

DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION &
ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE FOR
MISSOURI

August 2009

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

FINAL SURVEY
FINDINGS & RESULTS

Macon, Missouri



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

City of Macon

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

FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted four focus groups in Macon, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the Macon community in regard to Downtown. The four groups included the following: 1) Downtown stakeholders, 2) elected officials, 3) long time residents, and 4) newer residents. 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:

1. General Questions about Macon

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

2. Downtown Specific Questions

04. Generally speaking, would you say that Downtown Macon 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 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 Administration and elected officials?

3. Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

09. As you know, the City is in the process of developing a Strategic Plan for Downtown Macon. 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:

1. General Questions about Macon

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

2. Downtown Specific Questions

05. Generally speaking, would you say that Downtown Macon 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 Macon? 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.?

3. Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

10. As you know, the City is in the process of developing a Strategic Plan for Downtown Macon. 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 Macon to resemble?

C. THE MACON 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 Macon as a friendly small town with a good sense of community, good healthcare, a good education system, a strong theater company, a lot of volunteerism, and many nearby outdoor recreation opportunities. It is within an hour's drive of Columbia, Missouri, which affords residents the opportunities and resources of a larger city while living in a smaller community. All of these features, according to participants, make Macon a good place to raise a family.

Participants generally felt that Macon is moving in the right direction. They cited the Downtown redevelopment -- and the concerted and coordinated effort of Downtown business owners within the last two years to revitalize Downtown -- as a major reason that Macon is moving in a positive direction. Many noted, however, that there remains potential to make Downtown more user-friendly and attractive, to market Macon as a whole more effectively, and to attract more business and industry.

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

The main shopping area in Macon is the Wal-Mart and the grocery stores, located off the highway. Downtown is a secondary shopping area, with Ben Franklin, a gift store, and J.P.'s, a store that has a variety of things including clothing, athletic shoes, formalwear, and kitchen supplies.

Participants said that residents try to do their shopping in Macon, but have trouble finding certain specialty items or an adequate selection in town. For most things other than everyday shopping, residents travel to Columbia. Participants said that they travel to buy children's clothing, a selection of shoes, professional clothing, and any other specialty items not available in Macon. Some residents also travel to Kirksville or Moberly, and some shop online.

According to the groups, people come from very nearby to shop at Wal-Mart in Macon, but the Wal-Mart does not draw from a large radius, since both Kirksville and Moberly have Wal-Mart Supercenters and are quite close to Macon.

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 Macon, including fast food, Mexican, and Chinese food. There are a few locally owned restaurants, but participants generally felt that there is not enough variety for dining in Macon. Many visit Columbia when dining out for special occasions or to find a larger variety of dining options. Participants indicated that they would welcome a fine dining option in town, a wider variety of restaurants, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating.

For entertainment and recreation, Macon has an excellent theater company that is a regional draw for playgoers and for actors, who often stay the summer in Macon while performing in the theater company. Macon also has a movie theater, a skateboard park, a bowling alley, a library, a historical society, school events, and a number of clubs such as the Elks Club, the Lions Club, the Kiwanis Club, and the Rotary Club. For outdoor recreation, Macon has a number of excellent options, including the lake, fishing, hunting, parks, and a golf course at the country club.

Many people, however, travel to Columbia for entertainment, especially for fine dining and nighttime entertainment or for a wider variety of entertainment options.

D. DOWNTOWN MACON: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT

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

Participants in every group generally indicated that Downtown Macon is moving in the right direction. The Downtown Association has worked hard within the last two years to improve the Downtown area, to bring in business, to bring in events, and to revitalize Downtown as a whole. A few businesses that were once on the highway have now moved Downtown, and the aesthetics are improving.

However, participants noted that Downtown still has room for improvement. Some gave examples of unrealized potential that would make Downtown Macon move even further in the right direction—improving infrastructure, improving streets and sidewalks, adding more retail and entertainment, and improving building façades were among the highest priorities for participants. Other priorities included adding a variety of residential space, cleaning up the backs of buildings and the alleyways, adding parking, improving signage, and adding green space.

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, the nostalgic feel of Downtown, and a general desire to see Downtown succeed as the major reasons they located their businesses Downtown. The participants indicated that Downtown would be more attractive to new businesses if the City focused on improving streets, sidewalks, and infrastructure to improve the aesthetics of Downtown.

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

Participants mentioned a few reasons that they visit Downtown, including Ben Franklin, J.P.'s, theater performances, festivals such as the Fork and Cork, and services that are located Downtown. Most participants said that they visit Downtown at least weekly.

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 had a few major concerns about user-friendliness. The biggest concerns were related to infrastructure—streets, sidewalks, and drainage. Other concerns included parking, business hours, and signage.

Infrastructure was of the highest priority to participants. Many participants noted that the uneven streets and the broken sidewalks make Downtown very difficult to drive through or walk around, especially for pedestrians with walkers, wheelchairs, or strollers, and especially in icy weather. Poor drainage and sewer systems compound the problem, because until the sewer system undergoes a major reconstruction, the City will likely need to tear out portions of the streets and sidewalks regularly to patch the system.

The parking situation is a “perceived parking problem,” as many people in the community believe that there is little parking on the street near the businesses they wish to visit. There is plenty of parking in parking lots a block or two away from any given point, but participants said that many residents are unwilling or unable to walk that far to get to a specific business. Some participants also mentioned that because on-street parking is parallel parking, residents who do not feel comfortable parallel parking avoid Downtown. The groups suggested that if there were more businesses and the Downtown were more pedestrian-friendly, people might be more willing to walk a block or two to a business. They also suggested angled parking as a way to add more parking Downtown.

The business hours Downtown, according to the participants, are a significant issue, especially regarding evenings and Saturdays. Many stores close at or before 6:00 PM on weekdays, many restaurants close at or before 8:00 PM, and a number of stores close before noon or 1:00 on Saturdays. Participants felt that these business hours are not as convenient as they could be, especially because there is little in town to do after a theater performance or in the afternoon on Saturday. They felt that inconvenient business hours are a major reason that many people go to Columbia for nighttime and weekend entertainment and shopping.

Signage was another issue for participants. They suggested that more visible signage from the highway and better signage within Downtown would help visitors find what they were looking for, and would also help residents stay more aware of what is available Downtown.

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 newspaper, the Chamber of Commerce, and word-of-mouth as the major ways they get information about Downtown business and events. They felt that communication about Downtown could be improved, and that the City, the Chamber, and the Downtown Association could do a better job publicizing Downtown both to residents and to potential tourists and 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 are a number of apartments Downtown, and many of them are occupied. During the summer, many actors in the theater company rent apartments Downtown. The housing is largely rental property, and the rent is low.

Participants indicated that they feel there is a demand for more housing Downtown, particularly for young single professionals and couples. Because the old buildings have stairs but no elevators, the housing would be impractical for older people or young families. Some felt, however, that there is a lack of affordable, nice housing for young professionals in Macon, and Downtown could fill that niche.

E. DOWNTOWN MACON: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

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

Participants suggested a variety of new businesses Downtown, focusing on independently owned specialty-type shops and restaurants rather than larger chains. For retail, they suggested more men's, women's, and children's clothing, more shoe stores, and a bookstore, a small grocery store, and any other kind of specialty shop. For food, they suggested additional restaurants, including fine dining, a wine lounge or beer garden, a coffee shop, a tea shop, a deli, a higher-end bar and grill, and a variety of casual dining options, all with later business hours and possibly outdoor seating. In other types of businesses, they suggested a focus on arts and entertainment, including art galleries and shops, an arcade or dartboard area that might draw teenagers, a bowling alley, and an event center.

For entertainment, the focus groups felt that a variety of restaurants and shops with later business hours would be a good start. They also suggested live music, art shows, and other semi-regular events to draw people Downtown. The groups felt that arts and entertainment would be a good focus for Downtown because Macon already has a strong performing arts tradition and also has a number of local artisans and musicians.

The participants focused on adding residents to Downtown, suggesting that additional, attractive second-story apartments, well marketed to young professionals, would help fill the buildings and keep a number of people Downtown that would patronize businesses.

Participants generally felt that the Downtown's purpose is not to compete with Wal-Mart and other large chains, nor is it to compete with the larger malls in Columbia. Rather, they indicated that Downtown's purpose should be to offer a unique and "quaint" experience to customers. To this end, the groups felt strongly that small business should be encouraged, and the City should find and offer incentives to potential building owners to fix up their buildings into usable retail 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 tended to focus on giving Downtown a historic, cohesive look and feel while making it still feel safe and maintained. They suggested the following as aesthetic priorities: improving streets and sidewalks, making sewer repairs, burying utilities, making building repairs, filling buildings with retail and entertainment businesses, improving the alleyways and the backs of buildings, potentially adding murals to buildings, adding flowers and trees, and filling vacant lots with parks, park benches, and additional parking.

Infrastructure was of the highest priority, particularly streets, sidewalks, underground utilities, sewers, and building repair. The groups suggested that an aesthetically pleasing Downtown would help draw businesses as well as customers for those businesses. The groups also felt that building owners should be given incentives to fix up their buildings.

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

The groups felt that (1) infrastructure and aesthetic improvements and (2) attracting retail and entertainment businesses should be the highest two priorities, and that all other improvements would follow. Other priorities included improving wintertime snow-plowing practices, razing crumbling buildings, and marketing both Downtown Macon and Macon as a whole to both residents and potential tourists.

Business Owners: 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?

Business owners indicated that infrastructure improvements would most help them keep their businesses thriving. In addition, they suggested that grants, loans, and other incentives would help them fix up their buildings and also help attract new business.

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

The business owners were cautiously interested in a "special business district," but indicated that they would need to learn more about the potential impact of such a district before expressing support. They also suggested that they would be more comfortable if it were a Macon-wide sales tax increase that was earmarked for Downtown improvement rather than a sales tax increase that would be applied only *in* the Downtown area.

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

Participants mentioned several downtowns, which they felt various aspects of would be appropriate for Downtown Macon: Boonville, Missouri; Columbia, Missouri; Kirksville, Missouri; Moberly, Missouri; Clarksville, Missouri; Louisiana, Missouri; Branson, Missouri; Clinton,

Missouri; Brookville, Missouri; St. Charles, Missouri; Chillicothe, Missouri; Warrensburg, Missouri; Quincy, Illinois; Pella, Iowa; Omaha, Nebraska; Carmel, Indiana; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Anchorage, Alaska.

F. KEY POINTS

Key points about the Macon area:

- ◆ Macon is a friendly small town with a good sense of community, good healthcare, a good education system, a strong theater company, a lot of volunteerism, and many nearby outdoor recreation opportunities, all of which make it a good place to raise a family.
- ◆ Macon is within an hour's drive of Columbia, Missouri, which affords residents all the opportunities and experiences of a larger city while living in a smaller community.
- ◆ Macon is moving in the right direction, particularly with regard to Downtown redevelopment, but it still has a lot of unrealized potential.
- ◆ Residents shop at Wal-Mart, the grocery stores, and a few Downtown stores in Macon; however, residents do much of their shopping at the mall in Columbia, Missouri or online.
- ◆ While residents of smaller communities very near Macon do come to the Macon Wal-Mart, most nearby communities are also near towns such as Kirksville or Moberly that have Wal-Mart Supercenters, and those residents do not shop in Macon.
- ◆ There are a number of restaurants in Macon, such as fast food, Mexican, and Chinese food—the participants overall felt that there is not enough variety for dining in Macon and drive to Columbia to dine out for special occasions or for variety.
- ◆ The community would welcome a fine dining option in town, a wider variety of restaurants, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating.
- ◆ For entertainment and culture, Macon has an excellent theater company, a movie theater, a skateboard park, a bowling alley, a library, a historical society, school events, and a number of service clubs.
- ◆ For outdoor recreation, Macon has a number of excellent options, including the lake, fishing, hunting, parks, and a golf course at the country club.
- ◆ Many residents travel to Columbia for entertainment, especially nighttime entertainment and fine dining.

Key points about Downtown Macon in the present:

- ◆ Participants felt that Downtown Macon is moving in the right direction, citing the Downtown revitalization efforts within the last two years as a positive direction for Downtown.

- ◆ The participants also felt that there is a lot of unrealized potential that would make Downtown Macon move even further in the right direction—improving infrastructure, improving streets and sidewalks, adding more retail and entertainment, improving building façades, adding a variety of residential space, cleaning up the backs of buildings and the alleyways, adding parking, improving signage, and adding green space.
- ◆ The business owners cited low cost, the nostalgic feel of Downtown, and a general desire to see Downtown succeed as the major reasons they located their businesses Downtown.
- ◆ Downtown would be more attractive to new business if the City focused on improving streets, sidewalks, infrastructure, and the aesthetics of Downtown.
- ◆ Participants, on average, visit Downtown weekly for a variety of reasons: Ben Franklin, J.P.'s, theater performances, festivals such as the Fork and Cork, and other services that are located Downtown.
- ◆ The participants' biggest concerns about user-friendliness were infrastructure—streets, sidewalks, and drainage; other concerns included parking, business hours, and signage.
- ◆ Infrastructure was of the utmost priority to the focus groups, especially overhauling the drainage and sewer systems, repairing streets and sidewalks, and making Downtown more pedestrian-friendly.
- ◆ Many people perceive a parking problem (though there are parking lots available), because they often have to walk a block or two from their parking spot to a store—suggestions to remedy this included angled parking, filling more storefronts to make the walk from the parking lot more pleasant and interesting, and improving the sidewalks to make the walk safer and more appealing.
- ◆ Business hours are inconvenient for many people, especially during weekday evenings and Saturday afternoons; longer business hours might deter residents from going to Columbia and encourage them to stay in Macon, especially for dining and entertainment.
- ◆ More visible signage from the highway and better signage within Downtown would help visitors find what they were looking for, and would also help residents stay more aware of what is available Downtown.
- ◆ Macon residents get information about Downtown from the newspaper, the Chamber of Commerce, and word-of-mouth.
- ◆ The City, the Chamber, and the Downtown Association could do a better job publicizing Downtown both to residents and to potential tourists and visitors.
- ◆ The participants felt that there is a demand for more housing Downtown, particularly for young single professionals and couples.

Key points about the future of Downtown Macon:

- ◆ The participants suggested a variety of new businesses Downtown, focusing on independently owned specialty-type shops and restaurants rather than larger chains.
- ◆ For retail, participants suggested more men's, women's, and children's clothing, more shoe stores, and a bookstore, a small grocery store, and any other kind of specialty shop.
- ◆ For food, participants suggested additional restaurants, including fine dining, a wine lounge or beer garden, a coffee shop, a tea shop, a deli, a higher-end bar and grill, and a variety of casual dining options, all with later business hours and possibly outdoor seating.
- ◆ In other types of businesses, participants suggested a focus on arts and entertainment, including art galleries and shops, an arcade or dartboard area that might draw teenagers, a bowling alley, and an event center.
- ◆ Arts and entertainment would be a good focus for Downtown because Macon already has a strong performing arts tradition and also has a number of local artisans and musicians.
- ◆ Additional, attractive upper floor apartments, well marketed to young professionals, would help fill the buildings and keep a number of people Downtown that would patronize businesses.
- ◆ Downtown's purpose is not to compete with Wal-Mart and other large chains, nor is it to compete with the larger malls in Columbia; it is to offer a unique and "quaint" experience to customers. To this end, small business should be encouraged, and the City should find and offer incentives to building owners.
- ◆ Downtown should develop a historic, "quaint," and cohesive look and feel while making it still feel safe and maintained.
- ◆ Participants suggested the following as aesthetic priorities: streets and sidewalks, sewer repair, burying utilities, building repair, filling buildings with retail and entertainment businesses, improving the alleyways and the backs of buildings, potentially adding murals to buildings, adding flowers and trees, and filling vacant lots with parks, park benches, and additional parking.
- ◆ An aesthetically pleasing Downtown with a strong infrastructure would help draw businesses as well as customers for those businesses.
- ◆ The focus groups felt that (1) infrastructure and aesthetic improvements and (2) attracting retail and entertainment businesses should be the two highest priorities for the City.
- ◆ Other priorities included improving wintertime snow-plowing practices, razing crumbling buildings, and marketing both Downtown Macon and Macon as a whole to both residents and potential tourists.

- ◆ The business owners indicated that infrastructure improvements would most help them keep their businesses thriving; in addition, they suggested that grants, loans, and other incentives would be helpful.
- ◆ The business owners were cautiously interested in a “special business district,” but want to ensure that an additional tax would not drive away business from Downtown.
- ◆ Participants mentioned a few downtowns whose mix of businesses they admired: Boonville, Missouri; Columbia, Missouri; Kirksville, Missouri; Moberly, Missouri; Clarksville, Missouri; Louisiana, Missouri; Branson, Missouri; Clinton, Missouri; Brookville, Missouri; St. Charles, Missouri; Chillicothe, Missouri; Warrensburg, Missouri; Quincy, Illinois; Pella, Iowa; Omaha, Nebraska; Carmel, Indiana; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Anchorage, Alaska.

SECTION II

DOWNTOWN STAKEHOLDERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: Tell me a little about your community as a whole.

Friendly.

That's true.

Very friendly.

I think Macon's a typical small town. Wal-Mart moved in, and a lot of businesses followed, and the building owners Downtown... (noise, unintelligible)

Good community, good schools, good churches.

State park out here.

I think we're getting older as a community. There's a demographic that we don't seem to be attracting.

We have a quality school here, and several really nice churches, and the general populace, we actually have suffered less than most communities from this economic thing, and we're trying to make the best from it and grow from it.

We have a lake for fishing and camping, a swimming pool, a country club golf course.

I'd say that there's a lot of community organization, like Rotary, Relay for Life, Kiwanis, and I feel like the community kind of pulls together.

Social security's probably our biggest employer.

(laughter.)

That is true. That college-age family, young families, are what's lacking in this community.

With all the new duplexes, we have ample housing. Maybe 15 units built this last year.

But we're lacking the industry to give them jobs.

(agreement.)

Moderator: *Would you say the City is moving in the right or wrong direction, as a whole?*

I'd say the right direction. There's a lot of energy in the area as far as economic development and the Chamber trying to bring businesses to lure people to the area.

The access to highway 36 and 63, which have just become 4-lane, and we're going to have quite a bit more traffic through here than ever before, which should help the prospects for new business.

Moderator: *Where do residents do most of their household shopping?*

Out of town.

I shop in town.

I think a lot of people do in-town shopping, but if they happen to be in Columbia, they go to the Supercenter. You don't have everything here that bigger communities have.

The medical facilities are largely in Columbia. And that causes people to be in Columbia, and there's a lot of big chain stores there.

We do have those two big grocery stores here, and I'm not shopping for a family, but I think our prices here are comparable to those out of town. I shop here 95% of the time for groceries and for Wal-Mart. Sometimes you go to those big Wal-Marts, and I find this one adequate.

I have to agree with that. Most of the grocery stores are pretty good.

I lived in a smaller community before, where I did have to drive 30 miles for a gallon of milk.

I think most people do their shopping locally, because it is convenient. It takes an hour to get to Columbia and 30 minutes to get to Moberly. People do most of their shopping here, but if they're out of town, they're going to shop for the bigger dollar items.

Those things that are missing.

I think most of the out-of-town business is drawn to the south.

Yeah.

(agreement.)

Moderator: *What about dining and entertainment? Where do you take visitors?*

My mom's.

(laughter.)

My backyard.

We have a lot of restaurants.

We do.

We have a lot of fast food, too. More than I thought we could've supported. But it's because of that highway.

We have the plays and the theater.

For supper clubs, though, the only one I consider evening is the Pear Tree.

Fine dining, kind of.

Yeah, and that's about 4 or 5 miles away. Other than that, you'd have to go all the way to Columbia.

Moberly's got a couple. But for a major night on the town, they're going to leave town.

The number one revenue here is outdoors. The lake, hunting, fishing, camping.

Yeah, that is true. I didn't know that before I moved here.

A lot of people do come here to hunt and fish.

We do have exotic animal sales about four times a year. We just had one, and this town was completely full of people. The motels were all full.

The second largest exotic sale in the US.

Yeah.

And they do these artifacts, and they draw some pretty good crowds, too.

Yeah.

It draws a lot of people. It's big money.

Moderator: Let's talk about Downtown. Do you feel Downtown is moving in the right or wrong direction?

We're making strides.

Especially in the last 6 or 8 months.

We have an active Downtown association in the last few years, and there wasn't one before that, and there's been renewed interest in purchasing and fixing up the buildings Downtown. The level of interest Downtown is numerous times what it was. People were sitting on a building and they wouldn't put any money into it, and they weren't looking at eye appeal, but the Downtown now looks 10 times better than it looked even a year and a half ago.

And it still has huge potential.

Moving in the right direction, but still has a long way to go.

Very true.

Moderator: Why do people come Downtown?

Ben Franklin and the Rexall. Those are our two anchor stores. And the furniture store, and as these other businesses have started, it has potential to bring more people. That's what the Downtown needs, is to bring in foot traffic, bring in people to look at one shop but they'll buy something from another shop.

Rexall and the cleaner's.

There's several businesses.

Moderator: Why did you choose to invest in Downtown?

My husband and I, we just liked the idea of trying to get the town back up and running. The town was dying, but now people are taking charge of their buildings and working on them, and we're gradually trying to make the Downtown someplace people want to come to and to visit Macon.

I agree. 100%.

Real estate values are lower Downtown, so you have a lower rent or payment or whatever.

The rent Downtown is about half of what it is on the highway.

Moderator: Any other reasons other than financial concerns or a general desire to see Downtown succeed?

I find it a good place to do business. We've had plenty of traffic. Many a day, we're jam-packed.

Takes you back to when you were younger, the nostalgic feeling of a smaller community. Instead of having a bunch of blank faces, people here are saying hi to each other. It's just a good feeling.

That's true. It's more of a home feeling. I grew up here, and every store was full, and there were people everywhere, and the stores stayed open late one night a week, and those days need to come back.

I grew up in Seattle, and I have lived in some smaller towns, and here there's community involvement. I've lived in a lot of places, and this is one of the better communities. When I first moved here, I wasn't that excited, because it is in disarray, but the community is unlike anything I've ever seen. I feel very welcomed. It's the small town that you've always heard about.

I was raised in St. Louis, and I came up here about 15 years ago, but it wasn't until...I never did come down here. But I remember seeing in the paper sidewalk sales and Downtown stuff outside, and you're seeing more of that now. The synergy that comes with a lot of different businesses working together.

I remember a number of years ago, there was a parking problem around town, but it's getting better.

Most people I run into, I either know their parents or their grandparents. They grew up with my kids.

Moderator: Regarding parking, let's talk about the user-friendliness of Downtown. Is there enough parking, and is it convenient?

People always say stuff about it, but we really have enough parking. It's all within a block. If you go to the Columbia mall, you'd be lucky to park that close. Or if I go to the Fox in St. Louis, you're going to pay for parking a few blocks away. It's all about the perception.

We've got tons of parking.

But people here think if they can't park right in front of your door, they've just lost it.

That is the mentality. That's my mentality.

There's no way to change that.

You may have to walk half a block.

But if you want to park in front of Barnes & Noble in Columbia, you'd walk farther than that.

It's all in the perception.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

...we used to have angled parking...

...there's probably an engineering group that could look at it. I'd love to see it become an issue at some time because there's enough business. But now, seldom will you ever park too far from a business.

Our renters need a place to park, and it ends up being in front of the building.

Our alleyways around here, there's a lot of work going on on the fronts of the buildings, but the backs need work. There's potential parking behind the buildings that could be utilized because it's not aesthetically nice.

Moderator: You mentioned renters. Do you mean the second story?

Yeah, residents on the second story.

Each building holds at least 2 or 3. Some have 6.

The only day I ever see congestion Downtown is on Tuesday, when the Better Living Center's open, and most of the matinees are on the weekends. It's unusual to see a traffic problem. And there's a lot of parking behind Ben Franklin.

You don't want to walk through the alley, though.

I envision Downtown being a one-way with angled parking. It's easier to get in and out of, and you gain parking.

I don't know what the difference is, but maybe 30%.

(many people talking at once.)

I don't know numbers, but we lost some when we went to parallel parking. But for angled parking, you have to be one-way.

Even if you are half-block away...

I hate to parallel park.

This is the only place I ever parallel park. You just don't see a lot of it. And people aren't very good at it.

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Is Downtown easy to find and navigate?

Well, from 63, there's a sign, but the sign should be much larger.

Once you're down here, you'll find anything.

But getting there.

Some small towns, you can sense where Downtown is, but this doesn't really lend itself to it. You think when you go on 63 that you've seen the town, and you don't realize that there's an older area.

They could follow the chicken smell.

(laughter.)

Most towns are built on a through street, a main street, but this town's one-way.

I had some friends come from Iowa, and I tried to explain to them how to get Downtown, and we need a bigger sign out there telling them that the Downtown is here. Where is it.

Even in Kirksville, you can kind of sense that the Downtown is that way.

If you don't know it, you can't find it. You need a big, bright sign.

Or an electronic sign.

That'd be great.

I think when you see the ones on the right, you don't pay much attention to it.

If we just had a sign that said, "Downtown off the Highway," people would stop.

A lot of people who come through are here, and they come Downtown and look the area over. There's people out there, and you might as well make it easier to get found.

(agreement.)

I have a lot of customers who drive around to find a good place to eat.

Yeah, they look for a hometown café.

I drive for miles to avoid fast food.

I had one the other day who saw my billboard and said, "I knew I'd find you if I just drove around."

You remember when we had that neon sign? We could use one of those.

I've got a big arrow sign here that needs to be rewired.

Moderator: What about business hours? Are they convenient?

I think so, overall.

Most of the people who live here are older, and at 8, they're ready to go home.

People often talk about how we used to have everything open late one night, but no one can ever come to consensus to what it should be. And you'd have to let people know.

Yeah.

When we were open for retail, and people would ask what time we closed up, and people will wait for you if someone's going to come. You won't get pushed out the door. The community and businesses are very helpful.

The hours are pretty amenable to anybody. Most people are open 6 days a week. People tell me I'm never open, but if 60 hours a week isn't enough, I don't know what is.

Moderator: How do you communicate to people about your businesses or Downtown?

That's a 64,000 dollar question. What is a good means of advertising?

I've been trying to find it for a year and a half.

We've tried newspaper, radio, TV.

Newspaper and radio. I had people from Iowa, Illinois, all over the place saying they heard me on the radio, but I spent hundreds to run an ad in the Macon paper and no one sees it.

The Macon paper leaves a lot to be desired.

The Monday paper's the one with the biggest circulation.

When I get ready to open a new building, I print up about 200 leaflets, and I put them on windshields at Wal-Mart. It's effective.

I think technically that's against the law.

But nobody says anything.

(laughter.)

And it is effective.

It's old hat. You look at the paper, and you know all those people, and you know they're there.

I've never read the local paper.

People say the paper, but they don't read it.

I read every ad, but I'm one of the few people who does. Most people don't.

(many people agreeing.)

The cable TV channel is pretty effective.

We've tried it.

The lawn service covers half of the advertisement in our paper. There's like 9 people doing lawn service.

Moderator: *How's communication between business, property owners, City Administration and government?*

I think it's good.

We're small enough that we know the city officials. If we have a problem, you can call somebody.

You may not get somebody on the line right away, but you'll get a call back. They're good at two-way communication. I find they're very good. They're a lot better than the bigger cities.

I agree.

(many people agreeing.)

I had to call 9-1-1, and they were there instantly.

Moderator: *Let's talk about the future of Downtown. What would you like to see Downtown? What kinds of businesses would be a good fit?*

I would like to see a small walk-through mall. There was a plan for that in the Jefferson Hotel, and no one did anything with it, but if you have a larger building that you could divide up into small stores, and have different kinds of shops and maybe offices upstairs, I think it would be very effective.

A grocery store.

I thought about that at one time. But I think that grocers work on a very small margin, and starting a small store, I don't think it would be profitable. And you've got the Ice House that isn't far. That kind of ideal corner grocery would be great if the properties or the upstairs tenants...what is it called in a big city where they have a neighborhood within that big city, that's ideal, but I don't know if it'll work here.

You'd have to wedge in, and I don't think we'd have enough traffic.

If there was more living down here instead of just businesses, maybe a small store would work. You see, we used to have a little delicatessen here, and people buy stuff from there.

I think that would be great. And retail, too. It could all just be retail.

We need more retail of anything and everything.

That was all before C Stores.

I don't mean retail like that. I've been in wool and fabric wholesale for years, but I'm going to open a little shop. That'll bring up a whole new clientele. And then they'll go out for lunch and maybe shop at your store. The businesses don't have to be identical, but they still have to be retail. We have a lot of insurance and lawyers and offices down there, service businesses.

Those are taking up part of your Downtown, but they're not generating traffic. People are here to see the businesses but not to shop.

It's hard to get enough volume to run a retail business down here. Several of us have tried. You can have a store that people love, but there's not enough people. In the video business, people loved the things I did, and I had 300 loyal customers, but I needed 1000.

But the space is more affordable here than anywhere else.

Somebody needs to get local people to shop locally. They don't.

I don't expect local traffic either. My business is people who come to my website.

The Internet shopping does hurt everybody. What Wal-Mart didn't wipe out, the Internet did.

(agreement.)

Finding the need of the community. The community's got to support the businesses Downtown and in Macon, because you can't pull them from elsewhere enough to survive forever.

You need to have several things. We need more clothing places. I went to buy my grandson dress clothes, and there's nothing. There's no dress pants for my husband. Wal-Mart doesn't have that.

There used to be a shoe store down here.

(agreement.)

It'd be nice if there's a men's clothing store. There's nowhere to buy men's clothing.

If you had something for women, something for men, something for children...

It's a Catch-22. Say we had a nice men's store, everybody thinks you've got to shop around. If there's not enough traffic, then there's not enough business, and if there's not enough business, then there's not enough traffic.

That's why you need several businesses.

And anybody that has never had a business doesn't have a clue what it costs.

And there is competitive shopping with clothing or with anything. People will wait and go to Kohl's. It's hard to compete with those big chain stores.

You can't buy a pair of tennis shoes in this town anymore.

I can remember when we used to have 3 drug stores.

And 2 shoe stores.

And we had Penney's and Sears.

What is the niche business, what is the type of business, that we have to find and lure down here? These buildings are economical to buy, but they're not economical to maintain.

That's why a mini-mall would be nice. An assortment of businesses.

But that doesn't really show to the windowfronts Downtown... if they go in there, they're pretty much done.

One building and nowhere else?

You could spend a couple hours in there. It is cool.

We're not going to get the kind of department stores we used to have.

I love antique stores.

I would imagine that your Sears and your Penney's, you'll never get them back in.

I think its specialty shops.

If you go to smaller communities, you see specialty shops. Hannibal, Quincy, Ozark, they're revitalizing their Downtown, you're not seeing big stores. There's specialty shops.

And there's clothing, but it's a specialty type thing.

(many people talking at once, unintelligible.)

Another thing we haven't talked about is, if people come in to camp and hunt, we're all talking about how our hours are good, but if you go to any tourist destination, we don't address the hours from 5 to midnight unless we're complaining about it. We could use some entertainment type businesses, evening businesses. People talk about, "Oh, I went to a place for vacation, and we walked around all evening." All of those places are restaurants and bars.

Stores like Dollar General would go in a small town.

That Dollar General is right off the highway, but they wanted a lot of square footage that we don't offer down here. We wouldn't get them Downtown.

Well, a lot of downtowns, I see they're turning more to like a tourist...getting people to shop, or a lot of artistic communities with specialty jewelry and...but those type businesses, because of the low overhead, they have to survive for a long time. I mean, it's a building. One has to feed off the other. One has to survive long enough for the next one to come along.

(agreement.)

There's a lot of empty buildings, and if that starts going, maybe a supper club... oh, and we do get the Beaumont opened up, but it's still kind of down there, not up here.

Moderator: What sorts of dining and entertainment would be a good fit for Downtown?

More plays.

As far as dining, we don't have a restaurant that people will come to at night and have a drink. There's not a place to get a glass of wine or a beer with your dinner. People who want to have a steak or seafood and wine or beer, it's not available down here. It's a scary proposition.

And to have enough seats.

The problem Downtown is that the law has gotten on these DWIs, and if you sit in the restaurants for long enough, the cops will be watching your car.

That doesn't make me stay at home. I'm just not going to get loaded.

Or have a designated driver.

You can drink a certain amount of alcohol and stay below the legal limit. I'm not certain, but I'm right, right? You can't have tested over a certain amount.

You're right. The hunting, fishing, outdoor, rural community, and I know a lot of people would go to a place with a nice steak or seafood and a cold beer. Give me two or three steak options. You don't need a 4 page menu.

Just go back to Clapper's, and that's all you needed, and you'd wait forever to get in because it was good food.

If we want that, we go to Kelly's, or the Mexican, and they're neither one Downtown.

Moderator: Do you think there's a demand for more housing Downtown?

Mine are full.

I've got three empties.

You need to lower your rent.

I think there's room for some more rentals. I keep mine full because the rent's pretty reasonable.

They're giving up a yard, they're going up stairs, and they park on the street.

What's the average age down here? 25?

Yeah.

And the older bachelors.

(many people talking at once.)

They're affordable to live in.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Do you see the need for condos or lofts?

I wouldn't mind doing a couple lofts, but I don't know that I could get the rent I need. You'd need 6 or 7 or 8 hundred rent.

_____ 's had a couple people ask her about finding a place, nice older couples who want a loft or a condo. She's had people say that they'd move Downtown if there was a nice place that you could get up and down into easily. You've got to cost it out, too.

You'd need to put an elevator in.

Yup.

I think the need is there for bigger housing. But I don't think the buildings in Downtown Macon, they're all chopped up, so you'd have to make 2 apartments into 1.

Or that building down there would be great. The Liquor Warehouse. You could do lovely housing there.

(agreement.)

That was a nightclub at one time.

It could be now. Another business that I could see but I would never want to run.

Moderator: What about parks, recreation, walking trails, green space Downtown?

Green space, yeah.

Some of these old buildings that need to be torn down, you could have little green spots with a picnic table.

There's some cool little things.

And that's always inviting.

I lived in a community that turned their railroad beds into a bike trail, and that community went from asleep to awake overnight.

The communities on the Katy Trail, they're just cottage industries, those communities. People love to ride bikes.

I was amazed how many people bike trails brought in.

That's a bike trail from St. Louis all the way to Kansas City.

B&B's and restaurants.

A lot follows the river.

Moderator: What about improvements to the look and feel of Downtown? What need to be the priorities? Streets and sidewalks, landscaping...

All of the above.

We still have sewer problems, and we need to fix them before we put in streets and sidewalks.

Right now, the façade work has started. That's one part that's started, with the painting, and the old cheese graters are coming off the front of the buildings. There's still some work to be done, but it's started. When somebody from outside walks in, they don't know if you're sewer's collapsing... my first priority would be the visual stuff, and then you get money and interest. One façade at a time is doable.

If you get it looking good, the rest will follow.

There's a town I saw that had a beautiful sidewalk put in, and that made a lot of difference in the way people perceived it. I broke my leg on my sidewalk, and we got our sidewalk done then.

Not the sidewalks, but it's a ticking time bomb if our sewers and utilities are not good. I don't think they'd have to dig out the sidewalks.

What's the problem? Where is the sewer? You wouldn't want to repair the sidewalks and then tear them out.

Generally, it's under the street.

It's a no-brainer for me that they should fix it before the streets and sidewalks.

I'm hoping this economic stimulus package will help us get done.

The façade of the building is something that can happen before or after, but the streets and sidewalks...

Well, the sewer is something the City has to do.

In front of our building, the water main is right in the street. That needs to be fixed.

I collect all the water from Ruby Street down to Ferry Street, and it all comes through the alley and in my back door.

We've got a lot of water problems. We had half the sidewalk replaced, and we don't have curbs anymore, so the water just goes under our building, and we had to get half the floor replaced. There's a lot of water under all these buildings.

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

Now with the stimulus package, they should apply for grants to help cut costs for utilities and maintenance to small business, and any business that's hiring employees and so on should be considered for utility rate adjustments. That's what the stimulus package is for. If we don't take advantage of it, we're throwing away money.

The costs of utilities deter people from buying buildings.

(agreement.)

I think it could be any small business Downtown that don't hire employees.

There ought to be different classifications, though.

I disagree.

The businesses are struggling, trying to make some money, struggling to bring people Downtown.

I've never agreed with it, but why should it cost me more to put light in that building than it does in my house...they stick it to the businesspeople because that's where the money is.

The rate is higher Downtown?

Yeah.

We should be entitled to some consideration on our utilities.

My merchant's license is higher than most everybody else's, because I'm in sales. I have to pay a percentage of my retail sales.

And your sales tax. It's not very much, but it's something.

(many side conversations trying to clarify the details of sales and merchant's license fees.)

Moderator: *Would you be in support of a special business district with an additional sales tax to fund projects or particular things specifically for Downtown.*

More taxes?

So people would pay more taxes here than by the highway?

I think all sales tax should be collected through the state.

Well, that's just what he's saying, is that this additional tax would be half a percent, and that would be channeled to help with Downtown. It's okay for a small customer. The only time I see it making a difference is for something high end, like furniture.

Still, that's the general public's privilege to vote in if they want to do it.

I agree 100%.

I'd like to see the money get spent for what it's earmarked for.

Rochester, Minnesota did that, and they built some wonderful things.

That's a beautiful city.

It's like walking through the Taj Mahal.

A lot of that Downtown work that was done, the cobblestone sidewalks and bridges and buildings, that was done with a .5% sales tax.

I don't think it would affect the sales. People pay 4% more in Columbia than they do here.

They've got 11% sales tax.

My opinion is that it's probably going to take some of that to generate enough revenue.

But it would need to be city-wide for people to support it.

It probably wouldn't pass, because people won't vote for it.

Look at how long it took for them to pass the additional percentage for the park.

I don't know how else to get it other than voting on it.

I'd like to think long and hard about it before we raise our sales tax. We could mess ourselves up by making one bad move.

It wouldn't be Downtown. It would be the whole city.

They tried to get sales tax for the school, and people weren't willing to pay it.

I don't think people would be willing to vote for it because of the bad economy.

But the question wasn't whether people would vote for it. It was would we support it.

I don't see how we can get this Downtown working without additional revenue. The sewers and all that.

I don't see how we'd get very much for the Downtown in a city-wide sales tax increase.

It could be where the City needs the most work done.

We all agree, because we're Downtown.

We're paying for new sewer systems with our taxes, even though ours are old. Let them pay for ours.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

Moderator: That's all the questions I have. Is there anything else anyone wants to add?

I don't think our problem is traffic. We get traffic. We have people here. That highway is packed. And it's going to get more. So I think that's a huge advantage that we have to some other towns.

It's got to be sort of a branding thing. There's got to be a reason people don't zip on through.

(agreement.)

It could be the lake.

And we have that nice park, and it's camping, and the lake, and that's a big draw.

And the hunting, the guys go out and the wives shop.

And you want something after hours to draw that crowd.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

We have a country music show that draws people.

We could just be the next Branson.

(laughter.)

One thing a lot of people ask us... one business opened up on the highway, the Java Hut, and I cannot believe the business that place did out there. It's almost something you can do that down here.

He was unique, though. His mother was fixing his food Downtown.

(laughter.)

I never thought that would be successful.

It's that on-the-go lifestyle, that specialty coffee.

People buy water out of plastic bottles. I never thought I'd see it.

If we had a major employer come in, what would that look like, if we had 400 families move in.

It would be unbelievable.

Some cities have done that to their Downtown, made a lot of residential.

A lot of those buildings are not worth saving.

But that's a choice that they're making.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

SECTION III

ELECTED OFFICIALS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: Tell me a little about Macon.

Great school and hospital.

Friendly.

Community's very nice.

They work together good.

Yeah. We have great cooperation in Macon.

Between organizations and everyone.

And there's a lot of organizations.

I think we're progressing.

Very family-oriented town.

Repertory theater.

I think we're a good retirement community.

Situated where two major highways intersect.

Close to Truman College.

I think we have a real strong middle-class base.

I have something that affects Macon, too, and it's that it's the center of many state offices. MODOT, and highway patrol, and Health and Human Services.

It's the county seat.

Variety of churches.

A nice skating rink for the kids. A lot of improvements there.

I think there's something for all age groups, and there's an opportunity to be involved in the community.

I'll throw in the parks and the pool. I think the parks, in the last 4 years, we've made a lot of improvements, and the pool's been upgraded.

Macon Lake draws a lot of fishermen. There's bass competitions.

You're county parks draw a lot of people during the year. There's a variety of recreation.

And there's the exotic animal sale twice a year.

That draws people from all over the country.

Expo center. Nice, large building that's accessible to the public.

We have a daily newspaper.

You can walk or bike a lot of places in town.

After talking to people in larger communities, it's unusual to see kids riding their bikes because of safety, but Macon's a good environment for children.

We have fiberoptics throughout the town for Internet.

It's a low-crime area. And we have a good police force.

Excellent fire department.

Insurance is reasonable here in town.

Moderator: Where do people work?

Con-Agra. The school, the nursing home.

State offices.

Lot of medical facilities, doctor's offices.

A lot of people work in the Moberly Area.

Kirksville.

Columbia.

People really go all directions.

It was a wash, though. The number of people who went out of town to work was about the same as the number who come in to work. Economic Development did a survey, and it was a wash.

Moderator: Where do people shop?

Columbia.

Some in town, but not as much as you'd think.

For everyday essentials, here, but for kid's clothes, we have to go to the mall in Columbia.

Groceries are good here.

There's not a shoe store in town.

We fortunately have two appliance stores.

(side conversations.)

A lot of people come to Macon to shop at Ben Franklin's. There's lots of unusual items there. Pictures or other things for home decorating, and they go to little shops, too. There's a frame shop with interesting things. And we have people who like antiques or are looking for items of interest. My sister-in-law came here and bought tables and chairs to take back to St. Louis, because she wanted antique furniture. Some antique dealer out on the highway somewhere on 63. When she visited us, she bought it. And I've heard of other people doing the same thing.

Moderator: Do people go to Columbia to shop?

Yeah.

Columbia, yeah.

And Moberly and Kirksville, but mostly Columbia.

There's a Wal-Mart Supercenter in Moberly and Kirksville, and a lot of traffic goes there.

Some go to Chillicothe to the Supermart over there.

Moderator: Do you stay here for dining and entertainment?

We're hurting for dining.

We have a lot of fast food.

Not a lot of variety. We've got the Pear Tree and some stuff in other communities, but we need more here.

We could support more.

We do have a nice theater with 3 showings.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: So do people drive to Moberly or Columbia for dinner?

Oh, yeah.

Every time you're in Moberly or Columbia, you'll see people you know from Macon.

And ironically, you can go to Pear Tree, which is 7 miles from here, and you won't see anyone you know.

It's just a little on the high end.

It's a special occasion kind of place.

Valentine's and anniversaries.

Or "I'm Sorry" dinners.

(laughter.)

Moderator: Do people stay in town for entertainment?

We have a big dominoes meeting at my house every week.

(laughter.)

The movie theater.

Carousel productions.

We have a 3-plex.

Golf course.

Movie house.

Moderator: I saw hundreds of people playing Bingo at the McDonald's earlier.

Bingo? Really?

Yeah.

We've got camping and water sports.

We've got a few bars.

And high school sports. We have lots of—thirty or so basketball games a year. Not counting junior high or elementary. And they have soccer and baseball. There's a lot of activity like that. I consider that entertainment.

And there's a lot of fundraisers that can keep you very busy.

Pretty good sized Relay for Life event. Surrounding communities come for that.

The Comfort Inn here has an activity room that's not big enough for a wedding, but it's big enough for organizations to have their regional meetings. I know that the University of Missouri's retirement group, they get all the retirees from the area, and they meet in Macon and explain the retirement system. Or insurance companies will have all their agents meet here. There's a lot of people who come to Macon for meetings. The Expo center out here, the camp grounds, there's a group of Baptist churches coming to have a big meeting. Because of our location, we have lots of people come for events, and people don't realize it happens, because it happens at the hotel.

We do have a bowling alley, two swimming pools. YMCA's got a lot of activities for the youth.

We just put in a new skating thing.

A skateboard park.

We do have a country club in town with a golf course.

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

With the Downtown association, we've seen a definite move in the right direction in the last 2 years.

It was sliding, but it's a lot better now. It had that look that there wasn't any people in the buildings and there wasn't much going on, versus now. More businesses are down here, and refurbishing, and little park benches, and some greenery, and involving the school.

There's a lot of folks working to refurbish their buildings. They haven't got a lot of businesses right now, but people are doing this at their own time and money. They're working pretty much on their own. A couple of businesses, the banks for example, threw out all the old flooring and carpeting. The people that are doing it have full-time jobs, so it's going to take some time, but it could be that they work on it until they retire and open up a business there so they can have a little income.

I think we've seen some of our local retailers move back Downtown. J.P.'s. That helps. That's a positive thing.

And the old furniture.

They moved Downtown. Shane Hall moved Downtown from out on the highway. I think there could be more, but there's a positive move.

Wal-Mart went out that way, and people went out there with it, but the increase in rent got too high, and they couldn't afford it anymore.

Rent is cheaper Downtown.

I think that people saw more focus and activity in Downtown Macon, and I think the amount of traffic is bigger because of J.P.'s and the refurbished buildings. People are thinking, if I had my business here, people can find me. And there's quite a bit of parking. You might have to walk half a block, but there's plenty of parking. It's not much further than if you park way out at Wal-Mart and walk in.

We had some residents come into the community that hadn't lived here, and they saw potential in some of these buildings when the rest of us just saw ratty old buildings. _____ bought one, and _____ bought several. They see something in the buildings that we didn't.

And they started encouraging people to come Downtown. They were progressive and proactive and regenerated that interest.

And the personal touches. Christmas music Downtown when you're walking around. That's what they do in Columbia, too.

Kind of that mom and pop feeling.

Yeah.

Moderator: How often do people come Downtown?

We all come down here every day.

(laughter.)

There's a drugstore.

For ice cream.

Probably weekly.

More than you would think.

Anyone that has children shops at J.P.'s for t-shirts and team apparel.

And the fact that City Hall is in Downtown Macon, people come here to pay their bills and maybe run down to shop or go to the bank or finance work. People sometimes go to a restaurant while they're up here.

The post office is here.

And there's churches Downtown.

We didn't mention, but we have 4 banks Downtown.

Two funeral homes Downtown.

Moderator: How user friendly is Downtown? How are business hours?

(laughter.)

That could be an improvement.

Saturday afternoons, a lot of merchants are closing. I think the working people... you might try to run Downtown for something, and nothing's open.

Years ago, we'd stay open one night each week, and nobody does that now. Even during the holiday season.

I think, like, with J.P.'s, having the help and the overhead. So it's not open later.

When you've got a store that's got 5 employees, it's kind of hard to run like Wal-Mart does.

And there's just some inconsistencies. Some close at 1 on Saturdays, some at 3, some at 5.

Moderator: We've talked about parking.

There's ample parking. The perception isn't that, though. If they can't park right in front of the building, "parking sucks," but if you go to Wal-Mart, you can't get close.

I think if they could have angled parking instead of parallel...a lot of people don't like to parallel park.

It used to be that way, right down the middle of the street, with one-way traffic.

Moderator: What caused the change to parallel parking?

None of us is that old.

(laughter.)

Wasn't there a time when it was angled parking on the outsides?

When it was one-way traffic.

You don't have room for two lanes if you do that.

I don't recall parking down the middle.

That was so many years ago. That was in pictures.

Moderator: What about lighting, streets, sidewalks...?

Sidewalks.

Streets.

Sewers.

We have a lot of complaints about the roughness of the streets.

So I guess people would complain about brick streets.

But the infrastructure's old.

(agreement.)

You can look at that new paving stamping instead of individual bricks.

(many people talking at once.)

...trees...

...planters...

...I don't think we want real brick, but that stamping would look nice...

...sidewalks...

...something a snow plow...

...antique street lamps...

...the old-time street lamps...

Moderator: Is there not enough lighting?

We just want more attractive lighting.

It's not quaint.

From a business standpoint, the lighting is inconsequential, because nobody's open at that time.

The theater's the only thing.

And the bar.

But there's no restaurants.

You've got the Apple Basket.

Eh, that's not a restaurant.

Moderator: Is it hard to find Downtown?

We have a sign up on 63 with an arrow pointing.

It's called business district.

But it could always be improved.

If we had one at Pine and 63, that would be nice.

And if it told the types of businesses Downtown.

A "historic business district" sign.

The sign that we have up there was a 6-month process to get the permit.

Yeah. You can direct people Downtown, but not to specific businesses.

We tried to paint "Welcome to Macon" on the water towers, but they wouldn't let anything go on there.

Moderator: How do people find out about what's going on Downtown?

Word of mouth.

The Downtown association has a website.

The Chamber.

The local paper.

The radio.

The cable channel. They advertise events in the community.

Also, they have a local 64 channel with events and election stuff for people running for school board.

We do have a radio station.

AM and FM.

And it's good.

We need to promote it outside Macon. We need more access to Columbia and St. Louis to get people to come to Macon.

Moderator: Do you have people that live Downtown, on second stories?

There's some.

We need better people to live down there.

Right now, it's kind of low rent.

And if they're home sick, they've got their vehicles out on the street. They don't have parking behind their apartments.

Moderator: Would there be more interest for people to live Downtown?

Yeah.

If it were spruced up.

I've seen downtowns that have been refurbished, and I thought it would be nice to live there.

People just cruise Downtown.

We forgot to mention that as a form of entertainment.

The Fork and Cork, that's entertainment.

Close to Macon, we have a winery north of town, and they do tours and events and outdoor seating.

These buildings Downtown, the face of the buildings, they need to be fixed up. J.P.'s is nice and this is nice, but 80% of them need help.

A lot of them need help in the rear.

Yeah.

(laughter. Side conversations.)

You can get grants and stuff like that. I think it's very difficult. They'd have to decide themselves. That can't be imposed from outside.

One big improvement would be to take all the old signs down from businesses past, 20-year-old businesses.

I agree.

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

Clothing and shoes.

Clothing.

Shoes.

A hardware store.

A coffee shop.

Nice restaurants.

A tea room with a gift shop.

A nice restaurant.

Would it serve tea?

(laughter.)

And a glass of wine. It would be so neat over there by a theater on the parking lot—

--you mean the grassy knoll?

If you could have tables and umbrellas and a catered dinner before the theater.

I think you have to have a mix of traditional retail businesses with specialty shops. Parkville, north of Kansas City, you see some traditional stuff like a hardware store, but there's a candy store and an antique store and a wine store. It brings in visitors and locals.

Your artisans, we need to have specialty stores for them. We do a festival once a year, but a store Downtown would be nice.

(agreement.)

Handmade items sold Downtown instead of stuff made in China.

Like Amish stuff.

I'd like to see more of that.

One of the things, when people go somewhere to go shopping, when we had 3 or 4 dress shops, people would come from Kirksville and Moberly to Macon because of the variety. If you could just have several of something...it sounds counterintuitive. You're going to get more people coming in if you have lots of a certain thing. My relatives go places where there's several things. What's that little town over north of Kansas City? Weston. You go to Weston, there's nothing worth anything, except there's a Halloween store, and then the next month, it's a Christmas store. They just had things that changed with the season. It's not something you go to every month, but every season, you might want to see what they've come up with.

I understand the concept of multiple shops, but there's multiple websites, too. That wasn't around years ago.

It's hard to stay in business.

You've got to have a lot of traffic to maintain business, and you've got to draw them to the area.

J.P.'s could not compete with Columbia, with Macy's and Dillard's, for shirts and stuff.

I don't think you're going to see that come back. I don't know how it could. But a niche market...

A small grocery store. I think there might be need for it.

We have those convenience stores. Those have replaced the little neighborhood stores.

Moderator: What kinds of restaurants would you like to see Downtown?

They'd definitely be successful.

That's probably the best idea.

The theater would bring people to the restaurant before or after.

The Beaumont could.

They're working on it, but it's pretty expensive.

(many people talking at once.)

If we get our streets and sidewalks fixed, it'll draw business down here.

That'll help. But also, we need some small industries to hire people, 100 or 150. That would bring a lot of business Downtown, too.

Moderator: What would your dream Downtown look like?

No overhead lines.

All underground.

Infrastructure, isn't it. But that's where it starts.

Consistency.

(many people talking at once.)

...stamped brick...

...if we get all the infrastructure underneath so it's not going to fall apart on us, you could then pour concrete with stamped brick, and that would give you the look of the old brick, and then you're going to have to buy the stamp so that whenever you repair it, you can restamp it.

I think you'd get more businesses if the buildings were more energy-efficient, for utilities.

(agreement. Many people talking at once.)

...flowers, flower boxes, we don't have the money to do it. They had a person all year round to take care of them flowers.

We have had that.

They had intersections and the corners, and they had hanging baskets. It was nice, it was pretty.

You're retired.

(laughter.)

I think we have to cater to what women want, because the women are going to drag the men to go shopping and out to dinner. The women...

Dinner's the key word for us.

And a sports bar.

And another thing is, part of being successful is to have the Chamber of Commerce actively involved in promoting activities and stuff like that. It's one of those things that you just have to develop a program, and it needs to promote the whole town. If we promote the *whole* town, it'll benefit the Downtown. We don't want to be competing against ourselves. We need to have the whole town as part of this process. Some kind of a big sale to get people to come to the community, and you have to have things that are worth driving to come and get it. I thought the Chamber would be the logical one to lead that.

Maybe a good program...we talked about flowers... we could have organizations adopt an area.

Columbia is a tree city.

We've got several organizations that may adopt an area to do planters and keep them watered.

What about the guy with the water truck to water the baskets? That's nice.

Moderator: What other downtowns have you liked?

Clinton, Missouri.

St. Charles.

Yes, St. Charles.

Old St. Charles.

You're right about Clinton. It's a good mix of traditional businesses along with specialties.

I'd like to see murals on the buildings. Brookville.

Chillicothe's got several.

They're remarkable.

If you haven't seen the backs of those buildings in Chillicothe...

(many people talking at once.)

...There's several communities up in Iowa with real strong downtowns...

...Pella, Iowa...

...Even up north in Iowa...

You ever been to Anchorage, Alaska? Very pretty in the summer. The stores are all the old-style storefronts. They've got flowers. It's really different. You wouldn't believe they could do it in that cold climate, but they do.

Moderator: Is there anything else you want me to know?

We have a historical society.

We need money.

Yeah.

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

A couple things we have to offer, we do have an airport, and we're planning an airport expansion project. We also have a fishing reel company. They manufacture specialty fishing reels. We're fortunate to have those folks.

Sportsman's Corner's going to start selling them.

We have a couple Bed and Breakfasts, too.

Yeah.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Thank you very much.

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SECTION IV

LONG TIME RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: Tell me a little bit about your community.

We have a good school system. A lot of people that are coming to Macon, it's important to them. If they move here and they have children...

We have recreation. We have the lake. A swimming pool. The parks are good, there's tennis courts, racquetball, basketball.

The pool.

The YMCA.

Yeah, the Y.

About schools, I've seen a lot of schools and talked to kids about their schools, and I think we measure up just about as well to those schools. We have a lot of extracurricular sports. Football. And our basketball's been pretty good, baseball is pretty good.

A lot of kids participate.

You also have summer league play.

A good library.

I would say fine arts is a real strength. We have a real strong community theater, and they're very well attended. We have a professional theater company here in the summer. And we have a lot of great musical and artistic talent.

And that's taken years to develop. I see these young people who started up as small children, and now they're main players.

Our band and choir in school, our music is great.

Our churches are pretty strong, too. They're well supported. When we have a community event, we get a lot of participation.

It's not just one denomination.

Yeah.

There's a lot of antiques.

The exotic sale brings people from all over the world. They stay in our hotels and things.

And the horse sales every month.

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

Definitely the right direction. Especially in the last few years. No one has mentioned medical facilities. We have a good hospital, lots of plans for the future.

A clinic.

Yeah.

A lot of banks, and that serves everyone's needs.

We have a strong history, and I know that in the future, that would be drawing in people too. We're putting in a state museum along with the county museum, and that will draw people to this area.

Moderator: What are the main shopping areas for residents?

We have two good grocery stores in town, and we have a Wal-Mart. Hopefully, we can maintain the two we have.

When we just had one, that was not good for the community.

The shopping is a weakness, though.

And restaurants.

We have Ben Franklin, but that's probably one of the only places you can buy a gift.

There's not much clothing here.

And that's mainly because of the big chains, and Wal-Mart has done a lot to hurt the small businessman.

This has been the first time in 80 years we haven't had a car dealership. That's the economy, but...

That's been a nationwide event, so we're not the lone wolves.

It's a sign of the times.

I think one thing that hurts our community is that it's hard to find a nice restaurant to take visitors to.

We're lucky to have Con-Agra here, too.

They've been a mainstay for employment for a long time.

I love Macon, I grew up here, but that seems to be a downfall. I think we need to bring more jobs here, higher-paying jobs, where people can...we have convenience stores and fast food places, but it's nothing that families can sink their teeth into. We lost the Lee packing plant, and Toastmaster closed down, and the only place we have is Con-Agra.

We are very lucky to have a newspaper that's printed weekly.

Very true.

And I know it's having a tough time, but so's everybody else.

Moderator: Where do you go for other shopping?

Columbia. (Everyone agrees in unison.)

And several people go to Kirksville for specialty stores, dress shops...

Moderator: Let's talk about Downtown in particular. Do you think it's moving in the right or wrong direction?

It's moving in the right direction, it's just having a tough time...

Slow movement, but movement.

There's a couple things that bother me about Downtown. The streets are absolutely a disgrace. They patch and patch.

The sidewalks are just as bad.

You go three blocks from Downtown, and our streets improve greatly. You see these streets...there's no reason. Our Council isn't focused in that direction, and I think they need to revitalize the way they do things.

I think they need to bring a grinder in.

I've discussed that with them. At least it would level out the humps. They contend that they can't because they still want to do some infrastructure as far as utilities, and that's expensive. When _____ was on the Council, she had a big hole in the road, and she called to get it fixed, and now she has two holes.

Their excuse for infrastructure is relevant, too, though.

I have had a lot of visitors mention how bad the roads are. I think the efforts Downtown are inconsistent. J.P.'s or Rutherford's look great. If everyone did that, it would be amazing, would give our Downtown a facelift.

But the last 5 years, we've had great improvement. If we could just keep the momentum up.

I thought the Fork and Cork last year was a great event.

And you had a good turnout.

I was amazed. I couldn't believe that many people were there. It rained, and it was cold.

The people doing the renovation, they're down because of the economy. They're still interested. I think it'll come around.

The events like Fork and Cork and the Black Tie Affair, the Downtown has really helped. I've never been to one. I hear that they're really good, though, and I think those are really good ideas.

And they're well attended.

We need to get people to come to Downtown.

I think our community is very good at supporting school and the theater. People are generous with their time and their talents and their money.

The Fork and Cork last year, it was raining cats and dogs, and people still came. They came.

We ran out of food. It was hard to believe.

I think that's another big point for Macon is the clubs, the Rotary, the Lions, the Kiwanis. Everyone supports them.

We had the largest fish fry we've ever had last year.

Moderator: What are the major reasons people come Downtown?

Ben Franklin.

(agreement.)

J.P.'s.

Rexall's.

That's another one.

And the theater, whenever there's...

And we probably lack some parking that we need Downtown. We used to not have all the apartments. Now there's apartments in every one of those buildings.

They're supposed to park in the back, but they don't do it.

Streets seem to be our biggest problem.

I think what he said a while ago, they're not wanting to do anything to the streets without fixing the sewer, because if they can't get the sewer fixed, they're going to have to tear up the streets.

Every time they get an estimate, the cost keeps going up.

That's the issue.

If we just leveled the streets for now, that would be great.

I talked to a couple once about doing one street at a time with the sewer, it wouldn't cost that much...it wouldn't be outrageous. They said, "If we do that, we'd be continually redoing it, because..." Maybe the money should be spent on the sewer. And they do need to do that, because there are leaks all the time.

Moderator: Are there things you used to be able to do Downtown that are conspicuous by their absence?

The shopping.

Yeah.

People used to go shopping Downtown, and it was packed.

This used to be a grocery store.

And the Gaslight Grill.

Saturday used to be the big—

(many people talking at once.)

That's happened all over the United States, though.

There were clothing stores, shoe stores, pharmacies, and restaurants.

We don't have a shoe store now.

We had several dress shops.

JC Penney, Sears, Montgomery Ward.

I think, from when I was a teenager, Downtown used to be a big place to come and hang out. No one does anymore... even just coming down and cruising the block.

They don't do that anymore.

The biggest thing we do Downtown is whitewashing.

(laughter.)

Moderator: Whitewashing?

It's an event. It's supposed to be lime and water. Paint.

Moderator: Let's talk about how user friendly Downtown is. You mentioned streets, but what about parking?

There's too little parking.

I had to circle the block.

I parked a block away.

Especially if something's going on in the theater. Everyone who lives in the apartments parks on the streets.

I don't think it should be parallel parking.

Years ago, didn't they have the angled parking.

Part of it was one-way, too.

It was so narrow, though.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Is there parking that's there but not convenient?

It's limited.

There's one lot, maybe two.

We have Con-Agra, but that's a private lot.

Everything east of here is Con-Agra.

The one by Ben Franklin and the one here. Those are the two major places.

(many people talking at once.)

And you have to walk through the alley sometimes.

Moderator: What about business hours? Are they convenient?

I think so.

Yeah.

I think the few we have, they're open.

They stay open until 6 or 7.

Christmastime they stay open later.

Moderator: Do you think people would like to see longer business hours?

No.

I don't think that's necessary.

Moderator: How easy is it for people to find what they're looking for Downtown?

I get lost Downtown.

I know my husband's cousin's coming here to go to a therapist, and she wanted to find a place to get lunch. For someone who's not familiar, it is a problem.

We need a place that will serve a good, quick lunch.

A nice family restaurant.

(many people agreeing.)

...nice salads and sandwiches...

...a little bit more upscale...

Moderator: How do you get information about Downtown businesses or events?

Newspaper.

Radio.

Chamber puts out a...

...they email.

Word of mouth is the best way to do anything.

The Chamber lets all the businesses know.

They put out an annual card, and it has every date that has anything going on. It's nice. We use that a lot at our office.

I don't know if everybody gets one.

But they're available.

The Chamber hands them out to the businesses, and we have them sitting out.

Not so much to residents, though.

I think that would be a good thing, though.

Yeah.

People that have those signs that they put letters on, whenever there's a special event, they get used. Even the banks.

Yeah, that's nice.

I hear about a lot of things from those signs. Whenever we do stuff, like fruit sales, we contact businesses and ask them to announce it on their signs.

Moderator: Let's think about the future of Downtown. What are some types of businesses you'd like to see Downtown?

Shoe store.

Yeah, shoes.

Clothing.

I think it needs to be a nicer, upscale shoe store. People would, instead of driving to Columbia, I think that might be where we might have the most luck.

Right now, Wal-Mart's the only place you can get shoes.

And tennis shoes at J.P.'s.

But specialty stuff.

We used to have good, upscale shoes.

We had several shoe stores.

And we should have nice purses.

I think a nice sit-down coffee shop would be nice.

Or a good place to eat.

People who work Downtown would love that.

I get calls from groups that want to come in for the theater, and they ask where they can eat, and it's very limited. I tell them the Apple Basket, or Nolan's. A lot of those people want something convenient, because the groups are on buses.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: What types of restaurants? Fine dining? Family?

Yes, and yes.

Not Chinese, not Mexican, not very specific places.

We have those, and they do very well.

A place that serves drinks. A cocktail.

Kind of like the old Gaslight.

If only somebody would open that up again.

That, and the coffee shop that he mentioned. Some place to go and get quality coffee and pastries.

Do you see how crowded that JavaSmith is out here in the morning? Good grief.

That coffee shop could have fruit juices.

Almost like a JavaSmith Downtown.

They were going to open one up.

Where we had the restaurant, right?

I'm also talking about the Java Downtown. That fell through.

He was going to, but then he went to ministry school.

Right next to Apple Basket.

I think there's been lots of ideas, but they just haven't taken off.

One place was having trouble because they wanted to serve wine, but it was hard to get a permit.

But we went through that years ago with the Gaslight.

The restaurant business is tough.

Yeah, very.

It would be nice.

And if you run it, you're going to have to live there.

That's right. It's lots of hours.

Moderator: Are there other types of businesses that would be a good fit Downtown?

Shoes.

Clothing.

A boutique.

I think even though we've got some representation, a little place that had a lot of gift type things would be a good fit. We've got some antique dealers Downtown and things like that, so something that's a little bit nicer. J.P.'s has some, but that's mostly in the cooking area.

Somewhere to buy a nice gift for an anniversary or a wedding.

We had one on the highway that closed.

I think it would be better Downtown than out there. It's in one of those little malls right now, and you've got to really be going to that store.

How does the tobacco shop make it?

It's a chain.

It just amazes me how many people still smoke... I saw a stack of cigarette butts outside the bank this morning. You go into those Quik-Trip places...

There are a lot of talented people in the community, and I think something that would allow people to show their works, and maybe combine it with a coffee shop.

I think _____ was trying to do that.

And _____, too.

I think a bookstore. We should have a bookstore.

Yeah.

I think a women's dress shop. We tried to get Linda's to move back in with J.P.'s, but when she retires, we need another one, and I think it would go good down here.

When you're coming Downtown, you'd always stop into the dress shop. I used to drop in all the time. I think a Downtown dress shop might go.

Moderator: Do you think there's a need or demand for more or different housing Downtown?

I think it's really gotten a boom because of everybody fixing them up. We have some really nice apartments. They are nice. I think they're pretty well full, aren't they?

I don't know.

I know there's a waiting list.

They're cheap.

You have steps and all that, though.

(many people talking at once.)

Some of those apartments are fancy.

A lot of them are really nice.

Is there a big demand for rental property? How could there be?

There's such a variance between low and high value. But most of these are young single people.

They don't have anything but stairs, so for older people...

Moderator: What about condos or lofts?

We have them being built everyday over Macon, so that's not a need.

Unless we brought in some new business to employ people.

The condos are often more for older people.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: What about trails, green space, and that kind of thing Downtown?

I think that would be good.

We have a walking trail at the lake, and the City has one, and the Y has an indoor track.

That would be nice Downtown.

And as part of the transportation grant at the historical society, we hope to open up the building on the corner as a recreation area.

That would bring a lot of people Downtown, recreation.

A good bowling alley.

We have a bowling alley, but there's no free time to bowl.

It's open on Friday and Saturday night.

Have a non-smoking bowling alley.

(side conversations.)

A lot of kids go there on Friday nights. Probably 10 or 15 that go on the weekend. I've been probably four times to bowl. You can go to Kirksville or Moberly for better bowling, though.

Where do the kids go for recreation?

The movies.

School things. Sports.

There isn't much, really.

I go to people's houses and watch a movie. Hang out. There's not something that'll draw everyone. That's something that we could do in Downtown, something that teenagers could go do on a Friday or Saturday that isn't going to get them in trouble.

We had a Teen Town for a lot of years, but I think the parents wore out, and so did the kids.

When I was in high school, we had an arcade, a place for kids to hang out.

That would really, definitely...I don't know, if you're not going to go to the big party for the weekend, then you're basically going to sit at home. I think that would be a big draw.

Moderator: *We talked about the look and feel of Downtown. What other priorities do you think there should be in terms of the look and feel, whether that's streets, sidewalks, building repair, landscaping...?*

If there was some way they could get all the awnings on the same level.

Or even just updating.

I think those facades that they've worked on are very nice, but it would be nice to be uniform. And some of them have boards instead of windows.

Are the buildings structurally sound?

I worry about fires.

And the ceilings falling in.

We've had a lot of fires over the years.

I think that's true of any town.

(many people talking at once about structural integrity of buildings.)

Moderator: *Awnings, street repairs, windows, what else?*

Some of the facades have been improved.

It would be nice if they all were.

When we have an event and people fix up their windows, it attracts a lot of attention.

Christmas is nice.

Yeah, I think whenever you decorate the windows...I know FFA put one in the building down from J.P.'s, and we got a lot of compliments about it. We kind of forgot about it, but people kept reminding us how good it looked. I think that always looks nice.

A lot of effort goes into that, too. _____ does a lot of that. We have a lot of out-of-town owners, though. But so far, the windows look nice for special occasions.

I know there's been talk of trying to expand that to have seasonal windows, more than just Christmas.

Fourth of July.

When I was a kid, it was either the Lions Club or the Elks, but at Halloween, they'd have contests.

That quit because so many of them started going to paint instead of the stuff you could wipe off.

As far as the facades, the Downtown association has been doing an excellent job of trying to get that done and have a theme to it.

They've put decorations and potted plants and benches.

And the school does the planting.

Moderator: I only have one other question. Thinking about other downtowns, what elements do you admire?

Clarksville has a really good group of artisans. There's glassblowers and potters, a lot of that artisan thing going on, and that actually draws people.

Yes it does.

I know when we had the antique store, people would come to the exotic sale, but then make the effort to see the antique mall.

Kirkville got a grant to brick the sidewalks and make it really nice.

Moberly's downtown looks a lot nicer. It looked horrible before.

It can be done.

I would like to see artists do something with the sides of the building.

Chillicothe is unbelievable.

Louisiana had done some stuff downtown.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: Other downtowns?

I don't know how you encourage people that haven't done anything to do something. Some of them live out of town.

Yeah.

(agreement.)

Some store owners just rent, so they don't have a lot of control over the building.

(agreement. Side conversations.)

How would you get some group enthused to do mural painting? An art class?

Moderator: In some places, it's been art classes at the local schools.

College, or high school?

I don't know, but the Kirksville arts association, they have that building, and they had boarded up windows, and they had a group associated with the school, and different ones did different windows. It's almost on a window shade fabric. They're perfect.

I bet if you talked to the high school or middle school, they do murals in the middle school every year. They've painted over some.

Maybe they should do this instead of the inside of the school.

I think that'd be so neat.

I think you would have lots of people interested in doing it.

(agreement.)

Chillicothe has 15 or 16 murals, and tourists go around to see them, and I think that's a big draw we're missing out on.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

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SECTION V

NEWER RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: Tell me a little bit about your community.

Macon's a lot slower than St. Louis.

You can walk to different places, and that's nice.

Super-friendly people. A very open community, but I don't find people are pushy. They're just friendly.

Easy access to anything and everything. You don't have to fight crowds.

Good school districts.

Lots of fun things going on that appeal to a lot of different ages. The Fly Wheel Festival, the Tractor Pull, just finished the Turkey Shoot for young people. The community really puts effort toward providing activities for young people. Hunting, fishing, the lake.

Camping.

We even have a beach.

There are a lot of things for varying age groups to do. The Black Tie...the theater Downtown is awesome. We need to market that more. We really have great crowds from the area. They do shows all season.

There's 4 shows a summer.

There's 6 this year.

2 in the fall, 4 in the summer.

We have a very popular event that occurs 3 or 4 times a year, and that's the exotic sale. That draws people from all over the country.

Moderator: Tell me a little about that.

They sell all kinds of animals. Spiders, snakes.

Wildebeests.

Zebras.

They also have a taxidermy sale at the same time.

Very exotic items, things from Africa, everything.

It is fun. It's always neat to see what they have.

There is a traffic problem, and usually only the opening days of deer season.

Wal-Mart is even overrun.

Macon County usually has the largest deer kill in the State. People come in from all over, from Texas even.

Many days, we look out our front window, and our yard is full.

Moderator: Where do you do your shopping?

There's only 2 grocery stores in town. There's a nice little dress shop in Macon, that's just exceptionally nice for a small town. I think the shopping's above average for a town this size.

There's nothing for children.

Clothes.

Shoes.

If you're not willing to do Wal-Mart, you're out of luck. But J.P.'s has some men's things and tennis shoes, but for a 14-year-old girl, you're out of luck.

Or business dress.

But we're not far to—

The grocery stores are nice, and they have bakeries, and caterers. We have a very nice Expo Center that's good for receptions and graduation parties.

When someone needs to go outside of Macon, almost everybody goes to Columbia.

You can get anything you need online, though.

Yeah.

There's really not much in Moberly, in comparison.

You might as well go to Columbia, if you're going to drive.

And you have more choices all in one spot.

Moderator: Are there things that there's not a need to go out of town for?

Groceries.

There are a lot of older people that very seldom leave Macon. You can get anything you want here. We have several doctors.

Drugstores.

A great small hospital for the everyday sort of stuff.

We have pharmacies and dentists, chiropractors.

We do have choices. You're not just stuck with one.

We're a regional center for that stuff.

For the smaller towns.

Moderator: What do you serve as a hub for?

Medical and shopping.

The hospital has even looked at expanding and trying to do some things, and has big dreams for the future, for it to be more of a regional medical center.

And the clinic just expanded.

And some of the doctors from Columbia will come up to that facility.

And the health department just added on.

Moderator: Does Wal-Mart pull people from small towns?

It's not a Super Wal-Mart, so people usually go to Moberly or Kirksville. As a church, we've been drawing more people. People from other places nearby drive 10 and 15 miles to come. A lot has to do with the highways being 4 lanes.

We also have a very active historical society, and they're in the process of getting a museum together, and we have an arts show every spring, and it's amazing how much talent there is in this area. I had no idea that these people could do anything, and they have beautiful paintings.

We have a lot of local artisans. The Fork and Cork festival really opened my eyes to the local talent.

It was a rainy festival last year. But last year, because of the weather, I think some things didn't happen, but it was everything from a run to local music and local artisans and local food.

Wine.

We do have a winery that's just 5 miles from us.

Designed to bring people into Downtown, the Fork and Cork.

It was put on by our Downtown association. It was very well done.

(agreement.)

Moderator: What about dining and entertainment? Is there enough of that?

Compared to the little towns around us...

Well...

We've got fast food and Mexican and Chinese.

We go out of town.

We don't have a nice restaurant that serves alcohol.

A decent bar and grill.

We don't have a lot of date restaurants.

Like the Gaslight used to be.

A nice sit-down restaurant.

The Pear Tree, but it's not here, but people go there for special occasions.

I would say we're lacking pretty seriously in good restaurants. Entertainment, we have a decent little movie theater. If you're a real moviegoer, you'll probably drive to Columbia.

He gets some first-run movies.

The prices are quite good.

The theater's a great attraction. But most entertainment is outdoors, with the lake, boating...

We have a skating rink which is very popular, and we have a bowling alley, but they mostly just do leagues.

You have to go at like 9:00 at night, after the leagues.

The theater is great, and my wife and I are very frustrated, because the theater lets out at 9:30, and there's nowhere to go for a cup of coffee or a piece of cake.

Bowling.

(laughter.)

The other thing...the skating rink is so popular because there isn't anything besides the theater for them to do. It would be nice to have a place for birthday parties and activities, like a Bonkers.

Otherwise, you have to go to Columbia.

Moderator: Do people drive elsewhere to dine out?

Columbia.

Kirksville.

We go to Ethel, to the Santa Fe restaurant. It's their own little community restaurant. It's a fun excursion.

And there's a dive in Moberly, Lulu's, that's very good.

It's got fabulous food.

It is definitely a dive.

It's fabulous, though.

(many people agreeing.)

If you're going to get serious about going out to eat, you'll go to Columbia.

Moderator: Let's focus on Downtown. Do you see things moving in the right or wrong direction?

Positive direction, without a doubt.

Absolutely.

It's always active.

There's been an intentional effort from the businesses to move back Downtown. J.P.'s is an example.

I think so too.

A big improvement was taking off the awnings.

_____ redid her whole front to make it look like it used to.

They've really started to restore the buildings to their original appearance.

Vine and Rollins are really nice.

I've been involved in Main Street improvement in Boonville, and it was before the boat, and some of their buildings look very similar to ours, and they received funding, and the local businessmen renovated to make it look like the original buildings, and they have a nice main street. They have a highway that goes through, and that's nice, but I think if we market all of our potential and find it, we could do the same.

And maybe tax breaks.

Yeah.

I think once the highways become together, because they're going to meet here, I think the potential is great for us to move in. We could have all kinds of things.

Everybody's hoping it will be a hub for this area and grow from there.

Moderator: What kind of things do you use the Downtown for?

Ben Franklin.

J.P.'s.

J.P.'s does a lot of t-shirts.

Upper-end kitchen.

Athletic shoes.

Rents tuxes.

Pretty eclectic, but it's got a lot of unique items.

The theater is here.

And the drugstore.

The furniture store.

Moderator: How often do you go Downtown?

I'd say weekly.

Yeah, I would too. But everything closes so early on Saturdays, by noon or 1, but I have two small kids, and I don't normally get out early on Saturdays. After noon on a Saturday, only Wal-Mart and the grocery stores are open.

I have the opposite. I have elderly parents, and I have a sitter that comes in the afternoon on Saturday, and then there's nothing to do.

Moderator: *That was my next question. How user friendly is Downtown regarding business hours?*

The hard part from a business perspective, on the Saturday afternoon when I would want to go out, it isn't an option. One of my frustrations tends to be the parking. Parking is really difficult, especially anywhere near where you want to go.

And it would also be nice if there was more in the evening during the week. Not late hours, but a little bit later.

A lot of smaller communities have that. Moberly has that, and Boonville did. That helps. At least one night, you can go down there and pick up a birthday present.

Moderator: *Is there any parking off your Downtown?*

Yeah.

There's a couple lots.

And there's one at the other end.

I think it would be great to make the streets one-way and do angled parking.

A lot of people do not like to parallel park.

(many people agreeing.)

One of the things we didn't mention for the kids, we have a skate park, a skateboarding park. Across from the library.

It would be neat to coordinate things with the library, the theater, and the skate park.

That would be neat if we opened an evening. In Columbia, it's like an event, and it's artisans and wineries Downtown. It would be cool to have that.

That would be neat. If we would focus a little more on some of the younger activities that coincide with some adult activities, that might be nice.

I think that even though the weather was terrible, the Fork and Cork was an excellent time. If we had more of those kinds of events... you know, there's just not enough people to put those things together.

It ends up being the same people for each thing.

Boots and Black Tie are like that.

Moderator: What about lighting, signage, and things like that? Are they ample?

The first thing I think of is the sidewalks. They're pretty bad.

When my parents were walking, they have walkers, and it's really difficult on these sidewalks.

There's cracks everywhere.

You can do a lot to dress up Downtown. Boonville added some brick, some trees, and it made it a quaint atmosphere. Our sidewalks do need to be improved.

The Downtown association has done a lot with flowers, planters, and benches.

We need a coffee shop.

Yeah we do.

And we need a really big sign on 63 that points to Downtown.

Yeah.

We need to boast about ourselves.

Individual store signage is better without the awnings, but there are still places that you could drive by a hundred times and not realize it's there.

The other thing I notice is, in the wintertime, if someone doesn't own the building or if it's vacant, you can't walk. If there's a business, it's cleaned off, but if you have to park at the other end of the block, you might have to walk through snow.

(agreement.)

If there could be a fund or something to clean off sidewalks...

Moderator: What about second-story living Downtown?

We have some.

And in the summer, with the theater, we have quite a bit.

They come from all over the country, and they stay in the apartments.

The potential would be amazing for some really cool lofts.

That would be neat.

Moderator: *Would there be an interest in lofts?*

We don't have a huge young, kid crowd.

We do in the summer... but some of them have said it would be fun to use this as a base if they do a lot of regional theater.

I think you could rent them to teachers and stuff.

I have a young cousin who was here working for the Grimshaw, and she couldn't find an apartment here. It is difficult for a single person. We're getting a lot of senior housing, but not cool young housing.

Moderator: *So you think more rentals?*

Yeah. Rentals.

When you break down our population, it's like 25-65 is our largest population, and that younger set, I don't think we have a whole lot of rental available for them other than small houses that have the bare necessities of what they need.

Moderator: *The last part here is to look to the future of Downtown Macon. What kinds of businesses do you think you'd like Downtown?*

Coffee shop.

Definitely.

Tea shop.

As a minister, I'm frustrated, because there's no good place in town to meet someone to talk. The church or your house, but no good place to have a cup of tea or a cup of coffee or that kind of thing. We mentioned restaurants, too. A decent...

I think if our Downtown had a nice restaurant, a bar and grill type thing, that would bring people Downtown.

I agree.

Me too.

Something fun and young, too. We want to maintain our youth.

It would have to be open past 8:00.

Yes, definitely.

Do not close until 11:00 at least.

It would be interesting if we did a few focus groups and determined an identity for Macon, a personality. If everybody had a better understanding of what the various ages are looking for... I don't think people would be inclined to invest unless they had a little background.

Moderator: What personality do you see your Downtown taking on?

Well, I mean, I've lived on the east coast for a number of years, and a lot of little towns reinvented themselves with a definite personality. There were a lot of antique shops and what have you, and the décor complemented each other, it's easy to get around, well-lit, good sidewalks, places to sit down and get a cup of coffee, warm and inviting and friendly. It would be nice if it all sort of fit together and complemented each other.

Successful Downtown areas are exactly that. Hannibal, they have a lot of places that feed off each other. Even like Santa Fe, New Mexico, feeds off of the local artisans over there and has a southwest theme.

I think as long as the outside was inviting, the inside could be whatever it wanted to be.

That's what I meant. They shouldn't all be the same kind of store.

(agreement.)

As long as the outside, like Boonville with the cool lights and the nice sidewalks, to have attractive buildings...

And a place to sit down, benches and what have you.

If the awnings complemented, and had their name on it or something...

A little store here that I find interesting is this little frame shop. That's what I'm talking about. Finding things that you haven't expected to find, going into a shop and being surprised.

Something that I think of, just because I've experienced it, I'll go into shops that are pretty on the outside but they smell musty and aren't clean on the inside. I came in here a few weeks ago, and they didn't stop at the outside. They redid the inside. And I keep thinking of this store because it invites you to come in.

Old and quaint is nice. Old and musty is not so nice.

You want a nice bathroom and... I don't know if that's going way beyond what people can do.

I think a lot of the grants that have been out here, a lot of them are to fix the outside up, and it's up for the owners to do the interior.

One of the things that the actors enjoy when they come here is the soda fountain.

Oh, yes.

They just think that is the coolest thing.

And that needs to be marketed a little more. Drawing that younger crowd.

They close at 6 or 7 in the summer, so if you don't hurry up with your supper and get down here, they're closed when you want ice cream.

I think there's an opportunity for our town to build on arts and entertainment. We really do have a diversity of really good artists. There's an opportunity there to do something more, to be that regional draw for entertainment, especially on the weekend. If there was more and better restaurants Downtown, people could come and eat and walk around Downtown.

If there were restaurants, you could serve a dual purpose. You could draw in people for the festivals and the artists, but still maintain a reason that your local people could come Downtown. That's the challenge, to appeal to the people that live here, but come up with something unique enough to draw people here from other areas.

And it has to be profitable.

Right. But I think there's a fine line. If you have restaurants, your local people will come to town as well.

Macon is very inter-generational. Some of our best friends are people in their mid-60's to in their 30's like we are, to 40's and 50's, it's across that expanse.

Right.

If you look at the population, there's not that much difference between 25 to 44 to 50 to 65. I myself, our two youngest are in 4th and 6th grade, but I have older kids, so I'm of an older generation, but I still mix with younger people.

It needs to appeal to all people.

Where would you find these diversified storekeepers? Would they be from here?

Well, there's been a bookstore advertised for two years that hasn't opened.

We could open a coffee shop there first.

You've got to have a coffee shop next to a bookstore.

Some place where you can enjoy a fantastic cup of coffee on a couch and buy a book and read. Macon is eclectic, it's unique, it's different...things you wouldn't think would work here probably would. You could make a smaller version of Barnes & Noble would work here. Or an Applebee's, a place that serves a good steak, those kinds of things will work in a Downtown. But the people here are all generations, young families, retirees, you know.

That was one of the reasons we moved here. My husband grew up here. We lived in Columbia, and our older children went to Hickman, and we were afraid of where it was going to end up, and we moved up here to go through a smaller school district.

That's why we moved here. We lived in Kansas City before.

Why did you move here?

My husband died about a year and a half ago, and I lived in St. Louis all by myself, and I chose a community I liked and a house I liked. I'm like 30 minutes from my oldest daughter. Yet I still drive to St. Louis. I do have to say, the people are, you just don't meet anybody that's not nice. They're friendly, they're open, they don't act like you're an outsider.

I think if we ever have advertising...hunting was a big reason that you guys moved here, you moved here because of the schools, you because of the friendliness.

We could've lived elsewhere, but school district was one of the big reasons.

We should push that.

Yeah, I think we should exploit that.

And the community's very supportive of the schools. Homecoming is huge. They shut down the whole thing for homecoming. They're very supportive.

(agreement.)

Moderator: What kinds of aesthetic improvements would you like to see?

Make the streets one-way so you can park more easily near where you're trying to get.

If you could angle parking, you could increase parking.

I've seen pictures where they were down the middle on a diagonal.

(many people talking at once.)

Something like brick pavers for sidewalks.

Yeah, that would make it more homey.

And trees, and the baskets. I think because it's historical, retaining that historical look...

Look at Branson. Branson's a prime example of taking an area and making it new but look old. And we don't even have to build old-looking things...we have them... as far as signage, you want everybody to have the ability to promote themselves in the manner they want to, but if we had some guidelines of, maybe, less plastic or less metal.

And frankly, we have to get real about having some buildings that need to get condemned and torn down. And there's vacant spots, too. We have to be realistic. If we could get Vine and Rollins in really good shape with some wonderful reasons to go Downtown, we don't need to go crazy with everything else.

And other people would come in.

I'd put a park Downtown.

Kids.

There are wonderful parks in Macon, but...

There needs to be one in the center hub. We did that in Boonville. There's a nice park on the corner, and it's used by everybody that comes passing through.

You could make it unique. In Kansas City, they show movies on the side of a building or in a park, and you could bring your kids, and you could sit, and drink some wine. A seating area along with a park.

(agreement.)

I lived in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and a group of stores had a local musical group. At the Fork and Cork, they had that, and it gives them exposure.

And they had the bleachers out. It would've been fabulous if the weather had been better.

They had a music store and a deli that went together.

A small little amphitheater, maybe, where the theater folks could get out and do stuff.

That empty lot next to the performing arts center, maybe.

There's a lot of things that could happen in an outdoor area like that.

You'd have to address your mosquitoes. I can't even go out during the summer. I don't know what you would do, but if you have outdoor activities, they'd eat you up.

Spray a lot of Off. You can't get rid of mosquitoes.

Now, they're carriers of West Nile, which is not a good thing.

With kids, we just spray them. You can't keep them in, even if you wanted to.

Moderator: What other downtowns do you admire?

One of the neatest ones I've been to was in Carmel, Indiana. It's great.

My wife is from Warrensburg, and they've done a lot. They've done the brick pavers and some neat streetlights. They're a college town, so there's no shortage of nightlife.

Omaha, Nebraska has a neat little area. Lots of restaurants, outdoor eating, funky stores, nice to walk around.

It used to be warehouses.

Very unique. There's a brewery down there.

A brewery would be a good idea. Kirksville has one.

Coffee shop-slash-brewery.

Moderator: Anything else?

One thing that has started to flourish here, and I think would be neat, is the historical society. It just exploded a couple of years ago, and they've done so many neat things, and that's a museum now, and to get people...they're trying to make it a good genealogy research facility, and to get people to Macon that way. Just coordinating all these places. The programs in the summer for the library and things like that.

A thought might be, for such a little town, I've never seen as many clubs as we have. I'm wondering if there would be a way to get the clubs involved. You see sections of highways where people pick up trash, and if you could get clubs to take tiny segments of Downtown... I do think that could be a huge resource. We have clubs like you can't imagine.

And having a master plan. If we put together a master plan, so that Rotary Club builds the amphitheater on this corner or to do the park, that's doable.

Once we decide we want something, we work really hard to get it.

Everybody pitches in.

And there tends to be resources, too.

I have a young woman working for me, and one of the things they like to do is play darts, but they play at the Elks Club, and it's old and it's smoky, and it bothers them. It's a wonderful facility, and it's great for events, but the Elks themselves can't keep it up, and it would be nice to figure out...because it's a wonderful facility for Downtown.

Even a community center?

I think a lot of it just hinges on communication. A lot of groups do lots of little things.

It needs to be coordinated. I get the Quincy Arts newsletter, and it has everything in it. A wonderful publication, once a month.

Our little newspaper is struggling to hang on, and they don't do much other than advertise... things aren't communicated effectively or well.

I have a friend whose house is in the city limits, but her street is not, so she doesn't get the paper until it's mailed to her. It's crazy.

Has anybody thought about getting unique retail shops Downtown?

Yeah.

That's another thing. The Chamber of Commerce is so far away from Downtown.

I'm on the Chamber, and I can tell you that the other side of the coin exists with Chamber, and there are several businesses on the highway that want the Chamber on the highway. There's a little bit of struggle.

There's two parts of Macon, the Downtown and the highway.

Downtown has made an enormous effort, because the Downtown association has brought everybody in this area together working toward a common goal, and that makes it highly visible by the public, and that's awesome. People know more about it. Maybe some of the other areas, they don't have a flowing movement toward something. That's probably part of what the struggle has been. I think there is more of a split there than people think.

I don't think the Chamber has to be Downtown, but a bigger sign. Make it easier to find.

Sometimes you can... people get confused between the Main Street association and the Chamber in smaller towns, and they think they're in unity, and they're not. They need to have their separate locations. And isn't the Chamber an area Chamber?

Yeah, it includes other towns.

Everybody has an opinion on it.

We all agree that it needs to be more visible.

Moderator: Thank you very much.