

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

FINAL SURVEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

CITY OF MEXICO, MISSOURI

July 30, 2008



D·R·E·A·M
I N I T I A T I V E

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FOR
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SECTION I FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted four focus groups in Mexico, Missouri on July 30, 2008. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the Mexico community in regard to the downtown area. The four groups included the following: 1) elected and other officials, 2) students, 3) city residents, and 4) business owners. Participants of all four groups were from a variety of backgrounds.

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

A. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE BUSINESS GROUP:

The following questions were posed to the business group:

General Questions about Mexico

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

Downtown Specific Questions

04. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Mexico is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?
05. Why did you choose to locate your business or make an investment in property downtown (or not in downtown, for other business owners)?
06. From what you hear from your customers, how "user-friendly" is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they're looking for? Is there a need/demand for more housing downtown?
07. How do you communicate to your customers about information about what's going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation) or with your own business?

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

08. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Mexico. We'd like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...
 - Additional/types of businesses would you like to see downtown?
 - Dining and entertainment?
 - Parks and outdoor recreation?
09. Now, we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do you think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?
 - Street repair?
 - Landscaping/beautification?
 - Green space?
 - Building repairs, renovation, upgrades?
10. Of all the potential improvements we've just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the City?
11. What could the City do to help your business thrive or keep your property values strong over the next few years?
12. Would you be willing to support a "special business district" in which an additional sales tax would be collected that would provide services specifically for downtown?

B. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE GENERAL GROUPS:

The following questions were posed to the general groups:

General Questions about Mexico

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

Downtown Specific Questions

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

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

09. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Mexico. We’d like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...
 - Additional/types of businesses would you like to see downtown?
 - Dining and entertainment?
 - Parks and recreation?
10. Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do you think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?
 - Street repair?
 - Landscaping/beautification?
 - Green space?
 - Building repairs, renovations, upgrades?
11. Of all the potential improvements we’ve just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the City?
12. What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most like Mexico to resemble?

C. THE MEXICO AREA

Generally speaking, how would you describe this area to someone visiting from another city? Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?

The groups described Mexico as a friendly, safe, progressive, cooperative community with good healthcare and many nearby outdoor recreation opportunities. Mexico, the county seat of Audrain County, serves as a regional hub for many smaller nearby communities. Mexico is also the home of the Missouri Military Academy, and is a reasonably diverse community. These factors, according to participants, make Mexico a good place to raise a family.

Participants generally felt that Mexico is moving slowly in the right direction. While the economic situation in Mexico has pushed it in the wrong direction in the past, in recent years, the town has been recovering and areas of Mexico are beginning to thrive again.

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 Mexico is the Wal-Mart, and people come from neighboring towns to shop at the Mexico Wal-Mart. Downtown is mainly a service area but does have some specialty retail, though not as much as the participants would ultimately like to see.

Many residents try to do their shopping in Mexico, but have trouble finding certain specialty or high-end items in town, or have trouble finding adequate selection in town. For these items, residents travel to Columbia and Fulton or shop online. These items include a variety of men's, women's, and children's clothing, shoes, sporting goods, and other specialty items.

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

There are a number of restaurants in Mexico, but many of them Mexican, Chinese, fast food, or barbecue restaurants. There is one fine dining restaurant, at the country club. There are a few locally owned restaurants that residents visit, but participants overall felt that there is not enough variety for dining in Mexico. Many visit Columbia when dining out for special occasions or to find a larger variety of dining options. Participants said that they would welcome a sit-down casual dining option, a fine dining option in town, a wine bar, a wider variety of restaurants, and longer business hours.

For recreation and entertainment, Mexico has a bowling alley, a movie theater, a country club, high school sports, a YMCA, and plenty of outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, and water sports. Also, Mexico has a number of outdoor festivals, some of them downtown. However, participants felt that Mexico lacks regular entertainment for young people. Many people travel to Columbia for entertainment, especially for nighttime entertainment.

D. DOWNTOWN MEXICO: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT

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

The groups, overall, felt that downtown Mexico's direction is mixed, but that it has the potential to move further in the right direction. There have been some aesthetic improvements on the Square and a few new businesses, and there are a number of thriving professional businesses downtown, such as attorneys' offices.

Many participants also felt that there is a lot of unrealized potential that would make downtown Mexico move in the right direction—adding more retail and dining, for example, is of the highest priority. Other priorities included adding a variety of residential space, improving building facades, improving the backs of buildings, making the aesthetics cohesive and attractive, improving sidewalks, and improving signage.

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

The business owners cited tradition and proximity to the courthouse as the major reasons they located their businesses downtown. Some participants indicated, at different points in the discussion, that new businesses might be attracted in the future if the City focuses on attracting a higher number of shops and restaurants in the area.

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

The groups mentioned a few reasons that they visit downtown, including the courthouse, services such as attorneys and professional offices, a few specialty stores and restaurants, and special events. Services were most often cited as reasons people visit downtown.

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

Participants rated only a few concerns about user-friendliness, including business hours, parking, navigation, and sidewalks.

The business hours in downtown, according to some participants, are a problem, especially regarding evenings and weekends. Most shops are open only from 8:00 or 9:00 AM to 5:00 or 5:30 PM on weekdays, which makes it difficult for people who have jobs with a regular weekday schedule to shop in these businesses. While there are Thursday night events for which businesses stay open later, overall, the 5:00 or 5:30 closing times make it inconvenient for people to shop downtown. The problem is compounded by the fact that the chain stores in town, such as Wal-Mart, and the malls in Columbia, are open in the evenings and on weekends. The participants also felt that restaurant hours are inconvenient, since few restaurants are open late. Some participants suggested that, as more retail comes into downtown, these shops should consider staying open until 6:00 consistently.

The parking situation is problematic, according to participants. It was suggested that local residents believe that parking downtown is a problem, but in fact there are ample parking spaces downtown. There are parking lots downtown that have enough capacity to serve most people coming downtown. Participants brought up the issue that business owners, business employees, and courthouse employees sometimes take up all the spots along the street. Some participants mentioned that some people want to park directly in front of the store rather than walking. Finally, participants felt that if the downtown were more populated with storefronts, people would not mind walking as much.

Navigation around the Square, according to participants, is difficult for newcomers and visitors. The one-way streets are often difficult for visitors to navigate, and residents sometimes see lost drivers going the wrong way on the one-way streets. Better signage, according to the groups, may solve this problem, and many participants felt that the option for two-way streets should be considered.

The sidewalks were also a concern to some participants. Since they are uneven, they make downtown visits inconvenient for people in wheelchairs, people pushing strollers, and other pedestrians.

As for downtown housing, participants in all groups all felt that some second-story loft housing would be welcome. They suggested that the City market it to young couples and young professionals.

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 radio, the Chamber of Commerce, the Internet, and word-of-mouth as the major ways they get information about downtown business and events.

E. DOWNTOWN MEXICO: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Mexico. 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 retail and dining— independently owned specialty-type shops and restaurants rather than larger chains. For apparel, they suggested more men's, women's, and children's clothing, and more shoe stores. For food, they suggested additional restaurants, including fine dining, a destination restaurant of some kind, Italian food, a nice bar, and a variety of casual dining options, all with later business hours. In other types of businesses, they suggested a bookstore, a coffee shop, a tea room, a small grocery store with organic foods, a bakery, a sporting goods store, and any other specialty shop. Some also suggested having an "anchor store," a large store to draw people to the Square. For entertainment, the focus groups felt that a variety of restaurants and shops with later business hours would be a good start, and that a nice pool hall, laser tag, and go-carts might be welcome additions.

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

Some participants agreed that the downtown's purpose should not be to compete with Wal-Mart and other large chains, nor to compete with the larger malls in Columbia; but rather to offer a unique experience to customers. For this, the groups felt strongly that small business should be encouraged, and the City should find and offer incentives to potential building owners to fix up their buildings into usable retail 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 generally said that Mexico needs improvement with respect to aesthetics. Their suggestions focused on giving downtown a historic and cohesive look and feel while making it still feel safe and modern. They suggested that building repair, filling any vacant buildings with retail businesses, closing undesirable businesses such as "payday loan" businesses, improving the backs of buildings, and improving landscaping should all be priorities. They also suggested unifying the look of downtown by standardizing awnings and planters, and perhaps including some streetscaping such as water features and benches.

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 the two highest priorities should be attracting retail businesses and restaurants and creating a comprehensive master plan for downtown Mexico. All other improvements, according to the groups, should work towards achieving these priorities.

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

The business owners felt that all downtown improvements would help their businesses, especially attracting other businesses to the downtown area and "sprucing up" the downtown area. Both of these things would help attract customers.

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

Participants mentioned a few downtowns whose mix of businesses, aesthetics, and destination status they admired, most notably Fulton, Missouri, which is only a 20-minute drive from Mexico. Other cities included Pella, Iowa; Chillicothe, Missouri; Jefferson City, Missouri; Fayette, Missouri; Columbia, Missouri; Moline, Iowa; and Austin, Texas.

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?

Participants in the business owners’ focus group stated that they would be willing to support an additional sales tax for the “business district,” because it would help support downtown improvements.

F. KEY POINTS

Key points about the Mexico area:

- ◆ Mexico is a friendly, safe, progressive, cooperative community with good healthcare and many nearby outdoor recreation opportunities, which make it a good place to raise a family
- ◆ Mexico as a whole is moving slowly in the right direction.
- ◆ There are a number of restaurants in Mexico, but many of them Mexican, Chinese, fast food, or barbecue restaurants.
- ◆ Participants overall felt that there is not enough variety for dining in Mexico, and many visit Columbia for dining options.
- ◆ Residents would welcome a sit-down casual dining option, a fine dining option in town, a wine bar, a wider variety of restaurants, and longer business hours.
- ◆ Mexico has a bowling alley, a movie theater, a country club, high school sports, a YMCA, and plenty of outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, and water sports.
- ◆ Downtown Mexico has a number of festivals throughout the year.
- ◆ Participants felt that Mexico lacks regular entertainment for young people, and people often travel to Columbia for entertainment.

Key points about downtown Mexico in the present:

- ◆ Downtown Mexico’s direction, according to participants, is mixed, but it has the potential to move further in the right direction.
- ◆ Downtown Mexico would move further in the right direction if the City added more retail and, added a variety of residential space, improved building facades, improved the backs of buildings, made the aesthetics cohesive and attractive, improved sidewalks, and improved signage.
- ◆ Business owners cited tradition and proximity to the courthouse as the major reasons they located their businesses downtown.

- ◆ Residents visit downtown for the courthouse, services such as attorneys and professional offices, a few specialty stores and restaurants, and special events.
- ◆ The business hours in downtown, according to some participants, are a major problem, especially regarding evenings and weekends—if stores were open later on weekdays and more often on weekends, residents would be more likely to shop downtown.
- ◆ Residents consider parking a problem, but there are ample parking spots on and around the Square; however, downtown employees take most of the street parking during the day, making it difficult for customers to find parking, and many customers do not know the locations of the parking lots.
- ◆ Navigation around the Square, according to participants, difficult for newcomers and visitors because of the one-way streets and inadequate signage.
- ◆ Uneven sidewalks are a concern for residents.
- ◆ Some second-story loft housing would be welcome downtown, particularly geared toward young couples and professionals.
- ◆ People get information about downtown from the newspaper, the radio, the Chamber of Commerce, the Internet, and word-of-mouth.

Key points about the future of downtown Mexico:

- ◆ Downtown Mexico should focus on attracting retail stores and restaurants.
- ◆ For apparel, more men's, women's, and children's clothing, and more shoe stores would be welcome additions downtown.
- ◆ For food, participants suggested additional restaurants, including fine dining, a destination restaurant of some kind, Italian food, a nice bar, and a variety of casual dining options, all with later business hours.
- ◆ In other types of businesses, participants suggested a bookstore, a coffee shop, a tea room, a small grocery store with organic foods, a bakery, a sporting goods store, an "anchor store" of some type, and any other specialty shop.
- ◆ For entertainment, the focus groups felt that a variety of restaurants and shops with later business hours would be a good start, and that a nice pool hall, laser tag, and go-carts might be welcome additions.
- ◆ Second-story lofts downtown would help fill the buildings and keep a number of people downtown to patronize businesses.

- ◆ Downtown's purpose should not be to compete with Wal-Mart and other large chains, nor to compete with the larger malls in Columbia; but rather to offer a unique experience to customers.
- ◆ Participants felt that Mexico needs improvement to its aesthetics, and suggested repairing buildings, filling any vacant buildings with retail businesses, closing undesirable businesses such as savings and loans, improving the backs of buildings, improving landscaping, unifying the look of downtown by standardizing awnings and planters, including some streetscaping such as water features and benches.
- ◆ The two highest priorities for downtown revitalization should be attracting retail businesses and restaurants and creating a comprehensive master plan for downtown Mexico.
- ◆ The business owners felt that all downtown improvements would help their businesses, especially attracting other businesses to the downtown area and "sprucing up" the downtown area.
- ◆ Participants admired, most notably Fulton, Missouri, which is only a 20-minute drive from Mexico.
- ◆ Participants also admired Pella, Iowa; Chillicothe, Missouri; Jefferson City, Missouri; Fayette, Missouri; Columbia, Missouri; Moline, Iowa; and Austin, Texas.
- ◆ Business owners would be willing to support an additional sales tax for the "business district," because it would help support downtown improvements.

SECTION II

ELECTED AND OTHER OFFICIALS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: Tell me a little about your community. Describe Mexico to me.

Well, since I lived in St. Louis for four years, it's amazing that you can get across town in 5 minutes.

(agreement.)

Mexico's one of the few rural communities with a large medical center and all the healthcare services that go with it.

As a city of over 11,000 in a county of over 25,000, an area that serves over 125,000 people, we have a ready and able workforce with a diverse economic background, a progressive city council interested in new, creative business ideas. I think it's somewhat unusual for rural Missouri.

It's a safe place to live. It's a very low crime rate here. We have one of the lowest crime rates in Missouri. Both crime and quality of life... we have very few traffic accidents.

I always tell people that the most amazing thing about Mexico is the people. People are kind, caring, forgiving...I think that's one of Mexico's greatest strengths.

Basically, it's a small community where you know your neighbors, but it's a progressive city.

(agreement.)

It's a hometown feel, but it's big enough for car dealerships and restaurants...

Did anyone mention the park?

Not yet.

(laughter.)

A lot of communities, you wouldn't want to walk along the park at dusk, but I see people do it all the time here. Our parks are safe and beautiful.

They never cut the grass though.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: As a whole, is the city moving in the right or wrong direction?

We had an enormous hiccup economically when we were dominated by one industry, and it set us back. We've come a long way, but we have a long way to go. We need to add population, improve schools... we're well on our way, though. We hit a big bump, but we're coming back.

It's a mixed bag. We've got some areas that are strong, vibrant, and progressive, but we're also attracting lower-income people to the community because we have a lot of support systems for them—free medical care, the health center, agencies to help them. Of the seven counties, ours is the second lowest in average household income. That's a concern. A big concern.

Moderator: What are the main parts of town for shopping, or where else do you go?

Wal-Mart.

Yeah.

Wal-Mart or West Plaza.

Everyday household things, Mexico serves well, but if you want a mall, you go to Columbia. For shoes, for example.

We serve more than Mexico, it's more of a regional draw. We don't have a sit-down type restaurant here. That all flows together. We need additional income, population, and with those come additional restaurants.

Moderator: What do you do for dining and entertainment?

The movie theater.

Dairy Queen.

(laughter, side conversations.)

For entertainment, we have the theater and the bowling alley, but we're short on entertainment. There are a lot of things going on at Presser Hall, there's usually something every weekend.

Concerts in the park on Tuesday evenings.

There are activities available.

A lot of kids' stuff.

Finding a place to eat is kind of difficult, though.

You don't want to have people come in Monday nights, because the country club closes.

Not everybody belongs to the country club, though.

I guess those people go to Porky's?

(many people talking at once.)

The senior center.

We are short on a quality, sit-down restaurant.

Moderator: Let's focus on downtown. Do you feel it's moving in the right or wrong direction?

As I drove into town from Kirksville, I couldn't find any parking, and I thought the lawyers must be busy today. Lot of legal things going on by the courthouse. We used to have retail, but there's not a lot left.

We lost the clothing stores and the shoe stores.

Yeah.

(many people talking at once. Lawn mower noise.)

We do have three quilt shops that draw out-of-town people. They have a shop hop once a year, where they go to ours and other communities. That's sort of a big thing.

Moderator: Why else do people come downtown?

I use it for meetings, Chamber meetings, the courthouse. I mainly come downtown for meetings.

We see a fair crowd eating breakfast on Sundays.

A couple pizza places.

(side conversations.)

I was in the morning meeting, and a lady pointed out something I've driven by a ton of times—the bridge is rusty.

I just noticed that this last week.

(agreement.)

We have tunnel vision. The bridge. That's one of our entrances to our downtown.

I think one of the problems downtown is, we do have specialty shops to bring people in. We have three jewelry stores and specialty shops, but they're for people with expendable income.

There isn't anything downtown other than the courthouse or attorneys, there isn't any other thing to draw people downtown. There's no necessity item that's down here.

The card shop.

But you can get those from Wal-Mart or Dollar General.

People do come for Hallmark. But they're all specialty shops. I think that's a problem.

Moderator: Are there things other than clothing and shoes that used to be downtown?

A bank used to be here.

We don't even have an ATM machine on the Square. They have to do X dollars a day, and they wouldn't do enough money from an ATM on the Square.

When there's events down here, people are always asking.

We didn't mention fairs and parades.

Oh year.

When I was little, there were three grocery stores on the Square. Five and dimes.

With a soda fountain.

That's a changing in times.

No hotel downtown.

If they do have a soda fountain, it's a big attraction. People come from miles just to go to the soda fountain.

Moderator: Let's talk about the user-friendliness of downtown. Is parking a big issue?

Yes.

People that work downtown are parking and using spaces for customers that might want them.

There are two parking lots downtown, and they should park there if they're working downtown for eight hours.

(agreement. Side conversations.)

You can park at Wal-Mart and walk much farther, but people won't walk downtown.

If there's a big funeral or something, or a craft fair, there are times when we can't get on that parking lot.

The other one never fills up, though.

Do we have signs that indicate where the parking's at?

No! I don't think there are any signs.

I think there might be on our corner.

I don't think there's any to this lot, though.

Moderator: What about business hours and locations? Are they convenient?

No.

They close too early.

9:00 to 5:00.

(phone ringing, unintelligible.)

Some places are open until 5:30.

Most places are one owner and maybe one clerk, and they're spread too thin to stay open.

The ones that do stay open do better, though, because the people who need to use downtown can't find a parking space during lunch. Staying open the extra 30 minutes does give them more business.

I think people say they're not open because nobody comes, but people would come if they were open.

And if you had a good restaurant, that would get people downtown later, too.

Moderator: Is it easy for people to find their way to downtown?

I think sometimes traffic patterns make it hard.

The one-way traffic, I don't know if it's a plus or minus for a town our size.

(someone talking on the phone, other conversations unintelligible, general agreement that navigation is slightly difficult for visitors.)

Do we have signage that says downtown?

Yeah. Central Business District.

For a new person, it can be frustrating. You don't know whether the stop signs are 2-way or 4.

And people go up streets the wrong way.

Moderator: What about housing? Is there a need or demand for more housing?

There is some housing downtown, but there is a need for a different type of housing. We need to appeal to a certain groups. There's no place for children to play downtown, so we're looking at people fresh out of college or elderly people who are still mobile.

(agreement.)

A lot of the old buildings don't have the firewalls, and they won't let you live upstairs unless there's a firewall between the two, and it's very costly to put them in.

I think it's five apartments over American Family, and other buildings have a few more apartments. At the time, the City had a rental rehab program... (background noise.)

And people that have pets have nowhere to walk them.

If they brought a plastic bag, there wouldn't be a problem.

Do we have a law about people cleaning up after their dogs?

I don't think we do.

(side conversations about people walking pets.)

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

Newspaper, radio.

The Chamber.

MexTV for festivals and stuff.

We have a tourism tax that was passed a couple years ago that allows organizations to get advertising funds.

(phone ringing)

...banners...

...word of mouth...

I would imagine our Ledger circulation has gone down.

The Wednesday paper is supposed to circulate to the whole town, even if they don't subscribe.

And our radio station reaches a large area.

The media outlets are extremely fractured... the listening audience is all over the place. You'd have to blanket a lot of outlets to have effective coverage.

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

Sit-down restaurants.

That seems to be the center point of most downtown.

More ladies' stuff.

(side conversations, unintelligible.)

Clothing stores would be nice, but it's probably not going to happen, the way everything is big-box these days.

Sporting goods.

Yeah.

When you talk to people in sporting goods business, though, the big-box places and Internet have really chipped away.

Hallmark and the craft stores attract a lot of people. More craft stores.

Antique stores.

Scrapbooking.

Something to add to our tourism.

Something to bring the guys down with the gals over the weekends. A gun shop or a sporting goods store. There's a ton of outdoorsmen out there, and we don't really have anything for them.

Something you can't do within 20 miles of here. Something more specialized.

A specialty coffee shop, where you can sit down and socialize, or something like a deli, that might draw some younger people to the area.

I still think if we could ever get Brookstone and Home Decorators to do outlet stores here, that would bring people downtown. People drive in for outlet stores.

And Soft Surroundings, too. They're high-end stores.

A bakery would be a nice draw.

(agreement.)

I always think to myself, we have bakeries and clothing stores and sandwich shops not downtown, and so would people go downtown?

(many people talking at once.)

Some type of a shop or activity for the younger crowd. If mom and dad want to go downtown to eat or something, the kids will have nothing to do.

We had the billiard hall, and that's closed now.

Sometimes I wonder—if you've got those big entertainment draws like Mizzou sports, Lake of the Ozarks... how big do you have to get to make someone come here?

When you talk about restaurants, why does the Pear Tree do so well in such a small town? How do they attract people?

We had Barbary Coast here, and we couldn't keep it.

The quality wasn't good. It wasn't clean.

(agreement.)

Moderator: *Is there a need for more parks and recreation downtown?*

I don't know how you'd fit it.

I'd like to figure out something we could do with this space over here. I know they don't want people to park there. There has to be a way we could utilize it, if only a parking lot.

Moderator: *Let's talk about the look and feel of downtown. What are the areas for improvement?*

I'd like to see hanging baskets of flowers, something that draws your eye and unifies things. I don't think we'll ever get a unified façade, but something that unifies the Square. And something I've seen in Chillicothe, they have a lot of murals. They're so neat. I really appreciate and enjoy them. We have some big sides of buildings that could use something.

(agreement.)

Someone comes in to design the murals, and...(noise, unintelligible.)

It's around \$10,000, I think.

(many people talking at once about the cost of murals.)

Sidewalks, streetlights, garbage cans, park benches. They need to be worked on.

It all needs to tie in, with a master plan.

I think it's nice that people plant flowers and all, but something where everything is the same... all the flower beds coordinated or something, so it doesn't look haphazard.

It's difficult, with the size parameters and all that, it makes it hard to do the unifying planters. We had discussed doing four corners, and if those were successful, doing it someplace else. So you're unifying it, but in a slightly different way.

How are we on trees? Fulton has all these trees, and they don't have birds everywhere.

We have about 14 Bradford pears downtown.

The bigger these trees get, the more they're going to draw the birds. And that's a problem. They're going to be in Mexico no matter what, but if we keep rotating the trees and not let them get full-size, we may be able to solve the problem. Things that grow slow will probably be the best.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Are there other downtowns you've been to that you'd like to see Mexico resemble?

Moline, Iowa, has coordinated concrete with brick, and they have clothing stores and all that. It really looks neat. They have archways entering downtown and the hanging things. And Pella, Iowa, that's beautiful. That's a population just like ours, and they have a fancy restaurant, bakeries... they probably don't have all the lower-level income people, but that's a beautiful town. They used the theme of tulips and their heritage.

Archway entrances, that's a good idea.

It could be a halfway archway, like in St. Louis with some of the campuses.

And it could match the lights. That's an interesting concept.

I've always envied Fulton's Christmas lights. We tried that, but we couldn't get everybody to do it. Ours is a little more difficult, because of the Square, but we really didn't pull it off. People drive to Fulton during Christmastime.

Moderator: What would you say is the highest priority for downtown Mexico?

I'd say a master plan. To me, that's what this is. Have a master plan, and then commit to it.

Increasing the retail base rather than the service base.

I think a master plan's a good idea. The physical structure of downtown, both infrastructure and building repair.

How are you going to pay for it?

Yeah, like the outside of our building has to be painted, and we don't have the money right now.

Some buildings look nice on the outside, but inside there's issues.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

SECTION III

STUDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

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

The Missouri Military Academy is here. I don't know much about the MMA except there's guys from all over the world there.

We have a Wal-Mart.

(laughter.)

We have a Y.

Yeah.

Moderator: *Do you like living here?*

I plan on living here.

I don't plan on coming back.

Me either.

I like bigger towns like Columbia, but that's just me.

I don't think there's enough here to keep me stimulated activity-wise after high school. There's high school sports, but that's it. There's tennis courts, but who are you going to play with?

There's also not much incentive to come back after college if you graduate with any specialized degree.

I'm going to stay because I plan on farming.

I think overall it's a safe town.

I would rather leave after college, get a good steady job, and then come back with my kids. I could raise a family here.

It's more for raising children and for retirement. There's not a lot for the middle age group to do.

We used to have a lot of activities downtown, and we've just gone away from that. Like Gus Macker. It's a 3 on 3 basketball tournament.

When I was younger, they had the Fiesta Mexico, but they don't have that anymore. We don't do a lot anymore. The Sunset Festival is more geared toward children.

There's nothing that really focuses on teenagers anymore.

(agreement.)

Moderator: What is there to do, then?

Play sports.

Extracurriculars when the school year is going on.

We go to Columbia. If you want to eat, you go to Columbia.

Or see a movie or something.

And shopping.

Moderator: Does anybody do their shopping here?

Just for your staples, but not...

Stages is the only clothing store.

There was a lot more when I was younger.

We had a shoe store, too.

Moderator: What do you stay in town for?

Groceries.

I think a lot of people are ordering online for clothes and shoes.

If you're getting jewelry, you can do that here.

Craft supplies.

Cellphones, computers.

Anything you can get at Wal-Mart.

We just buy supplies here. If you're doing home repair, you can go to the lumber store.

We've got plenty of auto supplies.

Pizza places.

Chinese food.

Moderator: What do you go to Columbia for?

Movies. Shopping.

Our movie theater is going downhill. Things are falling off the wall, and they don't put them back up.

(many people talking at once.)

Fulton has a movie theater. They have 8 movies playing all the time. It's a college town, so it's... and it's not far to drive.

If you want books or CDs, you have to go to Columbia.

And sports equipment.

Moderator: Do people go to Fulton a lot?

Yeah.

Moderator: For dining, what's the story?

If you want Mexican, barbecue, or pizza, you'll be fine. But it's all fast food here.

And if we do get a sit-down restaurant, it never stays. I don't think our town could support an Applebee's.

I think they could. I think if they put it on 54.

And they have Applebee's to go. They could open up a smaller Applebee's.

Even just a restaurant like that. Something sit-down.

Something with some selection.

Moderator: What else do you do for entertainment?

We used to have mini-golf.

Bowling alley. But it's always league bowling. You can't just go there.

Fulton has a really nice bowling alley with dollar games on Wednesday.

Everybody goes out of town, and no one from other towns comes here. Our economy doesn't have anything to sustain it.

We've gone from being a white-collar community to a blue-collar community. People don't have the money to support stuff.

Unless you own your own business...

Moderator: Where do people work?

Factories.

School.

The hospital.

My dad doesn't even work here. He works in Jeff City.

Moderator: Do a lot of people commute?

They're all commuters.

A lot of factories closed down, so people found jobs outside of town.

Moderator: Where do you take friends from out of town?

Columbia.

Out to eat.

Nothing in town.

People usually come for weddings and stuff.

Or for high school class reunions.

There's no place for adults to go have a nice drink. You have to go to a smoky, nasty bar. You can't just sit and have a drink.

We go to the Y.

Fishing.

We don't have much for you after you're out of little league until you're in high school or junior high. There should be maybe soccer for little kids. There's YMCA soccer, but that's for little kids. It would be cool if we had more options for sports.

I think a private league could be good. Columbia has lots of them, ran by some kind of coach that wanted to start a team up.

And that's where a lot of our kids go.

Yeah, out of town.

Moderator: How often do you go out of town?

It depends on how old you are.

I don't go now as much as I did before.

I go like once a month.

Once or twice a month.

I go once a week.

Moderator: Do you come downtown often?

Never. There's nothing here.

To go to Coach's pizza.

He's going out of business, too.

Is he?

Yeah.

But that's the only reason we'd go downtown.

(many people talking at once.)

It would be nice if there was more clothing stores, for all ages. Places to bring people downtown.

Less payday loans downtown would be helpful.

Moderator: Did you used to come downtown when you were younger?

The soybean festival used to be huge.

And they used to have shoe stores, clothing stores.

A music store.

Sporting goods.

We did a lot of things when we were young.

The Soybean Festival used to be a big deal all around town.

They took it out of the downtown area, though.

So they still have it here, but they moved it out of downtown.

They changed the name of it.

Downtown still has the Missouri Parade.

Sunset Festival, Thursdays in September.

We have a Christmas parade.

For Sunset, all the businesses stay open later and they close off the Square and have games.

Teenagers who go there are just causing trouble.

They talked about trying to do stuff for the teenagers there, and what can you do?

Moderator: Is there trouble with teenagers?

Fights.

Cruising used to be big, but nobody does it anymore.

Some kid's broken into the high school concession stand over the summer.

People used to vandalize the Santa Train.

Moderator: Do you feel like you would visit downtown if it was nicer?

It's nice, but there's not much down here. If there were stores that interested me...

There's offices.

I wouldn't expect a lawyer's office downtown. I'd expect shopping places. On a town square, I'd want to see shopping places.

Moderator: Is downtown easy to get around?

Parking's horrible.

I don't understand why there's one-way.

People don't know how to drive.

If you didn't grow up here, you don't know how.

I think a lot of fault with the parking is the employees. There's not enough city police to monitor it. Fulton monitors it. We have all the employees parking on the Square. Courthouse employees won't park in the parking lots, and they boycott businesses if the police give them tickets.

Moderator: So there's parking off...?

There's parking off the Square. It's just for the little old ladies and people from out of town...

People might not know there's parking.

If everybody parked properly, there would be enough parking.

I notice when there's court in session, the whole Square is packed with cars.

That's a problem if people want to put restaurants down here. There's no place for their customers to park.

Maybe that's why people can't keep a steady restaurant down here.

I think restaurants that've been here are diner food, and we have diner food already.

There's turnover, but there's also a problem with the mindset. We always go to Columbia.

I think Mexico would only support a chain. I don't think a family-owned place would make it, unless it was really good food.

And there'd have to be shopping around it too.

If someone that was well-known in the community opened a restaurant, people would be more likely to go there.

People have tried to come here from other places, and it doesn't work.

I work at Innovated Technology, and everyone knows my boss, and he does good business. If you start a restaurant, you should be from Mexico.

I think the downtown diner that's right here would be successful if it was open past 2:00. I think that they would make it if they opened past 2.

Yeah.

It's good food.

Moderator: How are business hours?

I think around here, the businesses that are here now, 8:00 to 5:30 is fine, but if you start opening restaurants and things like that, they need to be open later.

Everyone closes by 6:00.

Except Thursdays.

There's only one restaurant on the Square.

Everything else not on the Square is open late.

You have to be open late in our town. It's a farming town. People don't get in from the field until late.

And people work second shift and third shift.

There's people down here at the bar in the morning, and they're just getting off work.

Moderator: If you could dream about what downtown should look like, what kind of businesses would you like to see? What kind of restaurants?

I don't think a chain would work downtown. There's not enough people to make money.

There was a deli shop, and that was pretty good. It closed. And shopping, like clothing.

More for teenagers. Where people can buy clothes and shoes.

I think a shoe store would be very nice. In Columbia, you can get a nice pair of dress shoes for 50 bucks. The one here had only expensive shoes.

We could use a sporting goods stores.

I don't think a shoe store would work, because of how many different sizes you'd have to carry. You can't have a variety, because you can't support that. When I'm working at Innovative and I tell people they have to order stuff, they don't like.

I think people would shop in Mexico if they had a place to do it. There are a lot of loyal people to the community.

I agree about the variety, but I think you have to have not only a shoe store, but have other things here. Give them no reason to go to Columbia, and they won't go just for shoes.

Moderator: What else do you think would be nice?

Books and music.

Books.

Definitely.

I think we need a coffee shop. Somewhere you can go and sit down.

The coffee shop we have is drive-through, so you can't sit here.

If we had like a Panera-type place, people could work on their laptops. Teachers could work on their lesson plans.

(many people agreeing.)

We get a lot of requests for like a tea room too.

Something for people who do quilt shopping.

Coach's pizza tried to make it a place where people can hang out, but he didn't make it work.

And they'd have to fix the parking.

You'd have to drive around to find a spot.

Moderator: Are there any other types of restaurants that you'd like?

A good Italian place would be good.

Something different.

We have two pretty good barbecue places.

We have no variety. Everybody wants to start the same restaurant.

Moderator: What about entertainment?

They used to have an arcade.

They had a place with pool tables and stuff.

Like a skating rink.

Laser tag.

Go carts.

The people that tried to take over mini-golf tried to do that, but they couldn't make it work.

(many people talking at once.)

I always wonder what the kids in Columbia do. What would you do if you lived in Columbia?

Shop.

They have the Arc. It's just a rec center.

There's a mini-water park uptown.

I know if we had places you could go at night, other than just eating, we'd probably do it. We still go bowling because it's there, but we'd do other stuff.

This is kind of off-subject, but I sort of remember from being about 7 or 8, people asking about Barbary Coast. That was a place that people from out of town people came to. These people from Minnesota came all the way.

It's was a seafood restaurant with entertainment.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

It's bad when you don't know what's open and what's closed in Mexico. You never know if anyone's business has closed.

And no one drives down the back side of the Square.

Moderator: Why did Barbary Coast close?

I don't think it was a lack of business. I think it was personal.

A lot of Mexico stuff, it's just bad business decisions. We don't have any real business-oriented people here.

There are a lot of people anxious to promote Mexico, but they don't have anything to promote.

Well, with Gus Macker, people didn't want to support it.

They didn't get enough volunteers.

Same thing with the air show. They brought in a lot of people for it, but it wasn't really locally supported.

Moderator: Does anyone live downtown?

There's a couple apartments above the buildings.

The Mormon missionaries live down here.

There are two really nice places above Santa Fe Trail.

Some of the buildings have really cool upstairs parts, but it costs a lot of money to redo them.

And you'd have to be able to park overnight.

Some buildings are redone and some aren't, and it makes downtown look bad.

They used to have a shaved ice place downtown, and I don't know why they shut down.

(many people talking at once.)

...I know he's working on that building.

People would probably want to live downtown if there were more lofts downtown.

I would say they would, because if you wanted an apartment, the apartment complexes aren't that good.

There's a lot of college kids from the ATC, and some single people, that would live in the apartments.

Moderator: What about the way downtown looks? Would it look any different, your dream downtown?

Strip all the metal awnings.

There's really nice brick behind it.

(agreement. Side conversations.)

It would also be nice if they get the flower beds uniform.

A uniform deal where all of them look the same.

Some of the misguided paint jobs could be redone.

We have a garden club. The area businesses could hire the gardening club to do the flowers.

We have a small park.

It's pretty. It's just not kept up.

I wonder what people think when they come in for the Miss Missouri pageant. They come shopping downtown. I wonder what they think, if it's quality shopping down here.

They love Mexico, but I don't know what they think about the shopping.

Miss Missouri pulls a lot of visitors.

But that's on the slide, too.

I think pageants aren't as popular.

If the Military Academy has parents weekend, those families come in and spend a lot of money here.

I think that's like the only events that sustain the hotel business here. People come for other festivals, but just for the day, or they bring campers. But Miss Missouri and parents weekend bring visitors to hotels.

Moderator: What else would you change?

Mark the parking better.

There's no sign for this one over here.

The parking lots could be spruced up a little bit.

Yeah.

The layout on that one's weird. It says "do not enter," so you have to go all the way around to get in the parking lot.

I don't mind the one-way streets, but that's just because I'm used to it. But I see people going the wrong way all the time.

You have delivery semis that take up the whole street.

If I had never driven in Mexico, and I came downtown, I would just be...

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Have you been to other downtowns that you think your downtown should be like?

Columbia.

Yeah, Columbia.

Jeff City.

I think Fulton looks really nice.

Yeah, it does.

They have a really nice restaurant on their downtown. And it's not astronomically expensive. You can get a good steak. A nice restaurant here would be... we have the country club, but who goes there?

They used to have a restaurant, and it used to flourish, out by the hotel.

Jeff City has—it's just really neat. The bricks are all getting to be the same. It's real nice.

Pedestrian-friendly.

They need to do something about the bricks on the sidewalks downtown. It's a bumpy ride for strollers.

Austin, Texas...

(laughter.)

We have a lot of people tell us how much they love the downtown Square, but other towns are more retail-oriented and built up. Ours just looks neglected.

If we got a college here, or a division of something or a community college...most of the ATC students are commuters anyway.

They have updated the ATC. Now there's a lot of people who go there. It is getting better.

They have no dorms, though. And who's going to live in the apartments we have here?

I have a friend who works at Porky's, and a lot of people come in there asking what to do in this town, and they send them to Columbia.

Someone from the pipeline came into the computer store, and I told them to go to the bar or the Mexican restaurant. That's pretty much it.

Do we have pool tables here?

They're closing that.

That was a big thing in Columbia.

They used to have one on this side, and that was nice.

Because of gas prices, people want to stay. It would be a good business move to start businesses in small towns.

And you've got to get something there for the teenagers. A club or something.

They had one by the drugstore for a while.

They used to have a skating rink.

That would be awesome.

I'd go there.

Laser tag...

(many people talking at once.)

You could do laser tag in the old Wal-Mart...

We definitely need restaurants.

Yeah.

That's the biggest thing we need is restaurants.

Moderator: Thank you very much for coming.

SECTION IV

CITY RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: Describe your community to me. Tell me a little about Mexico.

Very friendly city.

You get more done here in a day than you can in 2 weeks in St. Louis. And it's safer. We don't have the crime rate or the problems of a place like Columbia. We can go to the dentist, the doctor, the pharmacist, the shoe repair guy, all in the morning.

We kind of take care of each other. Neighbors are neighbors. When I lived in St. Louis, I didn't know my neighbors. Here, we take care of each other. I think it's a neighborly community.

I think it's a progressive city. It's very forward-thinking.

Our community economy was based for years and years on two major companies in one industry, which went away by 2000. The refractory industry. This community saw that coming and has brought in new diversified employers to try to find employment for those folks. I think it was industry dynamics.

Economy of scale.

Those jobs aren't elsewhere in the US.

Within 2 years, we had 17 new industries come into town.

And especially for a family, we have a solid high school and vo-tech education... they've got problems, but not any more than Columbia.

When you talk education, we have the advanced technical education center. That sucker's humming.

(many people agreeing.)

Economic development continues, and we have money from the state to establish Mexico as a plant sciences research center for Missouri and the Midwest. And we now have post-high school education. We also have a gem of a hospital for a community this size in rural America. Largest employer, dozens of specialty employers that you'd find only in larger communities. Outstanding medical services.

Having lived in towns of 90,000, I would say we're just the right size. Big enough to have enough services, but yet small enough that...

We have about 12,000 people.

I think our Y is outstanding, too.

At one time, we were the smallest town in the US to have a Y. This town is very giving. The Y has recently received a quarter million dollars. The public school raised money for the track. The first good track was put in with raised money, and now the softball field, and then the baseball field. You can just open a door and someone's given money to help.

I think we're moving forward on the cultural side, with the presence of the performing arts center. We have an estate that left a quarter million dollars to the Y and the performing arts center and journalism scholarships.

Our historical museum is outstanding, too. It recently expanded.

With donations.

(agreement.)

About 3 years ago, raised monies to add a comprehensive cancer center to our medical center, which now provides chemotherapy and radiation and other things. Wellness treatments. Supports and outstanding longtime diagnostic exam program that's received acclaim around the world.

We're also the home of the Miss Missouri pageant which brings people from around the state.

And the whole community supports that.

(agreement.)

And that's hosted at a private educational school that's been here a 100 plus years, Missouri Military Academy.

That draws people from all over the world. They really raid Wal-Mart when they come in.

We also have great walking trails that have been added within the last couple years.

(agreement.)

We have a lot of parks, too.

We have more parks per person than almost anybody in Missouri. Of course, God gave us the parks and the lakes, and the saints ahead of us have made it so we can use them. We've had smart public servants. Our city manager, who passed away, got a grant to put a walking path around the lake. That's just a tremendous trail. This town passed bond issues to repair the schools. Money came down from FEMA to make a tornado shelter, and we got the grant for a couple hundred thousand, so we're making a gym that we needed to make, but it's a heck of a

cooperation. And we passed a bond issue to add to the vo-tech building, and the state gave us money, and we're repairing major tractors, and John Deere has been giving us equipment to repair it.

And I believe we're pursuing that becoming an official John Deere training place. It would be the first in Missouri. We're the #1 agricultural county in Missouri. Soybeans, corn, wheat. This is a core agricultural county, a huge economical benefit, and also supporting economic development is one of the 3 best rural airports in outstate Missouri.

Which was also done by people who thought ahead of us.

We're the hometown of Senator Kit Bond, which is part of it.

I think this city knows how to develop partnerships to bring in everything we do. It's amazing.

I think the whole nature of the city is collaborative. They share ideas and build on them and bring in money.

We've got the new biodiesel plant, too.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Do you stay in town to do shopping?

There's leakage in that area.

I'm going to have to throw a blanket on that. We're missing an organic food place, a good variety of stuff. That forces us to go to Columbia, for that. The basic everyday necessities are not a problem, but we actually started putting in our own garden.

I have friends who have the same issue.

There's 3 or 4 places over there. That's another danger of Mexico, that we're close enough to Columbia to go there once a week. It's about 40 minutes.

It can be a blessing and a curse. Now, from St. Louis, 42 miles is normal... shopping is probably, if we need one thing, it would be that and even if you want to go to get basic necessities like a good suit. We lost our primary...you can buy the everyday stuff, but we're talking nice stuff.

I work part-time at the library, and we're constantly being asked where to buy books, and there's no place around.

I got to go to Columbia to get computer programs. I can buy a computer from Wal-Mart, but the programs... and that might be coming...

There's an irony to this, because a high percentage of people shopping at Wal-Mart aren't from this town. They're from neighboring county. We have a negative labor force. If we didn't have help coming in from other towns, we wouldn't be able to have the workforce we have.

The two most cited reasons folks leave Mexico is for shopping and for better restaurants.

Yeah. Dining out.

Yeah.

But there is a clientele, the minimum wage people, those people have all their needs met in Wal-Mart and all the fast food. Wal-Mart supplies a certain need.

Moderator: What about restaurants?

My opinion, we don't have any.

We don't have a destination restaurant. There are towns our size that have a destination restaurant. An example would be Paris. People drive for the Pear Tree. It would be a blessing for our community to have a destination restaurant, particularly on our Square.

I think our restaurants do fine.

I disagree.

I'm not saying they fill the bill. I just think they are successful.

(many people arguing at once.)

I cook all the time, because there isn't much to eat out.

As an example, last year I went to Beck's in Fulton for supper, and half the people there were from Mexico.

And Fulton's about 20 minutes away.

In Fulton, you have 24 hour eateries with those students and their parents. We haven't been able to get back to that. There's a demand for it, but not a demand enough to make it successful. I might be wrong. Tablecloths and cloth napkins?

There's a demand. I was in Beck's for lunch last week, and there were construction people there. It wasn't just old ladies and young couples.

(many people talking at once.)

Going back to the shopping thing, I had to have a white shirt for a funeral, and I went to every clothing store in Mexico and could not find one.

(many people agreeing that Mexico needs more clothing shopping.)

...we got a health center, which helps people with food and clothing for the working poor, and we have a handy shop which hires handicapped people, and they have 50 or 60 employees, and people come to this town to use that handy shops. It's one of the best in Missouri. These people have different problems, and they try to gauge the work to exactly what they can do, and they do that. They're very successful.

(background phone conversations.)

Moderator: What's the higher-end restaurant in town?

Country club.

It's not really open to the public, though.

It's open on Saturdays.

Does the public know it?

It's not advertised.

They do have great food.

They feel uncomfortable—we've tried to take my father-in-law, and he feels uncomfortable because it's a country club.

And they're trying to work on that image a little.

That just goes back to that age group, I think.

Moderator: What do you do for fun?

Make your own.

Go to Columbia.

Movies.

There are sports here, and the community supports its athletes. You have two golf courses, you have a theater in Presser Hall. They have a theater and music there. And coming soon, we're going to have Walk Back in Time. We do that around the Historical Society. That's an annual thing.

There's big special events, but as far as weekends, something to do, there's not much to do.

I don't think people move to Mexico for Wednesday night entertainment. I moved to Mexico for peace and quiet. I like walking around the park without feeling like I'm going to get mugged...if you want entertainment, you can find entertainment. If you want to see a real good movie, you go to Columbia once a month.

When you live in a city, you drive across town to do stuff sometimes.

I cherish some things more than "entertainment."

I never have to worry about finding people to be around. We make our own fun.

That's small-town entertainment.

(unintelligible side conversations.)

We have strong churches.

Amen.

All kinds! And they're active, and cooperative.

I think we have a community with significant numbers of folks who like to hunt and fish, and Mark Twain Lake is within 30 minutes. Folks who like to hunt and fish like this.

I think you have to define what entertainment you're looking for.

Moderator: Let's talk about downtown. Do you feel positive about the direction downtown is going, or negative?

I think I...I would prefer to see more retail and less service businesses on the Square. A lot of town Squares, you can see the evolution, and there's less retail, and when it opens up, it may be a bank, a lawyer, a service. That's good, those folks contribute, but there's not the traffic flow. One of the questions asked, where do you bring people when they come to visit, and...the scrapbook store. And the country club. And then Green Park. Downtown is a little bit of a...I hate to say void, because that sounds so negative, and we do have retail business.

We have quilt shops and antique shops that people come to visit. We show our visitors the Square because it's charming, but I don't do everyday shopping here.

So, the courthouse is across the street, and it's kind of an anchor to our Square, and there are probably many other rural counties that have the courthouse and the Square, and maybe this has already happened, but if we could contact those other Chambers and communities by email and ask them how they might have been successful in improving their downtown, that might give us an opportunity to learn without having to recreate the wheel. We could also inquire what they tried that was not successful... Likely 40 or 50 counties in Missouri with a similar setup, and there's got to be one or two that have been successful.

We would like something to kind of anchor downtown, bring more traffic, but we're very limited with handling traffic. We need parking, we need traffic flow. We just heard that a YMCA was built in downtown Belleville, Illinois, and it turned the whole downtown around. If we had much more traffic, it would be a real issue. There's no place to park.

There's places. You just have to walk a block.

People will walk a block in Columbia mall but they won't here.

(agreement.)

Moderator: So do any of you do regular business downtown?

At the antique store, a furniture store—Stubblefield's—the scrapbooking store. I go in bi-monthly. During Christmas, I shop Mexico first. I'm here 2 to 3 times a month at least. And the scrapbook store is very popular.

If we did a survey of residents, there's probably some that haven't been down here in 3 months.

(agreement.)

One of the things I'd like to talk about is the appearance of the buildings. About two years ago, I talked to the city manager about the backside of the businesses downtown. It was terrible. Well, they're painted now.

But they still look horrible.

Yes, but what else are you going to do. They said they couldn't do anything about the back of Frank's restaurant. And another thing is that the maintenance crews don't keep the weeds out of the intersection.

That's MODOT's responsibility.

(many people talking at once.)

You're right, though.

(agreement.)

We need better appearances.

My problem with some of the stuff is, where is our individual responsibility? I have a building, and it should've been condemned, but I feel it's my responsibility to keep that place up. If you own a building, why should the city have to pay to keep it up? If more of us could take responsibility...

They assessed the owners to paint the buildings.

I think some of that was done with our Community Development Corporation. I think our CDC, the banks have all grouped together to loan money and it's pretty generous, and I think they have money to lend...it's just having the people to want to use it.

And the ability to pay it back. Some of those buildings are over 100 years old.

I belong to the senior organization, and seniors come up to the Square and clean up the trash around the Square in front of these individual stores. I won't do that. If those owners don't clean up after themselves.

Have you all been to Pella, Iowa? They're out scrubbing their walks at the crack of dawn.

(many people talking at once, side conversations.)

Moderator: What do you do downtown?

There's a diner.

There's pizza.

Pizza works is here.

Just off the square, there's two or three.

Chinese.

(many people talking at once.)

On the north side of the Square, there's a tattoo parlor, a pool hall, and a pregnancy center. The only thing is the jewelry store and the place where they sell fish.

And the sewing store.

And Pizza Works.

And the place that sells carpet.

That's a good point. I think they pull in several contractors and folks from other small towns, and the high fuel prices may be helping some of our businesses in town not making Home Depot or Lowe's worth the trip. There's an odd mix of...

(side conversations.)

A pet store.

A Quick Loan.

(laughter.)

That's a pretty strong side.

Real estate.

Have you been to Fulton, Missouri lately? Years ago, Mexico and Fulton had a friendly rivalry, and Mexico was so far ahead, and now it's just the opposite. They have a beautiful YMCA and a downtown Square... you need to go to Fulton and look around. Their beautiful downtown courthouse...

But courthouse is a County thing.

The college has a lot to do with it.

You take University of Missouri out of Columbia, and what do they got?

That's why we don't have retail. If you're not a specialty shop, you cannot compete with Columbia. You can't stock the merchandise.

Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? What about business hours?

I think they're user-friendly.

They stay open late on Thursdays.

Yeah.

There's a village square association, and they're diligent to try to stay open longer more days a week. They work together.

And the courthouse is good for parking after hours.

And it really is, even working, you can come down, do your shopping, and still be back at work.

Moderator: What about signage?

I think the city could do a better job of marking itself. We have some marking, esoteric looking signs.

There's a sign on every corner on how to get to MMA. It can be done.

Moderator: Is there any housing downtown? Any need for housing?

A few second-floor apartments.

People actually live there?

Yeah. They're nice.

Some of the problems have been codes, to have them fire code okay, and that's been an issue, and it takes a different kind of person to...and there are those people out there that don't want to live in a ranch, they want to live in a loft.

You could market that to younger teachers who come in. I would've loved it. It's very in vogue right now for that age group. It would just take some marketing.

I would imagine they're all full anyway.

So you'd have to have more available.

(many people agreeing.)

It's an option. It could be improved on.

Moderator: Is there anything else about the look and feel of downtown?

I like things to stay with the old traditional look, as opposed to making it new.

(agreement.)

It would be nice if there was a signage ordinance.

There is one.

We probably have 10-15 different looks in awnings on the buildings, and some are better than others.

I love the flags, and Centralia's very good at changing theirs, and businesses buy them.

Banners?

It's not...

(many people talking at once.)

I don't think Mexico knows what it wants to be. We used to do the "north of the border" thing, and then we were the village square...

There's still a village square.

They were going to bring in historical designations, and nothing qualified for that. And now we're going to be the biofuels capital.

We can be more than one thing.

But let's focus in on something.

If we could just have a cohesive plan of what it should look like, it would be nice. You're going to change over time. I think what the look would be, we need to clean up, have people take responsibility.

And the flowers out in front.

I walk the Square almost every day, and there's probably 2 or 3 planters that are nice. Most are weeds. Either take care of them or put chips on them or something. I saw 6 dumpsters over 2 blocks. There are dumpsters everywhere.

One key business that's unique is we still have a car dealership just right off the Square. Over the last 30 years, the trend has been... (unintelligible)... most are off the interstate.

We have 2 car dealers right off the Square.

And when people come into town, when they're looking for vehicles, that's a draw.

Moderator: Let's dream a little about the future of downtown. What are some businesses you'd like to see?

I miss Jefferson Street. It was a great gift store.

It was a combination of gifts and used clothing.

A consignment store.

And then they got into gifts and stuff.

I mentioned it before, a destination restaurant and pub. I'd throw that in too. We sometimes have a stigma with a tavern type thing that is often misplaced. I think that would be a draw. It's a draw to Fulton.

We had a destination restaurant with Barbary Coast, but I know that he struggled.

And the service wasn't...

Well, and it's easier for towns like Fulton that has a college.

We don't have that here in Mexico.

(background noise. Side conversations.)

Like, Porky's, those waitresses have been there forever. It's the same core group of people.

But she's constantly looking for help.

You'd have to work your tail off to do a restaurant downtown. You're working 70, 80 hours a week. It's not something for just anybody.

And it's got to be a family thing, because the franchises don't want to be in the downtown. You're not going to get an Applebee's or TGI Fridays downtown. You'd have it out by Wal-Mart.

(agreement.)

I'd like to see a store for sheets and towels and housewares. I wanted a lampshade the other day. Where do you go?

Wal-Mart.

One thing, we're talking just the Square area...we've got Westlakes & Stage, just two blocks... are they considered downtown?

They're West Plaza shopping center, though.

But it would draw people in this area.

(many people talking at once.)

It directly impacts the downtown.

Maybe we're looking at a block, and we ought to expand that a little.

And I'd love to see a destination restaurant in the railroad house or the jail.

That would be really cool.

The old County Jail—supper there would be really cool. Maybe we need to look beyond these 4 streets. We don't have to go that far to do that.

Moderator: What about the look of downtown?

Well, clothing stores would be nice. However, when the stores have gotten merchandise in, it sits for 6 months.

It needs to be a coordinated look of colors, of awnings, of windows, of something that is several steps more impressive than it is now.

Are we enforcing our codes, though?

As you walk in the Square, count the different awnings.

(agreement.)

Well, but we need to help coordinate.

We need funds to get it started.

The pendulum can't swing too much toward standardizing. Columbia's downtown just tore down the concrete awning there, and it did look kind of Soviet.

(laughter.)

Jefferson City has the most lush flowers on High Street, beautiful hanging baskets. I don't know if the city does that or their gardeners organization, but it's just so pretty. It's so appealing.

Most of us were taught that first impressions are what you're going to remember. If you're coming over the overpass, what do you see?

When I came here for the first time, I thought, "You're bringing me where to live?"

I had the same impression.

It's not a good first impression.

There's some aspects that look good. I think it's neat, some of the things you drive through.

The old homes are beautiful.

Yeah, and the church.

But some of our approaches into town, you think...

That's true with any city, though.

The one thing I'm struck by is, I travel a lot, and I'm in Kansas, and I tell people where I'm from, and people have been here and the know about it. I rarely ever talk to anybody that doesn't know where Mexico is.

I've traveled all over the US, and I'm not moving anywhere else. I do like Colorado, though.

(laughter.)

I've met all kinds of people all over, and we've got a lot to offer. We have some negative things, but...

Moderator: *Have you been to other downtowns where you think, "wow"?*

Fayette, Missouri. It's a small town, and we've seen much smaller towns than Mexico that look much better.

The ones I've noticed are more isolated from other towns. Chillicothe, for example. You have to go 40 miles to find anything else. Your location has a lot to do with it. Columbia has sucked the life out of our downtown. A lot of people say Wal-Mart, but we've got one of the oldest Wal-Marts in town.

In the DREAM materials, they talked about streetscapes. It sounds really cool. Montgomery City has a fountain, you know, and maybe some flowing water.

(many people talking at once.)

Fountains, or larger plantings or benches or a little plaza or something...this neat little park over here.

I think it would complement a coordinated look.

When you freshen up your home, maybe that's what Mexico needs.

I think the City's doing a good job of planting trees. In the 80's, we had somebody come in with Bradford Pears, and we made national news for being the bird capital...bird droppings everywhere.

(many people talking at once.)

And then there was the beep.

But they're making a conscious effort to replace the Pears with others. And they fight vandalism constantly, too.

I don't know what the number is, but I do know that there is a traffic capacity down here, and that has to be taken into account. This area can only handle so many cars, and there's limited parking. The traffic flow and the parking has to be taken into consideration.

But it's possible.

Does one-way streets have anything to do with it? That's the most confusing...

They used to be two-way...

The perimeter of the Square, there's only one vacant store. Right? The JC Penney?

But some of them are filled with junk. There's a couple empty buildings. Not a huge amount, though.

It could be worse. And you see town squares that are. And not just squares, but even strips. Like Lebanon, it's very similar to High Street in Jeff City, and they fight the same thing—the Wal-Mart, and Springfield 40 minutes away.

And I don't think we can win that fight, so why bother. We need to complement. We're beginning to use Columbia as an asset, to being 40 minutes away without the crime and the traffic.

As an alumni of the University, we have a good active group here that tries to have events downtown. I've been with other groups that have tried to have events downtown, like the basketball tournament a few years ago. And we had a lot of resistance from business owners, fighting it, and once we did it, they had so many people downtown that they loved it. But those are special events. They're not week to week.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

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SECTION V

BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

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

Great healthcare, low crime.

Friendly, small.

I think that most everybody knows everybody, and it's nice...and yet, it's big enough that people can get most everything they need here. We have a pretty good selection of businesses.

We're close enough to the amenities that we can drive.

(agreement.)

Welcoming community... (unintelligible)

I think we have good schools.

Yeah, I think as a rule, people in Mexico care about the well-being of everybody.

The community will come together on projects. We built a Y, we got a veteran's home here, we worked to get Saturn here, which we didn't get, but we worked really hard.

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

I think right. It's just a slow process. There's lots of areas we need help in.

I don't think anybody wants to be a Columbia, but we want to grow and be a healthy thriving city, and we're moving in that direction.

Moderator: *What are the main shopping areas in town?*

South, the Wal-Mart.

The grocery store, too, and the hardware store.

And Stage department store.

The West Plaza shopping center.

Moderator: *Do people come here to shop?*

We draw a lot from the small communities around.

Yeah, people come here from all around.

(agreement.)

Centralia, they used to go to Columbia, but now they come here for the bigger Wal-Mart instead of fighting traffic.

(agreement.)

With Walgreens here, people would rather do that than fight traffic at Wal-Mart.

(agreement.)

The ironic thing is that none of us have mentioned the downtown.

Well, a lot of the businesses downtown are more specialty shops.

Services, too.

If you can't go to Wal-Mart, get a lawyer, or buy a car.

We have a pharmacist downtown.

Everyday shopping, though...

Good point there.

Moderator: What about dining and entertainment options? What are popular choices? Where do you take visitors?

We have a number of restaurants, but I wish we had more.

Mexican, Chinese.

Dairy Queen.

Somebody visiting, there's no real nice place to take them other than the country club.

(unintelligible...)...atmosphere.

Porky's I like, but it doesn't have atmosphere.

Yeah, we really lack restaurants in the downtown area.

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

Paddling.

It's not going in the wrong direction as fast as people thought it would, but we're kind of treading water here. I'm not embarrassed about downtown, but we've lost clothing stores that brought some people in, but we've replaced that with law firms. But there's still things to do and buy, but visitors liked to go look at clothes, and that seems to jump out as things they miss. I like having a car dealership downtown, but my customers need a place to walk around and shop.

(agreement.)

Two years ago, there were about four buildings on the Square for sale, but I don't think there's many for sale now.

There's two. The old Penney's and Miller's.

I think it would be nice to have a variety of businesses downtown, which is hard to do when you face Wal-Mart.

But with clothes, we had clothes for years, but we can't compete with the big box stores, and I'm not talking about Wal-Mart. You can't compete with Dillard's and Penney's.

Same with the shoe stores. They just couldn't compete.

Part of the shoe store problem was generation, too. As people get older, there's not always somebody to step up and take over.

(agreement, unintelligible.) ...men's clothing store.

Well, we noticed the down trend when we didn't have the factories, the office people, with dress codes, and even the banks are loosening up on their standards.

(agreement.)

...even though they're visiting the business, there needs to be something to keep them.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Why do you all choose to have your businesses downtown.

Close to the courthouse. We're a law firm.

Your downtown is usually your hub of the city, and the strip malls used to be the specialty stores, but now it's reversed. They used to have Thursdays and Fridays where you couldn't find a parking spot anywhere.

Well, there's two huge parking lots around the Square, and at your furthest point in those parking lots, you're closer to the store than you would be at Wal-Mart. I just think that people are spoiled.

(agreement.)

They try to enforce that, and I don't know why they can't. Police should ticket.

Moderator: Is there a time limit?

2 hours.

But they won't enforce it.

They'll get tickets if they don't keep their cars... and two hours may not be long enough for the beauty shop or something. It almost needs to be a little longer.

I always tell my customers that they can bring me their ticket and I'll pay it.

(background noise, unintelligible.)

The main reason is employees who park downtown. It's not just the courthouse.

We had meters, and they took them out.

Yeah.

It might've been 10, 20 years ago.

Moderator: Let's talk about the user-friendliness of downtown. How are business hours? Are they convenient?

We're open 9 to 5, Thursday night until 7, and as far as complaints, I hear that there's some businesses that are closed on Saturdays. People are just kind of used to it. There's some Saturdays that die in the afternoon and then pick up at 4:00.

We're open until noon on Saturday, and I've had people complain about it, but we didn't have any business when we did it. Maybe if I advertised... but Saturdays are definitely the slowest day of the week. And I've never had anybody ask for longer hours on weekdays.

Our hours are until 5:30, but we're usually there until 6, depending on our customers. I've never been open nights. Aufferberg is trying to stay open 2 or 3 nights a week, but it doesn't work for us. Our Saturdays used to be stronger, but they're not anymore. Most car dealerships in cities out on the highways, they do 90% of all their business on Saturdays. Mondays is probably my busiest day.

I have to go along with you. Mondays and Saturdays are our busiest days.

You're busy on Saturday?

All day, until 5. Saturday mornings are booked. There's a break in the afternoon, but then we pick up again.

It's a culture for each of our own individual businesses, but for any of us to get excited about staying open longer, traffic would have to change. There has to be people there. Maybe we need to advertise and put the cart before the horse.

On Thursday nights, if I don't have scheduled appointments, I don't have anything. But a few shops are open Thursday nights.

Well, the courthouse parking thing, people don't see cars, maybe they don't think anything's going on. It makes downtown look busy.

(agreement.)

Moderator: *Is it easy for people to find their way to downtown and find what they're looking for?*

I think so.

I think that's one good point about being downtown. It's easy to find us. And everybody is glad to direct you to other businesses. And we do have the little maps, VSA has maps, and people do pick those up off my counter.

Moderator: *Let me ask you about housing downtown. Is there much housing downtown?*

Not really.

Upstairs in a few buildings, rental places.

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

I don't think so.

My sister's from Texas, and I'm from Fulton—the big trend there is they build small downtown areas in Texas and they put in beautiful apartments above, and they have people watching their buildings all night long. They have people walking through the streets and eating at their restaurants. That's all they build anymore. I also think that all your baby boomers are looking at downsizing from big houses, and they want to travel. They want to be able to leave. You can't leave a house by itself, but if you're leaving an apartment, and your neighbors are around, you're safe. I think there's going to be a big trend of high-income people downsizing.

What do they do about parking?

These places have parking around it.

That above us would make it awesome. We've talked about it, but it always comes back to where they park.

But in big cities, they don't have parking.

They use public parking spots. There's waiting lists at these places, these apartments.

They have elevators for people who can't do stairs.

I like the concept, having built-in people downtown.

(agreement.)

I was just in St. Louis, and I was telling people you can get anywhere in 10 minutes in Mexico.

And 10 minutes seems like forever, too.

Speaking of Fulton, I'd like to see a nice restaurant, a Beck's type restaurant. I don't know if these businesses make money, but their city has really changed in the last few years. I think more and more Mexico people are spending money in Fulton than they used to avoid driving to Columbia.

Did Beck's say why they haven't come here?

I think it's the location. They've looked here, though. They want to be the anchor of a shopping mall or something...but there's a college town. It's fairly young at Beck's, and it's definitely great food.

They took an old building that used to be a yarn shop, and they took out the ceiling, and they went down to the brick wall, and it's got three levels. They don't use the upstairs as much as they'd like, but they do lots of events. We don't have any locations to do anniversary parties...

Lenore's.

Porky's has a room.

And the country club. But that may be something...

And Coach's pizza, they took an old building and they made it a bigger space. Maybe it's not as popular as a family restaurant, but he's invested a lot of money, but he doesn't even make enough money to pay someone to work there full-time.

I thought Beck's would be considered an upscale restaurant, which is more expensive than going somewhere else. Dinner was \$26 for a steak. You don't do that every day. It's a special occasion place.

I'd like to see that in the downtown.

(agreement.)

I know we're talking about downtown, and we'd love to drag businesses downtown somehow, but I don't know how.

JC Penney has that big old building.

That's for sale.

That would be a good spot.

If it's a restaurant, you'd have business at night. Parking's always an issue, but the lots aren't far.

Beck's does not have parking. It's in the middle of a block.

If you've got something good, people will come.

Cici's in Columbia doesn't have parking.

People complain about parking, but I think if you have it, they will come. Quit fining the people and fine the businesses whose employees are parking on the street.

Moderator: *Let's talk about other kinds of businesses you'd like to see downtown.*

I think the biggest thing would be a good restaurant, maybe a good sporting goods store.

Clothing, shoes.

More variety for people to be able to walk around and spend money down here. We have to convince people to shop down here, but we have to draw them in, maybe with a good restaurant.

I'm amazed at the scrapbooking store and the two quilting stores. People drive from out of town to get to these stores.

They're pretty well known.

I guess if you do that sort of thing, you drive for it.

I think it's appreciating what we've got downtown.

Do we have a bakery?

My wife goes to Fulton to get cakes. We don't have a good bakery.

(agreement.)

For a year, I opened up an outlet in front of our store. They would deliver baked goods. But you can't afford...it's very labor-intensive, and we didn't have to meet all the codes because we were just an outlet.

Somewhere that has coffee and bagels.

Montgomery has a niche, and I wish we could have something like that.

Something like that would be excellent.

Who owns the JC Penney building?

(speculation.)

I'd like to see that building become something special. There's potential there.

When people come in, that's what they see, and they think the downtown looks like crap. I'm like, "Wait a minute! What about the Square?"

That building was for sale a couple years ago, and it needs a lot of work...

Back to your donut shop, wasn't there a donut shop years ago on the north side of the Square? That billiard place is for sale. That would be an ideal place for it.

I'm not sure why Barbary Coast didn't fly.

I think they had chef problems.

That was a great draw.

Very unique.

And a lot of people came from the city down here, tour buses.

People would travel all over the US for that stuff.

You'd walk in the door and there was a bathtub.

It was a good idea.

But it was one of those unique restaurant type of places.

And he had an unusual menu. Alligator or whatever. He just didn't follow through.

There was a personality conflict or something.

I think we can sit around and talk about downtown, but the thing I keep coming back to is the market—I don't know if I'm smart enough to know what would make it.

Who would've thought that the cosmetic store would be here 35 years? If you get the right people running it, it's customer service.

And it's specialty.

It's customer service.

I think sporting goods has the same problem.

Well, we did have a sporting goods store where we are, and he was killed in an accident.

Well, they've succeeded in the past.

Wasn't there drugs involved in that?

(side conversations.)

I think we could support that. And a bakery or a tea room. But you have to have numbers coming through the doors.

I always think it's funny, we've lost our clothing and shoes, but we still have 3 jewelry stores. But we also have 9 payday loans.

(agreement.)

I tell you, on that sporting goods store... (unintelligible)

Moderator: What about parks and recreation? Is there any demand for that downtown?

I don't know that there's a need for it. We've got the one over there by... but I don't know how much it's utilized, but it looks nice.

I'd like to see more benches downtown. I know when I'm walking around other downtowns, you can sit down and look around.

A lot of people use the bench by the courthouse.

Yeah.

Visitors would use it more than people that live here, but...

Moderator: What about the look and feel of downtown? Streets and sidewalks?

I think they're in good condition. We've worked on quite a few of them.

The bricks were put down on a sand base, and with some of the water issues... so they were taken out in sections and concrete poured and the bricks re-laid.

I think the City has done real good keeping the downtown up, and I think there's room for improvement—trash cans, street lamps—but I think the City has done a very good job taking care of downtown.

(agreement. Many people talking at once.)

And those Bradford Pears...

One of the things that Fulton has done that creates a neat look is they have brick streets.

But we hate them, we hate them, we hate them. Never do that.

As an outsider, I love it.

But they're always torn up, they're always rough.

(many people arguing about brick streets.)

What about stamped concrete?

And other towns create these facades over these buildings...

The modern covers on some of the buildings...

And those awnings!

(noise, unintelligible.)

...replace the aluminum-sided windows with wood-frame windows, to make it look old. I don't know if there are grants for that.

People are scared to take off metal facades because they're afraid of what's under there.

...they really did a fancy tile roof. He's very good about new materials used to make things look old.

Moderator: What about other aesthetic aspects of downtown?

I came in today, and I thought that when you come over on that ugly green aqua blue...

(many people talking at once.)

You could do something with that bridge to make it look really neat. You could brick it or something.

Go across it and see what you think. As a new person walking in, that bridge is my very first impression.

And around the bridge, there's weeds and railroad buildings and the old jail.

And the pawn shop that burned.

That gets my eye off the bridge. It's not good.

I think the courthouse provides nice green space. I don't know if we need more. And we've talked about making the street pedestrian pathway, but I think it would be more inconvenient. I think it's nice that we have as much green space as we do.

As long as we keep those birds out.

We're doing better about private ownership. Buildings have been bought and fixed up. We don't have as many out-of-town building owners, and you also have to be able to afford to fix it up.

(side conversations.)

... I'd like to see someone take that over.

Moderator: *As businesspeople, is there anything the City could do to help your businesses thrive?*

Other than just sprucing up some of the things we've already got, like lampposts and uniformity in the flower beds... but I think the business owners have been putting their flowers in.

How do you all feel about how the City gets snow off the sidewalks?

Awesome, around the Square.

I wish they'd expand it.

I think it started out that some of us chipped in to buy the first piece of equipment, and then the City was using that around the block, and it does need to be expanded.

Did we pay yearly?

I don't think so.

(side conversations.)

The snow has to be removed on the Square, but you can't do that until night.

I know they use the street cleaner downtown, but it needs to be more often, because there's an awful lot of trash by my business. There's a lot of trash by my side of the Square. It's cups and bottles and diapers, just like things have been blown from trash out back and a bag got busted open. A little bit of everything. And we've got trash cans on every corner.

I think there could be more trash cans.

We could use one by the bench.

I think people walk right by them.

Something I really like when I go into small towns, I love bulletin boards with garage sales and lost dogs and all that. I find that fascinating. There's music here and it's free, or there's a sale here. People come down to look at those.

(agreement.)

We could probably paste our windows with bulletins...

(phone ringing...)

Moderator: How do you communicate with your customers about what's going on?

We do direct mail.

We do TBS.

Advertising is mainly in the newspaper.

We use newspaper and radio, but limited.

We do a lot of emails now too.

I still do lots of radio.

Our City is redoing their website, so there's an opportunity there.

How many websites do we have? The City, the Chamber... I think we need one central, easy website.

You could probably search for it.

I can go into Google and find it.

You could have school closings, downtown events, everything on one site.

I think it's mexicomo.org.

I thought it was mexicom.com. I think the Chamber is .org.

It's really a good site. I got a compliment from someone in Columbia about it.

I'm not an Internet person, but we receive residual income because all of our employees use our website and then search on the Internet. If you had a good website that people used...

Is that Good Search? Is that what it's called?

That might be a good way to build some income up.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: What do you think about creating a special business district to support projects in the downtown area, with an extra tax?

I'm for something like that, myself. Some way to get additional money to make downtown better. I think that's probably very important, to get a full-time person to organize and plan downtown. Somebody that's focused on that.

Agreement.

If it means a quarter percent sales tax, I'd be okay with that.

Moderator: Thank you very much.