I'm a big camper, and I go down south, and here, to go camping, you only have Quiver River.

We can't put a state park Downtown, though.

It is a really good idea if you can figure out a way to bring in people who like to bring in RVs. And look at Cozy-C. People come to that all the time.

It's amazing how much business they get.

As far as Downtown buildings, there are some that are in desperate need of repair.

Some of the owners are absentee owners.

We need some kind of tooth in our ordinances.

I know most people don't agree with me, but some, just because they're old, doesn't mean they're historic. Just like that yellow one on the corner.

It's part of the Downtown landscape.

The City owns it now.

(side conversations.)

Once they've messed up a building, like when they tried to short it up...

The City did that?

Yeah.

And I think we have a lot of that around here. People who are not trying to do the work.

Like pulling the front off the old Rexall building?

That ends up creating more of a problem.

In the 1920's and 30's, when a lot of Downtown was renovated, is they took out the old cast iron columns. My building is one of the few with them, and \_\_\_\_\_'s building, if you took the façade down, it's a beautiful building... if there's no roof put on that, though, it'll be gone in 3 to 5 years.

Some of the buildings are in such bad shape that to come in and restore, somebody has to have a lot of money.

But there's a lot of help out there.

One thing, though, that I see day to day, that building in the corner has been abusing their tax credits by working on it these past 6 years.

But structurally, it's very sound.

I've got to make one bold statement that'll stand out. My wife and I are going to be kidless this fall, and we've had this conversation several times, and I'm not the only one who's talked about this, but I have a nice house, I could sell it...and we've been thinking about moving out to a rural area before we lose. The whole City has to think about the attitude. The Wal-Mart's leaving, and this is a cancer that could spread.

Several of the houses I've seen selling actually just went on the market.

***Moderator: I've got one more question for you. Are there other downtowns that you'd like to see Louisiana duplicate in one way or another?***

I like how busy Hannibal is. When you go to their downtown, it doesn't matter what day of the week it is. Down in the Mark Twain district. You can stroll around, you can shop, you can stop and have a meal or a drink or an ice cream.

And Hermann.

Hermann's very nice.

What do you like about them?

The wine.

(laughter.)

It's quaint.

They have a lot of antique stores.

And they have an old German theme.

And a lot of their downtown is occupied with things like shoe stores and things you'd need.

I think one thing those cities have in common is proper property management and maintenance. One thing that seems to be lacking here is individual pride in property.

I direct people into this town from 54, because our town doesn't look good.

Our bridge looks like it's going to fall in.

The bridge doesn't have much appeal.

But it's so recognizable. When we had the flood, people saw that bridge, and it was in national news.

Oh, I was talking about the 79 bridge, not the 54 one.

It doesn't look safe at all.

Do they check the Georgia Street bridge? There's semi trucks.

Stand on it when they go over it.

That is unique. We have a creek running right through the Downtown area.

Truck traffic is a real deterrent for Downtown. There needs to be a truck bypass.

There needs to be a bypass. We don't want them on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.

The old architecture's supposed to be an attraction, and when trucks come by, that's not going to prolong the life of a 120 year old building.

Pave that cemetery road, and use that.

I don't know how much of that's going to happen, but word is that they're going to look to develop 54 to the bridge as a 4-lane from 61, and if that happens, then you're going to see some positive move from this town.

That bridge used to be the connection point for east and west.

I have a couple brochures from when the bridge was opened up, and it cut 85 miles from your trip from Chicago.

In the Chamber, there was a person that came from MODOT, and she had the priorities of building projects, and the 54 bridge was on the top 5 priorities.

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