

Neosho, Missouri

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION & ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FOR MISSOURI



MARKETING PLAN
JANUARY 2010



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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DOWNTOWN
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MISSOURI

MARKETING PLAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Neosho's downtown has experienced a good start on revitalization and growth over the past several years, but to transform that area into a prime choice for tourism, shopping, and business location, a focused and ongoing marketing plan is needed. The adage "If you build it, they will come" doesn't generally work in the real world. In addition to building it, you have to tell them it is there and why they want to come. You also have to know how to connect what you have to offer to the correct Target Audience that would be interested in it.

This Marketing Plan identifies six primary objectives for Neosho, goals and strategies for each of the five objectives, and ideal Target Audience for each of the goals. Taken together, these objectives promote one key message—Neosho offers a unique, fun and convenient place to shop or visit.



Newton County Courthouse

The six primary marketing objectives for Neosho are:

Objective 1: Rebrand Downtown Neosho

Rebrand the target area to create a cohesive and exciting image that is both easily understood by, and which captivates, the target audience.

Objective 2: Monitor Residents and Market

Through the use of continued surveys and focus groups monitor resident and visitor attitudes about Neosho.

Objective 3: Increase Sales

Increase the number of shoppers, diners and visitors to Neosho.

Objective 4: Promote Positive Perceptions

Promote a positive perception of Neosho in the minds of local and regional residents and CROWDER Students.

Objective 5: Strengthen Business Environment

Increase the business and retail development in Neosho and take steps to ensure longevity.

Objective 6: Increase Population

Increase the residential population in Neosho area.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Neosho is located in the scenic Ozarks and convenient to both rural and metropolitan areas. Its residents have a strong sense of community and consider it friendly and safe - a great place to raise a family.

Parks & Springs

Neosho has recently revived its identity as “The City of Springs.” The city offers several natural water features and outdoor activities in its five parks. Big Spring Park, which produces one million gallons of water daily, is the local favorite and located adjacent to downtown.

Another water-oriented attraction in Neosho is fishing and the National Fish Hatchery, which is the oldest operating fish hatchery in the United States. The Hatchery is federally funded and receives approximately 40,000 visitors each year. Attendance is expected to double upon completion of the new visitors center.

Tourism

Neosho has ties to many historical and influential figures. These figures include artist Thomas Hart Benton, inventor George Washington Carver, ragtime composer James Scott, and Herman Jaeger, who helped save the French wine industry when their grapevines were threatened by disease.

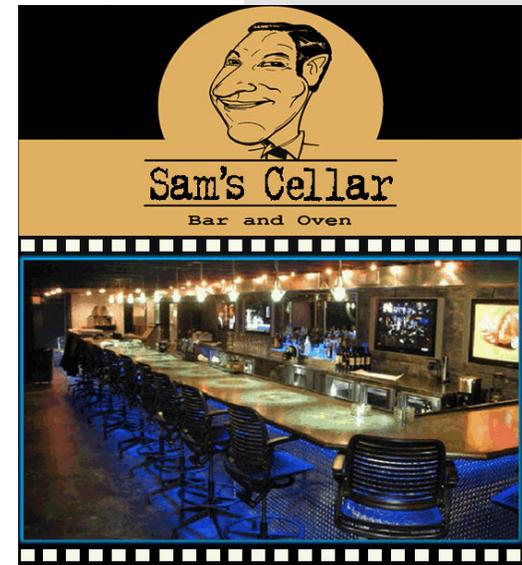
Annual events that bring visitors to Neosho include the Thomas Hart Benton Festival, the Annual Dogwood Tour, and Missouri’s Largest Garage Sale, in the spring. The Living History Event, National Fish Hatchery Fishing Derby, and Fourth of July Celebration are held in the

summer. The “Taste of Home” Cooking School and History Alley & Interactive Tour Day are in the fall, and the Holiday Open House and Winter with the Dickens Christmas Fair and Parade are held each winter. Weekly attractions include the Farmer’s Market and Tuesday-evening performances at the County Courthouse gazebo by local musicians. The City Library provides a good draw to the downtown, but is in present need of expansion, which provides a challenge to keep it located in downtown.

Business Climate

Neosho has a strong employee base with the following business breakdown: 12 percent retail, 2 percent dining and 43 percent service. Business hours, however, are not customer friendly. Many shops are only open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Retail that closes in step with the standard work day contradicts the desired perception of Neosho as a viable destination for consumers.

Encouraging extended business hours furthers Neosho’s capacity to establish itself as a destination retail district. Of particular importance are hours of operation during and around special events. Expanding business hours and opening on Sunday during special events and festivals will do much to enhance a visitor’s perception of Neosho.



Sam’s Cellar

The entrepreneurial spirit is alive in Neosho and includes new shops, redevelopments, and offices. Many new businesses and start-ups are choosing to locate in downtown. To encourage long-term success these entities must differentiate their product or service from the average consumer experience, typically big-box retail or strip malls.

The rise of strip malls and Wal-Mart over the last 20 years have taken shoppers away from the Downtown area. Wal-Mart is now the major store where people do their everyday shopping. Additionally, some residents go to Joplin or Kansas City for more luxury items or for a bigger selection than Neosho has to offer.

Identifying Downtown Neosho as a destination shopping experience that offers unique retail and restaurants is a way for the downtown to differentiate itself from the everyday consumer shopping experience. Consequently, the Downtown should draw upon its unique environment and mix of businesses to create an enhanced consumer experience.

Key volunteers from the business community are engaged in development efforts and have asked for a structured plan that everyone should adhere to in order to improve the overall business development of Neosho. Although the area has seen a resurgence in interest and development among key investors, a high turnover rate of businesses in downtown has increased the number of vacant buildings, giving sections of Neosho a rundown appearance.

Downtown Revitalization

There has been significant progress in rehabilitation efforts in Neosho. These efforts include the redevelopment of the Sterling Building into a mixed-use building, redevelopment of the Newton Place Hotel into senior living, and renovations of some of the buildings into residential loft apartments. Other major developments that provide the stimulus for further revitalization include the new visitor center for the U.S. National Fish Hatchery, Streetscape Improvements, and Morse Park improvements.

Although several buildings have undergone rehabilitation and improvement, many downtown buildings still need significant façade improvements. Property owners need assistance in updating historic buildings and making historically accurate and appropriate improvements. The interest level of the downtown business community in revitalization is extremely high.

Major parking lot improvements are occurring in the public parking lot outside of the Downtown square. Throughout Neosho, however, there is insufficient signage to identify location of public parking. By increasing the signage for public lots the problem is easily addressed.



Hass Building Rehabilitation

TARGET MARKET ANALYSIS

The Target Market identified in this plan have been identified to assist Neosho in efficiently influencing attitudes and behaviors. As the campaign develops and the strategies are implemented, it is important to understand how each initiative is affecting and reaching the targeted markets. Regular communication with these markets is crucial to maintaining visibility, integrity and trust.

Primary Market

An effective marketing plan for a community is in part targeted at its residents and local businesses. By recruiting these markets as “salespeople” not only will all downtown marketing plan objectives be more readily accepted, but all other revitalization efforts will be enhanced. It is also important for residents to feel proud and supportive of their community and that they live or conduct business in a dynamic downtown. Residents and local businesses are often overlooked.

The tools and messages sent to residents and local businesses are similar to those meant for visitors already in town; ease of downtown navigation, special events, general ‘feel good’ about town, and dynamic activity.

Success in the influencing of this market will build a base of activity that will provide a level of stable support and allow future marketing to the secondary and tertiary markets.

The following categories compose the Primary Market:

- Local Residents - residents that live in Downtown and the Neosho Zip Code (63701/63703)
- Area Residents - residents that live within 50 miles
- Downtown Business Owners
- Neosho or Downtown Visitors

Secondary Market

As the marketing message influence spreads and the Primary Market is saturated, it will be important to expand the outreach to add more people. The typical definition of a “tourist” is a visitor from at least 50 miles away. This visitor is more likely to be spending more and, possibly, staying overnight because of the distance travelled. With rising fuel costs, a 50 mile round-trip can immediately cost a visitor \$10—\$30. Such costs



National Fish Hatchery

underscore how important it is that the marketing message to visit Neosho is as compelling as possible.

Area Entrepreneurs are included in this group as they will view the message as a business opportunity and want to be part of the mix that draws people to town.

- Regional Residents - residents that live 50-100 miles away
- Local & Area Entrepreneurs

Tertiary Market

Expansion and growing excitement of the Key Message of Neosho should ultimately reach potential tourists looking to Neosho for longer visits, potential residents, and potential development investors.

- Tourists within a 350 mile radius
- Retirees & Baby Boomers
- Real Estate Investors

Communication Channels

The following avenues can be used to communicate with the primary, secondary and tertiary markets

- Website
- Newsletter
- Ads
- Special Event Brochures
- Top 10 Things to Do in Neosho
- Newsprint/Press Releases
- Signage/Wayfinding
- Flyers/Brochures
- Community Meetings
- Radio
- Visitor Information Centers



Rehabilitated Mixed-Use Building



Big Spring Park

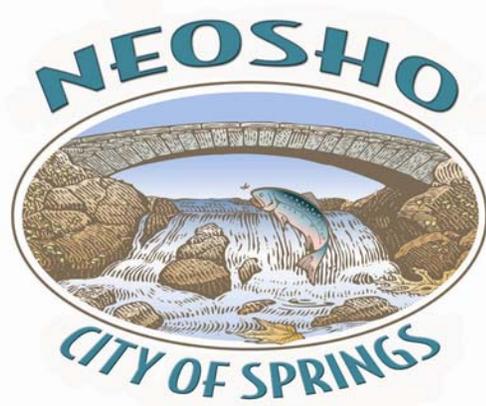
OBJECTIVES, GOALS & STRATEGIES:

The following text outlines the specific Objectives, Goals and Strategies that must be followed to adequately and effectively market Downtown Neosho:

OBJECTIVE 1: Brand the target area to create a cohesive and exciting image that is both easily understood by, and which captivates, the target audience.

Design a Logo to portray Downtown Neosho

- Logo should build on the rebranding of the City of Neosho and its new logo
- Build on the idea of Neosho as the City of Springs



Define Downtown Neosho in a tangible, physical way

- Wayfinding
- Streetscape
- Neosho's: lighting, site furnishings, landscaping, art, gateway signage

By implementing the branding strategy the downtown area will have its own identity eliminating possible diffusion of Downtown Neosho's brand within the community. By creating a cohesive identity for the different areas that comprise Downtown Neosho the area will be able to retain its charm without the confusion of where it is located.

OBJECTIVE 2: Through the use of continued surveys and focus groups monitor resident and visitor attitudes about Neosho.

GOAL: Develop a yearly community survey that builds on the DREAM Community Survey results. Target Audience: Local residents, Regional Residents, & Crowder College Students

Strategy: Every year conduct, tabulate and evaluate a community survey that will measure the target market's perceptions and behaviors of the following areas:

- Opinions of Downtown
- Awareness of Products & Services
- Plans for Downtown
- How respondents obtain Information for Events and Attractions in Neosho
- Number of Visits to Neosho
- Visits to other cities to shop or dine
- Reasons for visiting Neosho
- Reasons for not visiting Neosho

GOAL: Develop a Downtown Neosho website to be the central website for cultural, entertainment and hospitality information.

Target Audience: ALL

Strategy: Create categories for the Downtown Neosho website that highlight and illustrate the following categories:

- Entertainment: Nightlife, Music Events & Special Attractions
- Dining - Restaurant/Bar Locations for Neosho
- Shopping - Retail Locations
- Tourism— Includes lodging information

By developing the Downtown Neosho website to serve as an “online concierge” where all tourism/visitor information can be centrally located, it will provide residents and out of town visitors with information related to entertainment, festivals, special events and dining and shopping options.

Strategy: Coordinate all calendars from the City of Neosho, Chamber of Commerce, Newton Convention and Visitor’s Bureau and the Neosho websites to ensure that all event information is centrally located. Creating a comprehensive list of activities through a “Downtown Neosho Community Calendar” provides visitors and residents with comprehensive information.

Strategy: Follow on the successful visual layout and navigability of the new City of Neosho website. Make the Downtown website as easy to use and navigate as possible.

Strategy: Provide downloadable versions of all of Neosho’s brochures in PDF format.



Visitor Attractions throughout Neosho & Newton County

Strategy: Tag all possible keywords for internet search related queries.

- Neosho
- Big Spring Park
- Missouri
- Shopping
- Thomas Hart Benton
- Fish Hatchery

Strategy: Through the Downtown Neosho website and the Downtown Neosho Community Calendar create descriptors of the regular, annual events to allow both visitors and residents to learn more about special events in Neosho.

Strategy: Publicize and promote special events and expand on the information that the *Neosho Brochure* includes by providing pictures and descriptions of such special events as:

- Spring Dogwood Tour
- Summer Social on the Square
- Other events located in Neosho

Strategy: Downtown Neosho website should include content that would interest students. Use Facebook, YouTube and MySpace pages to promote Neosho. These communication avenues would be good choices for communicating with Crowder College students. In addition, adding a student blogger on the Downtown Neosho website about events in Neosho would increase student interest. The Neosho website links up to Crowder College website. Coordinating a reciprocal link for Neosho on Crowder College website would allow for advertising on the University's website.

Crowder College



OBJECTIVE 3: Increase the number of shoppers, diners and visitors to Neosho.

GOAL: Increase awareness of what products and services are available in Neosho
Target Audience: Neosho residents, Regional residents, & Crowder students

Strategy: Residents must be kept aware of the new dining and shopping opportunities in downtown Neosho. Creating a Downtown Neosho newsletter is a medium that can accomplish this goal. The newsletter should also include coupons, special promotions and ads to Neosho businesses. Coordinate with businesses and restaurants to offer a discount with the proof of newsletter.

In addition to mailing the newsletter to residents, make it available at the student union on the Crowder College campus, retail locations in Neosho as well as providing it in the form of an e-newsletter. The newsletter should also be made available on the Downtown Neosho and other Neosho websites.

Create a listserv or e-mail listing in order to distribute the e-newsletter. This will also allow for updates of new restaurants, retail locations, upcoming events, etc., using the listserv option to ensure that, a maximum number of individuals are reached in the most cost effective and environmentally friendly way.

Strategy: Develop a stronger presence on the Crowder campus through special discounts for students at Downtown Neosho shops. Also place ads in the school newspaper and work with the campus editor to investigate the possibility of designating a beat reporter for Neosho. Finally, have special goody bags for freshmen students at registration featuring gifts and coupons to Neosho shops.

Strategy: Increase outside advertising for Neosho. Advertising should be consistent and each ad should build on impressions made by previous ads. Ad campaigns that coincide with planned newsletter delivery or a campaign that is coordinated with the special events of Neosho will foster more recognition within the target audience.

Consider different media alternatives to deliver the message. Advertise to local areas (Joplin, MO, Springfield, MO) with Billboard campaigns along Interstate 44.

Strategy: Build on previous successes. Marketing efforts should build on the success of previous events. When promoting these events consider using creative and new venues to inform the public.

GOAL: Create a list of the "Top 10 Things to Do in Downtown Neosho." The Top 10 Things to Do should be updated annually.

Strategy: Creating a guide to illustrate previous visitors' and residents' favorite things to do can provide a useful guide to see all of Neosho. Include testimonials if possible. Not only will this allow tourists and visitors to

identify with others who find Downtown Neosho an appealing tourism destination, but this also encourages residents to be tourists in their own city.

GOAL: Create Customer Appreciation for residents and Crowder students

Target Audience: Local residents; Crowder students

Strategy: Residence Appreciation
Institute a Residence Appreciation Week that offers specials and discounts to Neosho residents. With a proof of residency within Neosho, residents will receive discounts to Downtown Neosho Restaurants and Retail Stores. Host special events such as Wine Tastings, discounts on Christmas Trees or Pumpkins (if held during Holidays), discounted tickets to local plays or music events, discounted admission to local attractions.



The Civic in Downtown

Strategy: Student Stroll

On a monthly (quarterly) basis hold a "Student Stroll," where with the proof of a college ID Crowder College students receive special discounts, free appetizers, etcetera at Downtown Neosho restaurants. Retail locations can also offer 10 percent discounts with a minimum purchase. This will bring Crowder College students to Neosho and expose them to local retail, shops, restaurants and local attractions.

GOAL: Position Neosho as a unique shopping experience in the minds of local and regional residents.

Target Audience: Neosho residents, customers within a 60-mile radius of Neosho, Crowder College students

Strategy. Reinforcing the idea that Neosho is an exciting place to visit and shop is important to helping reinforcing its identity. Marketing the area as a place that has something for all Target Audience including blue and white collar workers, college students and families is important to enticing these groups to visit Neosho.



Downtown Neosho Square

Strategy: Promote Neosho for what it is not - it is not like shopping at the mall, strip mall or chain store. Market Downtown Neosho as a boutique and unique shopping experience. It is important to market the area by showing customers the special and unique experiences that are only available in the Neosho.

Strategy: Allow licensed street vendors/performers in the Downtown Square; including clowns making balloon animals, face-painting, magicians, jugglers, caricature artists, musicians, and food vendors. Start with only allowing them on certain days, such as Friday evenings and Saturdays or during special events. Also, limit the number of vendors who are allowed on particular days, and make sure they actually show up for the days and hours they are licensed to be there. The vendors can pay a set fee for the privilege of performing in Neosho. There will need to be a set of guidelines governing their appearance, general conduct, and performances that are allowed. Everything should be acceptable for family audiences. The activity generated by street entertainers reinforces the concept of Neosho as a place of excitement and energy.

GOAL: Extend shopping hours in Neosho

Target Audience: Neosho business owners, local and regional residents, Crowder College students

Strategy: Neosho should encourage businesses to extend store hours. Extending store hours creates an atmosphere that promotes shopping after work. Develop incentives to encourage businesses to stay open a certain number of evenings.

One incentive could be extra ads and promotions in the newsletter and on the website, featuring businesses that are open longer.

Strategy: Start with extending hours for special nights, such as First Fridays (throughout the summer). Discounts and specials should be offered by local businesses. The City (eventually Downtown Neosho Alliance) could have local musicians perform in downtown and portions of the streets could be closed off and area restaurants could offer seasonal outdoor dining. This can be extended into First Friday Arts placing emphasis on retail and restaurants in addition to art.

GOAL: Ensure that Downtown shoppers and visitors know what shops are in Neosho that would be of particular interest to them.

Target Audience: Visitors to Neosho

Strategy: This goal can be accomplished by promoting and marketing Neosho with the resources currently in place as well as the enhanced website with retail and restaurant directories. The newsletter and e-newsletter are also ways to inform the public about new retail establishments, businesses, and extended hours.

GOAL: Increase the number of day-trip visitors to Downtown Neosho.

Target Audience: Regional residents

Strategy: Use mailers, billboards and newspaper ads in markets within a 60-mile radius to convey the Neosho experience. This would be a particularly good market to target for promotion of some of the smaller events.

Strategy: Build upon local events at Crowder College and other local Neosho events, to draw parents, alumni, and visitors to Neosho before and after such events. Retailers and restaurants could offer discounts and special promotions.

GOAL: Increase the number of overnight visitors.

Target Audience: Visitors from metro areas within a four-hour drive from Neosho

Strategy: Neosho is located within easy driving distance (between 2 and 4 hours) from Kansas City, Springfield, MO; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Wichita, Kansas; and Little Rock Arkansas. For major events, promotional campaigns that target these cities would be advisable. The campaigns should definitely include news releases to newspapers in those cities and their suburbs. The releases should be pitched directly to travel and entertainment editors/reporters. The releases can also be sent to the managing editors and posted in the travel/entertainment section of the paper, in addition targeting specific individuals in those areas would also be successful.



Downtown Cafe

Strategy: Create “suggested” or “recommended” two and three-day tour packages including approximate costs for all points of interest on the tour. Offer discounts on the packages. Make the purchase of these packages available around special events. These packages should be available from the Neosho website.

Strategy: Create an interactive section on the Downtown Neosho website that allows people to go in and “choose your tour.” The site would offer different activity options, point-of-interest options (broken into categories), different dining options (again broken into categories), varying distances, accommodations options, etc. The tour itinerary could then be printed out. This would be a good way to promote to both locals and tourists, the variety of activities that are available in Neosho. Students and locals might also want to use this when they have visitors.

OBJECTIVE 4: *Promote a positive perception of Neosho in the minds of local and regional residents and Crowder Students.*

GOAL: *Establish the identity of downtown as Neosho in the minds of local residents, and consequently increase its image as a vibrant and exciting neighborhood.*

Target Audience: *Neosho and area residents; Crowder Students*

Strategy: Begin a communication campaign that always refers to Neosho’s historic downtown area as Downtown Neosho. Stress the historic richness of the area. Use the newsletter, newspaper, ads, talk-radio interviews and billboards to promote Neosho as a destination. Always referring to the area as Neosho enables future promotions of the area to build on previously planted impressions.

Big Spring & Morse Park



GOAL: Increase the awareness of the positive progress and beautification accomplishments that have occurred. Also increase the awareness of improvements that are planned for Downtown Neosho.

Target Audience: Neosho and area residents, Neosho business owners

Strategy: By creating a section on the Downtown Neosho website that highlights plans and improvements for Neosho, regular and ongoing communication can be achieved informing the public of completed projects, those that are under construction and projects that are in the early development stages. This section of the Neosho website can also contain information on beautification and sustainable “green” efforts of Neosho.

GOAL: Improve the appearance and appeal of Neosho businesses and buildings.

Target Audience: Neosho business and building owners

Strategy: Encourage businesses to add flower boxes, paint façades, and make window-display improvements. By implementing these minor improvements the area becomes more inviting to residents and consumers. Encourage businesses to decorate stores for the holiday season. Make business owners aware of façade improvement programs and other financial assistance available for building improvements.

Strategy: Work with shop owners to help them improve their presentation of merchandise in their shop windows and shops. Currently, the appearance of many downtown shop windows ranges from cluttered to unkempt. It is also important to remind shop owners of the importance of maintaining an attractive presentation

of their merchandise if they are going to be competitive with other businesses. Ultimately, an attractive presentation can dramatically affect a business’ bottom line. It’s all about style.

Strategy: Maintain upper floor windows. Some second-story windows are unattractive, have broken windows or are boarded up. This gives the impression of an area that is in a stage of deterioration. The area appears more vital, healthier and safer when windows on the upper-floors are repaired and are well-decorated.

Strategy: Fill vacant store fronts with local art, signage promoting downtown or other stores window displays. If storefronts remain vacant make sure they are maintained. Using window displays allows for marketing of specials for stores in the downtown area.



Artists display work in empty storefronts

Strategy: Start contests for the most attractive shop window to encourage Neosho businesses to improve window displays. These contests and judging could be kept strictly within the business community, or visitors to Neosho could become involved in voting for their favorite shop window. The latter would be especially appropriate during the Christmas holidays. The contests could be based strictly on appearance, or they could also be theme based, which would be most appropriate around certain holidays and seasons.

Involving Crowder Students in the decoration of these window displays is a way of including the student population in the development and beautification of Neosho.



Newly Landscaped Parking Lot

OBJECTIVE 5: Increase the business and retail development in Neosho and take steps to ensure longevity.

GOAL: Increase education and available resources to current and new business owners.

Target Audience: Neosho businesses

Strategy: An educational component for downtown businesses owners would encourage development of business skills necessary for the establishment of successful businesses; designing a lecture series or series of seminars that provide the skills and knowledge for local business owners to streamline business processes, would be particularly beneficial for area businesses.

Strategy: Identify the current needs and desires of the customer base. Build upon community phone survey, focus groups and visitor surveys. Extending business hours is an easy way to accommodate more customers and the schedules of dual-income households. Coordinating business hours with special events will increase the foot traffic and flexibility for the store patrons.

Strategy: Create a cooperative effort to advertise and market the local businesses, retailers, and restaurants. This is a cost-effective approach that will both promote Neosho and, at the same time, draw special attention Downtown businesses. Working with the downtown retailers to advertise Neosho as a special retail experience creates a unified effort that will increase the awareness of the area.

OBJECTIVE 6: Increase the residential population in Neosho area.

GOAL: Increase awareness of housing opportunities in Neosho.

Target Audience: Neosho and area residents, historic-homes enthusiasts

Strategy: Produce articles and news releases about the conversion of Neosho buildings to residential units. Also, prepare and publish articles about the renovations of some of the historic, single-family homes in Neosho. Photos of these conversions should be included to visually support the articles. Pitch these stories to local papers, real estate magazines, radio talk shows, and local news programs. To reach people who may be interested in restoring historic buildings, distribute these stories to national magazines that appeal to that market.

GOAL: Increase the 24 hour population

Target Audience: Baby Boomers , Retirees; Young Professionals; University Staff

Strategy: Increase the number of available housing units in the downtown area. Many baby boomers and young professionals are looking for alternative housing that provides an urban feel. These housing options are located within the downtown and are within walking distance of shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities.



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APPENDIX

SWOT Analysis

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Neosho Strengths

The median home value in Neosho is below the state level and significantly below the national level. This makes Neosho an attractive place for people who want to relocate and are not tied to a specific area due to employment. (i.e. entrepreneurs who use the Internet to conduct their business, retirees, etc.) Also, in 2007, the median home value in Neosho was lower than in communities 30-minutes or less distance from Neosho, and nearly \$10,000 lower than communities that were 60-minutes driving time from Neosho. This would make Neosho attractive to homebuyers who could still commute to their places of employment.

Many of the retirees and people who are relocating from Florida and California are looking for a place that has four seasons. Neosho can offer that along with the natural beauty of the Ozarks to people.

Neosho is conveniently located to both remote, rural areas and metropolitan centers. In addition, emerging commerce opportunities provide conveniences close to home. This positions Neosho for “country living in town.”

Neosho already has several very successful events that draw several thousand people to the city: Missouri’s Largest Garage Sale (8-10K visitors), July 4th celebration (4-5K visitors), Annual Dickens Christmas Faire & Parade (2K visitors). Since these events already have a large measure of success and bring thousands of people into the city, it’s important that the city takes advantage of every opportunity during those events to inform visitors about other events and amenities the city offers. This can be through flyers, brochures, Kiosks, etc. In addition, because these events yield the highest return in terms of bringing visitors to the city, maximum efforts should be expended on them to make them as appealing as possible. A few really fabulous events will bring more people to Neosho than a lot of mediocre events.

Residents have a strong sense of community and a positive attitude about problem solving. When combined with an aggressive public information campaign and clearly identified strategies, these attributes can provide the energy needed to make changes in the city. Every effort should be made to engage the public in the campaign to revitalize the city’s downtown.

Neosho is perceived by its residents as beautiful, friendly, safe, and a great place to raise a family. With its hills and water, it is a “natural beauty”. These attributes all need to be promoted to potential residents. It is also important to ensure these are the attributes that readily come to mind when current residents describe Neosho to friends and family. Current residents who are excited and enthusiastic about where they live can be your most effective sales tool for the city.

Neosho offers a wide variety of outdoor activities. Parks, walking trails, safe places for biking, skateboard park, a 27-hole public golf course, and fishing make Neosho an appealing place to locate for both young families and mature adults. Big Spring Park is very picturesque and Morse Park offers a lot of activity amenities with ball fields, trails, springs and a creek running through it. The water from Big Spring actually flows through the downtown, but at this point it has all been diverted underground. It would be nice to bring it to the surface at some point in the downtown to create an interesting water feature. All total, there are 9 springs in Neosho, but a visitor would never realize that because they really aren’t well promoted.

Neosho has a rich historic heritage that can be highlighted to create events that make Neosho a destination. Among historic figures who have a connection with Neosho are the artist Thomas Hart Benton, inventor George Washington Carver, ragtime composer James Scott, and Herman Jaeger who was influential in helping save the French wine industry when it was threatened by disease. The city has tried a living history day, which has had relatively good success. Since two of these figures are related to the arts, the history aspect can be combined with a cultural arts aspect. This would broaden the appeal of the event and provide a broader opportunity for venues covering both areas. This can be especially effective since the city is home to the Newton County Historical Park and Museum and renovations to an auditorium in the downtown area are underway.

The city is experiencing increasing diversity in population and visitors.

Neosho has a recreation center that offers many classes and educational programs. In addition, the it has a YMCA with the usual compliment of services.

Residents and civic leaders believe the city is moving in the right direction, particularly with the building renovations in the downtown area.

There are currently five service organizations located in the downtown that give the downtown area a lot of stability: the courthouse, the community bank, the hospital, the public library, and the Division of Family Services. Because their employees can eat at downtown restaurants and do shopping during their lunch breaks, these services provide a built-in pool of customers for downtown shops and restaurants. The library was moved to the downtown from another location, and its usage has increased dramatically.

The relatively low cost of buildings, availability of living space above shops, and attraction of historic buildings makes the downtown an appealing place for business owners to locate their businesses. Merchants have mentioned this as some of the primary reasons downtown they chose to locate their shops downtown.

Some off-street parking lots already exist in the downtown area to address the problem with very limited parking spaces around the square.

The most important streets running east and west go through the downtown square. This provides built-in traffic through the area.

There are several antique shops and flea-market shops located in the downtown square that attract people from surrounding towns who come into Neosho on the weekend to shop at them—including people from Carthage and Joplin. There has been an increase of people shopping on the square from surrounding areas, such as Carthage and from Arkansas.

There has been a lot of renovation of historical buildings in the downtown square over the past few years, and even at the early stages property owners were interested in wanting to do the renovations right. These renovations are improving the attractiveness

of the downtown as a place to shop, live, or open a business. Some of the renovation includes converting unused upper stories of the buildings into apartments or condos. The synergy of these renovations on the square is beginning to spread outward along other streets in the downtown area.

The city already has a historical commission that had adopted a set of ordinances that will help ensure the renovations taking place with the historic buildings are done correctly and don't undermine the unique ambience of the downtown. The commission only serves in an advisory capacity. The city ultimately decides what downtown building owners can and cannot do with renovations to their buildings. The city, however, is moving toward becoming more stringent with building permits in that area.

A problem with drainage in the downtown square has already been corrected.

The downtown square has wide sidewalks and park benches that make it inviting for pedestrians to window shop and linger in the downtown.

"Walkers" have already started coming to the downtown square to exercise.

Recently the city has begun working on promoting features about Neosho that would appeal to business people. Two aspects they've begun working on promoting are the golf course and the Neosho airport, which is large enough to accommodate small jets.

A new visitor center with conference rooms will be located at the city airport. This will be convenient for business travelers. The visitor center should be stocked with information that steers visitors into the downtown. It is too far from the downtown to exist as the city's primary visitor center and effectively promote the downtown. People won't drive from the center of town, out to the airport in order to find out what there is to see and do downtown.

There is one local daily newspaper and one local radio station that cover city events. The city has begun sending out press releases to these two media outlets in an effort to inform the public on what is happening. There are also a number of civic clubs and organizations that have newsletters and could be instrumental in getting information about events to the public if they are informed early enough to get it into their publication.

There are a lot of active volunteers in Neosho.

Once residents in Neosho are convinced of the value of an idea and buy into it, they are loyal to it and willing to support it. They are proud of their downtown, but at this point don't see a reason to go there. Once they can be convinced of the advantages of shopping and patronizing the downtown, there is a high likelihood they will be loyal to it.

For a town of its size, Neosho has a good-size industrial park with over 3,000 jobs in the area.

A hotel tax is already in place and the revenue from it will help bring in money to use for promotions of the town.

Neosho has an active Chamber of Commerce that does a lot to revitalize the downtown.

An old high school close to the downtown has been converted into senior apartments. If information about the downtown is distributed there and transportation is provided, it provides a good market for downtown merchants. Also, since many of the shops in the downtown have noticed much of their business comes from people from out of town who are visiting relatives, making sure promotion of the downtown at the senior apartments would direct those potential customers into the downtown.

Neosho is home to the oldest fish hatchery still in operation and also hosts Neosho's annual National Fish Hatchery Fishing Derby. The hatchery currently gets about 40,000 visitors annually and that number is expected to double once the hatchery is renovated to look Victorian. In addition, many of the visitors are school children on bus tours.

There is a historic park located near the downtown, which has a 19th-century school house and a pre-Civil War log cabin. In addition the Newton County Historical Society Museum is located in Neosho. Both would be good draws to visitors, but currently they are difficult to find and have very limited hours.

An old auditorium in the downtown is being renovated and when opened will be a multi-use facility with productions, seminars and concerts. A person has already been hired to market the auditorium and the downtown.

Several organizations are already in place to assist with the revitalization of the downtown. One is the Neosho Area Business & Industrial Foundation, Inc., which provided funds for the revitalization and granting loans to businesses for renovations of buildings on the square. A second organization is the Downtown Planning Committee on Historic Preservation, which has made recommendation in Neosho's 2006 Comprehensive Plan.

The city is putting together a plan to deal with the redevelopment of the downtown and cleaning-up problems.

Neosho Weakness

The median household and the per capita incomes for Neosho were below the state median and per capita income levels. They were also significantly below the national median income level. More than 50% of the school children in the district are enrolled in the low-to-moderate-income lunch program. This means there is currently less discretionary dollars in the community than what one might find in other communities. A significant percentage of businesses and restaurants that come into the downtown area are less likely to succeed if their price points are far above the reach of most of the families in the town.

There is no well-established or well-marked route from Highways 86 or 71 into the downtown. In addition, there are no good directional signs leading visitors into the downtown. Visitors can come to Neosho and not even realize where the historic downtown is. Even once visitors are in the downtown, there is nothing in the downtown square directing visitors to Big Spring, the Hatchery, the golf course, or the Newton County Museum. This lack of directional signage makes it difficult for visitors to find their way around the city, to find the city's attractions, or to spend an enjoyable time in Neosho. It's more likely that they will become lost, frustrated, and leave without knowing what the city has to offer. In addition, it's not clear to visitors that the traffic around the square is one way or which way to turn. This makes it not only confusing, but dangerous.

Shop hours are inconvenient for most of today's shoppers. Most shops on the square are closed in the evenings, and many aren't open on Sat. or Sun. Many shops on the square are closed frequently. (one shop was closed Sunday, Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday) This makes it frustrating to visitors if they come on a bad day and many of the shops are closed. It would be good to coordinate with businesses so that certain days and evenings of the week everyone would be open. Then you can post on a downtown Web site the best days to visit. It might also be good to list the downtown businesses and their hours. Since retail space on the square is prime commercial area and revitalization of the square is central to the revitalization of the downtown, the city might want to consider different incentives to encourage businesses to stay open a set number of hours or particular days and evenings. Incentives could include significant reductions in business license fees or possibly requiring a business to be open a set number of hours or particular days and evenings before granting a business permit in the downtown area. (NOTE: According statistics given at a seminar that was held to help retailers compete when Wal-Mart came to the community, 2/3 of consumers want to shop in the evenings or on weekends. This means downtown shops are closed when 2/3 of their market wants to shop.)

There are no regular communication avenues between the city and residents or business owners. Education of and communication with the city's residential and commercial population is crucial. The city currently has no newsletter for residents, so any information residents receive is filtered through and at the mercy of the editors and reporters from the local papers and radio stations. This means that even if the local paper decides to cover an event, it is generally after the fact. A city newsletter could promote the event in advance and hopefully bring more people out for it. A city-produced newsletter would be extremely valuable in generating local interest and keeping residents aware of everything going on in the downtown. It would also be an essential tool for any public-education campaign the city would undertake. Possibly the city could start with a quarterly citizen newsletter that would promote the city to residents. Ads from downtown/local merchants could be used to offset the cost of

newsletter. (giving preference to downtown merchants) This approach would reduce the cost to the city, remind the public what is downtown, and give merchants another connection to their target market. In addition, it would also be advisable to produce a newsletter strictly for businesses located in the city. The newsletter probably wouldn't need to be produced more than twice a year, but it could provide businesses information on economic-development and business issues that would concern them.

Currently, residents don't even think about downtown as a destination unless they need to go to court or one of the other services organizations in the downtown. A city newsletter would help keep downtown and the revitalization of it in front of residents and bring it to mind more quickly. There needs to be a serious effort to market the downtown to the residents of Neosho.

Neosho residents describe Neosho as a "show me" community. They are very hesitant to embrace a new idea, but once they do, they are willing to put their heart and soul into it. This trait will mean a serious communication and promotions campaign is needed to get the public and shop owners to buy into the goals for the downtown before the efforts can achieve a high measure of success.

There is no designated "Visitors Center" where visitors can pick up a map and list of downtown merchants. Visitors can go to the Chamber of Commerce office, which has small brochure that contains a map and a list of some businesses and several other informational pieces. Unfortunately, many people wouldn't think to go to the Chamber of Commerce office for tourist information. In addition, the Chamber office, is out of the way, has very limited parking, and is not open on weekends. Possibly a kiosk with that type of information could be placed at city hall. A sign indicating that visitor information was available there would need to be displayed outside city hall, and the kiosk should be easy to spot as soon as one steps inside the lobby. It would also be advisable to have some visitor information available outside city hall after hours. At a minimum, this should include a piece containing a map and list of businesses and a piece with an events list. It would also be good to have these two pieces displayed and available at shops in the downtown.

Parking around the square in the downtown is a problem and a source of frustration for shoppers and shop owners alike. Many of the street-side parking places are taken up by employees at the county courthouse and other service organizations in the downtown. Although there are public off-street parking lots available, they are not well marked, so visitors don't know about them. In addition, there has been no concerted effort to have employees who work downtown use the off-street lots so that the spaces in front of the shops are saved for shoppers. The parking problem will become more pronounced as more loft apartments are developed downtown, and especially once the renovations on the auditorium downtown are completed and events are held at the auditorium. Solutions to the parking problems must be found or else they will inhibit the revitalization of the downtown. People won't come to events at the auditorium if convenient parking is not available, and shoppers won't return if they can't find a place to park.

Part of the problem with parking is people don't like to walk—they don't want to park in parking lots and walk to shops, restaurants, or the auditorium (once it's built). If the surroundings are attractive, however, people will be more willing to park in the lots and stroll through the downtown. This will involve serious beautification efforts with the parking lots and the whole downtown square. Once strolling through the downtown becomes more relaxing and enjoyable, people won't mind walking as much.

Although the city has lots of water features, they aren't readily visible to visitors and aren't well promoted. There are no signs directing visitors to the springs, even in the parks where they are located, and there is no good access to the springs in either park. Although there are picnic tables along the spring branches in the parks, there are no benches along them where people can just sit and enjoy the water. In addition, although the water from Big Spring flows through the downtown, it has all been diverted underground. It would be an added attraction to downtown and emphasize the area's uniqueness if the water could be brought above ground at some point in the downtown and create an interesting and inviting area for visitors. Neosho used to be called the City of Springs, but at this point a visitor would wonder why the city would go by that name.

There are no benches along the trails in the park.

The entrance to Morse Park on the north side appears run down and the road is in bad condition. This is the side that is closest to the spring that is in the park. In addition, there are other wear issues in the parks relating to bathrooms. Since the beauty of the parks is an important appealing factor to prospective residents and visitors, it is important that they be in good condition.

There is a lot of road repair needed.

There are few restaurants in the downtown, and the ones located there aren't open late. More restaurants and longer hours will be needed if Neosho wants residents to choose downtown as a destination for dining and entertainment. The lack of restaurants could have a negative effect on attendance of concerts and programs at the auditorium once it opens. People like to be able to go to dinner either before or after cultural events. More restaurants, cafes, coffee shops, tea rooms and eat-in pastry shops would provide places for people to visit, linger, and turn a trip to the downtown into an experience. To date restaurant owners seemed to think that there was not enough traffic in downtown to warrant staying open in the evenings. Once the auditorium opens and more evening events are brought to the downtown, there should be more people looking for dining options during the evening hours.

Sidewalks outside the square are deteriorating and in some places non-existent. This makes it a problem to move pedestrian traffic throughout the whole downtown. Especially if you want to make it possible for people to walk to the downtown from Morse or Big Spring Park. As a result, the downtown doesn't benefit from visitors to the parks. A clearly identifiable pathway from the parks into the downtown would be good to encourage migration into the downtown. The pathway could be of pavement that is made to look like bricks, flag stones, or some other pattern that would set it apart.

Sidewalks need to be repaired or built, but at this point sidewalks are the responsibility of the property owner, which makes it much more difficult to ensure quality sidewalks throughout the downtown area.

Due to a lack of foot traffic in the evenings, shops shut down. In turn, with no shops open in the evenings, there is less reason for people to visit the downtown, thereby creating less foot traffic. It becomes a downward spiral. Work is needed to both bring visitors into the downtown in the evenings, but also ensure there are shops open for them to patronize when they get there.

There has been a problem with getting downtown merchants to participate in some of the promotional ideas the downtown group has developed. For instance, the downtown group tried holding a window-dressing contest, but the shop keepers wouldn't participate. Since continuing to do the same thing will continue to give the same results, it is important that shop keepers be made aware of the need for change and be convinced it is both something they want to do and is in their best interest. Until it is understood why the shop keepers are not participating, further efforts have a low probability of success. It is important to get feedback from the shop owners to find out their reasons for not participating and solicit from them ideas of things they would be interested in doing. More communication with the shop keepers is going to be a key to success. They are independent and will become stubborn if they feel they are being told what to do rather than invited to become a part of the change.

The downtown square is filling with businesses relating to the county courthouse. (i.e. lawyers, bail bondsmen, title companies, etc.) These businesses generally have business hours from 9-5, Monday through Friday. When they occupy too much of the prime downtown space on the square, it creates a ghost-town effect in the square when they are closed and that discourages retail businesses from locating there, or remaining open in the evenings. It would be advisable for the city to limit the number of these service businesses that can be located on the square and do what is necessary to encourage them to locate on the side streets leading into downtown. That would still place them close to the court house, but not let them monopolize the prime retail spaces around the square.

A significant number of property owners seem to have lost pride in their property. There are private homes immediately adjacent to the downtown area that are poorly maintained. Maintenance-code enforcement is needed to ensure these properties don't drag down the viability of surrounding properties and the downtown area. Also, a community pride campaign is needed to help re-instill residents' pride in the community and their homes.

In the 60s, Neosho was home to the beginnings of the space program before it was moved to the coast. At that time many of Neosho's residents were well educated and highly-paid professionals. When the space program moved, they moved. It's important that the city fights the idea that Neosho's best days are behind them.

Much of the difference between success and failure of businesses can be the result of poor business practices of the owners. For instance, one shop keeper said her business was doing well, but she regularly advertised in a publication that was attractive to her target market. Another shop keeper said she has seen no increase in her business in two years, but admitted she did no advertising and depended on word-of-mouth to promote her business. Assisting shop keepers to adopt better business practices

and possibly creating a marketing group for the downtown merchants would help the merchants become more successful, which in turns benefits the downtown as a whole. Currently each shop owner is promoting their own business independently. Marketing the downtown as a group makes it more affordable and sends a stronger message.

The city has lots of events, but visitors don't know about them. Some events are listed in a brochure distributed at the Chamber office, but that is not easily accessible to visitors. Information on events and amenities needs to be readily accessible from a central location in the downtown area, at hotels, all the city's attractions (i.e. museums, library, Big Spring & Morse Parks, etc.), and at most of the shops in downtown.

A lack of large buildings in the downtown and limited parking area will inhibit the downtown from ever hosting large-scale mass retail opportunities. The downtown will have to build on niche marketing.

People traveling to downtown from the west have to drive past a lot of retail to get to the downtown. Without niche shops, restaurants, or attractions in the downtown, they are more likely to shop at the retail establishments to the west of the downtown. People on the east side of downtown, however, must drive through the downtown to get to the retail on the other side of the city. Marketing the concept of the convenience of shopping downtown would make sense when addressing these people.

The public library is located in the downtown and is very successful, but needs to expand. Expanding in the current location will be a challenge, and it would have a negative impact on the downtown if it moves to another area of the city. It's important that alternatives are explored to ensure the library is able to expand as it needs, but still remains downtown.

Power lines in the downtown area are still above ground, which detracts from the historic ambience of the area.

Banners were purchased for the downtown, but have never been hung. This is frustrating to merchants and the public, and will make them less willing to go along with other proposed plans. Follow through is important to keep faith with the public.

There is an empty church downtown that because of its design is perceived as unusable. There's a need to think outside the box to find uses for this building. Would it be big enough to house the library, since the library needs to expand? Could it be used as an extension of the library and provide meeting rooms, resource rooms, maybe house the children's section and provide places for storytelling, etc. It might also provide a good location for a visitors' center or possibly a small-business incubator.

There is a poultry processing plant only a block away from the downtown square. Although it isn't as odiferous as it has been in the past, it still emits a bad odor, is unattractive and doesn't fit with the direction the city wants to take the downtown. This location would serve the city's needs better as an industrial park, but it is important to remember that the plant employs individuals who are probably local residents.

A 2003 study said that only 43 percent of the money in Neosho stayed in Neosho.

Neosho Strengths

Residents of Neosho actually pride themselves in being able to drive a short distance to Joplin to do much of their shopping. That whole attitude needs to be addressed. Much of the effort spent to bring people from neighboring communities into Neosho to shop could be better spent on reaching Neosho residents and trying to keep them shopping in Neosho. Because they already live in Neosho, once you can establish a habit with them of shopping in Neosho, you're more likely to see long-term results with less continued effort than with convincing people to drive to Neosho from other communities.

At this time, there probably isn't enough local business to sustain the size of clothing stores that would fit in the downtown. For these needs, residents drive into Joplin, which pulls additional dollars from Neosho when they combine shopping trips and eating out while in Joplin.

The high cost of renovating the historic buildings can be prohibitive to small, niche businesses locating in the downtown. Although the downtown may be ideal for the businesses, they might need help to get started and remain viable until the business grows enough to support itself. Possibly business incubators that include retail would work. Also, business cooperatives could make it possible to bring needed niche businesses into the downtown on terms that the owners can afford.

Neosho Opportunities

The median age in Neosho has been steadily increasing. In 2000 it was 35.4, in 2007 it was 36.2, and it is projected to be 37.1 in 2012. The most notable increases will be in the 45 to 74 age bracket. This age bracket represents people whose children either have or are about to leave home, and people who either are or are about to retire. In both cases, many of these people begin downsizing their homes and start looking for attractive communities and comfortable, maintenance-free places to retire. With the development of the loft apartments in the downtown, the public golf course and parks, Neosho is in a prime position to market to this age group. Neosho is already seeing an increase in Baby Boomers and people in their late 30s and 40s moving to town. Aggressive marketing should be aimed at this group.

Neosho has seen a number of people moving to it from Florida, California, Arizona and Ohio because the cost of living in Neosho is much lower than in those areas. An effort should be made to highlight this movement and do a cost of living comparison in a news release, on the city's Web site, in brochures, and hopefully in a city newsletter. Once this information is in the hands of the public, they will be instrumental in disseminating it to friends and family members living in those states. It's referred to as the "friends and family" effect, and has been influential in the influx of people from southern California moving to the Springfield area.

Several property owners in the downtown square have begun converting the upper stories of their buildings into loft apartments. With the current national interests in restoring historic buildings and living in a downtown setting, the introduction of living space in these buildings would appeal to several different markets. Many Baby Boomers are retiring and looking for convenience, low maintenance, and often a way to get back to their roots. These apartments would appeal to them, especially if elevators can be installed in these buildings. Young adults have also shown an interest in these types of apartments. These could be marketed from the perspective of offering downtown convenience with a hometown atmosphere. Living accommodations above businesses also would appeal to entrepreneurs wanting to open a business and should be marketed that way. Several current downtown business owners stated that one of the reasons they located in the downtown was because it enabled them to live above their business. In addition, more residents living in the downtown provides built-in customers for downtown restaurants and shops. Unless sufficient parking is added to compensate for additional residents in the downtown, however, the success of the loft conversions will be limited and it could have a negative effect of business in downtown as a whole.

The DREAM Communities Initiative has opened financial-assistance opportunities for businesses or investors in the downtown area to rehab the historic buildings there. It's important, however, that these business owners understand what is available to them and how to obtain the help they need to apply for the assistance. Regular communication with them and a central "go-to" location where they can obtain information about all the options available to them would be helpful and can facilitate revitalization of the buildings and the downtown in the long run.

Springfield and Joplin are growing rapidly. As those communities grow and become more congested, some people will want to leave them to remain in more of a small-town atmosphere. To appeal to those people, Neosho will need to position itself as a

community that is small enough to be friendly, yet large enough to be convenient. The natural beauty of Neosho will be an important aspect of this positioning.

Neosho has recently seen an influx of people moving there from Arkansas. Tracking where in Arkansas the majority of these people are moving from would provide a good target area for advertising and promoting Neosho.

Neosho is defined by the natural beauty of its surroundings, parks, trails, and bike paths. In addition, it offers other outdoor options such as golf and fishing. These features enable Neosho to market itself as an ideal place to locate for outdoor enthusiasts. Young families and retirees would be good markets to target.

It would be good to connect the trails and bike paths in Morse Park (located northeast of the downtown square) with Big Spring Park (located southwest of the downtown square). The link should be well marked and go through the downtown area to bring more foot and bicycle traffic into the downtown. If this is done, it would also be good to provide bike racks at several places around the square to encourage people to stop and shop or dine in the downtown.

Neosho has promoted itself as the City of Springs, and it has several beautiful springs in or close to its downtown. However, there is no good access to the springs. Pedestrian access to the springs should be made easier, clearly marked, and promoted. In addition, since the runoff from Big Spring runs underground through the downtown area, it would be good to bring it above ground at one or more points and make the “springs” of Neosho more of a feature in the downtown.

Because Neosho already has several very successful events that draw several thousand people to the city, there are excellent opportunities to encourage large numbers of visitors to make return trips to Neosho. In addition, these large events provide opportunities to channel people into the city’s downtown area. The three biggest events are: Missouri’s Largest Garage Sale (8-10K visitors), July 4th celebration (4-5K visitors), Annual Dickens Christmas Faire & Parade (2K visitors). During these events it’s important that the city takes advantage of every opportunity to inform visitors about other events and amenities the city offers. This can be through flyers, brochures, Kiosks, etc. You can even provide “teasers” to upcoming events. For instance, if you want to promote an upcoming event that is historical, you might have a historical “character” at the current event, inviting people to come back for the historical event. In addition, maximum effort should be put forward to make sure visitors at events are moved through and around the downtown square.

For instance, the Chamber of Commerce and the city work with the local newspaper on the Garage Sale. On the day of the sale, the paper puts out a special edition of the newspaper with a map and list of registered garage sales. The paper is made available at several locations throughout the city, but not always at the most convenient locations and also sometimes it’s placed with advertisers who happen to be closed on that day. It would be good if it could be at news stands as one enters the city. Also have it available in the downtown. Also in the downtown, make booths available around the square that people can rent to display items for sale, and encourage merchants to have sidewalk sales that day. Be sure to prominently display the information about the special attractions downtown in special the edition and in earlier ads about the garage sale.

The July 4th celebration is primarily located in Morse Park. It would be nice if during the July 4th celebration there could be a patriotic-themed play or concert presented at the auditorium in the downtown square. Merchants around the square could be encouraged to stay open a few hours that day. It would also be nice if there could be musicians/performers on the courthouse lawn and in Big Spring Park. Ice-cream, snow-cone and hot dog vendors around the square would make it more of an event in that area and encourage visitors to linger and do some window shopping. This would pull visitors from Morse Park through the entire downtown. It would also be nice if the Newton County Historical Park and Museum could be open for tours that day.

During the Dickens Christmas Faire, set a theme that tells a story and then position character actors from the story at different locations around the downtown square. Create a flyer with a map of the square and show where the different characters are located. Have the characters each tell their part of the story. Visitors can collect “trading cards” from the different characters at each location or have their pictures made with them. Visitors could also be given a card that must be stamped at different shops or locations around the square, and once they collect all the stamps they would be eligible to drop the card in a drawing for a prize.

Anytime there is an event in Neosho, make an effort to tie at least part of it to the downtown. Have multiple entertainment/interest stations of the event located at different points around the square to move people around the whole square.

The historical society has a long-established History Alley and Interactive Tour Day event in the fall and for the last two years, a Living History event held in the summer. The fall event only provides minimal draw for visitors. It might be advisable to build on the success of the summer event by combining the two and adding living-history stations around different areas in the city. For instance, Native Americans trading with settlers at Big Spring, possibly some character actors representing Neosho’s founding fathers, settlers and even famous people with connections to Neosho, such as George Washington Carver, Thomas Hart Benton, etc. The tie to Camp Crowder through the cartoon character Beatle Bailey would also be good. It might also be good to have a presentation at the public library or at the Bess Boyden Memorial Library at the Newton County Museum on how to do genealogy research. (possibly both places with the Bess Boyden Library focusing on resources they have that are specific to Newton County) The day could finish off with a concert of popular music from the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the downtown square or at Big Spring Park.

Neosho and surrounding areas are experiencing an increase in immigrants from other cultures. (i.e. Hispanic, Vietnamese) Possibly part of an event could be a celebration of these different cultures. For instance, if the event is cultural arts, there could be performances, craftsmanship, or art pieces relating to the different cultures. Food from the different cultures would be another way to introduce the cultural diversity to events in Neosho. At this time, there probably isn’t a sufficiently large immigrant population to support a full cultural diversity festival, but working the different cultures into other events would add interest and bring new people to existing events.

One of the aspects of Neosho that has never been promoted is its connection to the Osage Indians who traded in the Big Spring area. This aspect of Neosho's history can be promoted in multiple ways through events, either as part of an event or it could possibly provide a basis for an entire event.

With the renovation of the downtown auditorium and the town's connection to the arts through Thomas Hart Benton and James Scott, Neosho is ideally positioned to become a cultural arts hub. The city is already working with the Southwest Missouri Art Alliance, hosting artist workshops and bringing in artists from neighboring states. The opening of the auditorium will provide an excellent venue to showcase more performing arts. The current Thomas Hart Benton Art Festival could be expanded to include performing as well as visual arts. In addition, since the Osage Indians traded in the Big Spring area, the city could also highlight Native American art—both craftsman and performing arts. However, as more performing arts come to the downtown, it will be important to solve the parking problems and introduce restaurants and coffee shops that are open in the evenings. There is a current interest in bringing more artist to Neosho to live and work. Art galleries in the square displaying original work from regional artists and photographers would help accentuate the city's cultural arts position as a hub. Craftsmen who work with stained glass, blown glass, hand-made jewelry, etc. would all fit well in this mold. In addition, these types of small businesses are ideal to share shop space, creating a something of a mall atmosphere. The uniqueness of their products also fits with the niche marketing the downtown needs to compete with large retailers such as Wal-Mart. These key factors will provide the synergy needed to turn the downtown into an entertainment destination.

There is already off-street parking available in the downtown area, but currently these lots are not well marked and under utilized. The result is a perception that there's no place to park in the downtown. These parking lots must be made attractive enough to make people want to park in them. In addition, more serious efforts are needed to have employees who work in the downtown park on these lots.

Neosho is home to the oldest fish hatchery still in operation and also hosts Neosho's annual National Fish Hatchery Fishing Derby. The hatchery currently gets about 40,000 visitors annually and that number is expected to double once the hatchery is renovated to look Victorian. It will have a museum, gift shop, and library. The fish the hatchery is propagating are endangered, but although it is getting good regional coverage, it has received very little national news about it. Every effort should be made to bring this to the attention of the national media. The efforts need to go beyond just news release and should include pictures, storylines, videos, human interest angles, etc. All news releases about the renovations, the fishing derby, or any other coverage should include the endangered species angle. It would be good to also involve school children with some kind of a drawing or essay contest about the fish, and promote that to the national media. Target specific national shows, publications and reporters that might be interested in a story of this type.

Neosho is surrounded by smaller communities. At this time residents from these communities come to Neosho to shop, but they also drive to Joplin. Once Neosho has addressed some of the issues that makes it inconvenient for visitors to shop in the downtown (i.e. lack of way-finding signage, unclear and unsafe directional signage around the square, inconvenient shop hours), Neosho can position itself as more convenient than Joplin, especially with communities close to Neosho and to its south. Once

more entertainment and dining options are available in Neosho, visitors can be encouraged to shop, dine, play and linger in Neosho. Changes in the convenience of shop hours will be especially critical to draw out-of-town customers to the area.

A Web site specific to downtown Neosho would help get information to multiple Target Audience and provide downtown businesses another link to their potential customers. The Web site should provide information for visitors, current and potential residents, and current and potential investors. It should include event descriptions and a calendar of events; park, trail and outdoor recreation amenities; entertainment and cultural arts highlights; a page where downtown businesses and restaurants can list their hours and provide links to their own Web pages; and there should be information about properties available in the downtown. It might also be advisable to list businesses that the community has identified it would like to see opened in the downtown. (i.e. a coffee and pastry shop)

A national trend in shopping-area development is to create a Main-Street look and feel. A couple good examples of this trend are The Landing at Branson, Missouri, and New Town in St. Charles, Missouri. Neosho has the buildings and town square already in place, but needs investors. Possibly, developers of small strip malls would be interested in purchasing, rehabbing and leasing several of the buildings in Neosho's downtown square.

One way to encourage people to eat at downtown restaurants in the evening would be if band concerts were scheduled for the square on Friday or Saturday evenings. In addition, some of the restaurants might want to provide some outdoor dining on those evenings. This would provide dinner and entertainment for patrons. Current restaurants in the downtown seem to do well, but more are needed to encourage people to stay and dine in Neosho rather than driving to Joplin. Once there are multiple choices of restaurants, people will be less likely to go to Joplin. The restaurants, however, will need to be open in the evenings and on weekends.

There are 4-5 churches within walking distance of the downtown square that bring large numbers of people to the downtown every Sunday. Unfortunately most shops and restaurants are closed when these large numbers of prospective customers are delivered to their doorstep. Downtown shops and restaurants should be encouraged to maintain at least short hours on Sunday afternoons. Possibly a monthly outdoor, Sunday-afternoon gospel concert during the summer would be a way to keep large numbers of church attendees in the downtown and provide more business for downtown merchants. It would be important that restaurants and shops cooperate by being open on those days. Hopefully, once people have become accustomed to remaining in downtown Neosho for Sunday dinner and shop browsing, the shops and restaurants will see the value in remaining open on Sunday afternoons.

There is a lack of several types of shops and services in the downtown that if they could be established, would provide synergy to the entire downtown. Some of these businesses are more restaurants open in the evenings and on weekends, a pastry and coffee shop, a deli, an ice cream parlor, and a chocolate shop. (most of these offer feel-good items that encourage impulse purchases) Without more people coming to the downtown at this time, however, it will be hard for these types of businesses to remain open

long enough to become successful. Possibly a multi-location business incubator or co-op could be established to assist these types of businesses to open and stay in the downtown area. A single building, for instance, could house a small coffee/tea room along with several small gift shops in the same building. Possibly a bakery co-op could operate in the same space as the coffee/tea room, so patrons could enjoy pastries with their beverages. Another building could possibly house a small deli/sandwich shop and also a restaurant and another building could house some of the missing retail, such as a dress or children's clothing shop. If these buildings are part of a business incubator, it reduces the risk for these start-up businesses and makes it more feasible for entrepreneurs to open one of the needed businesses. The businesses allowed to rent space in these buildings would need the types of businesses identified as needed in the downtown, and should also be required to commit to and maintain consumer-friendly evening and weekend hours. One large building that is vacant and could house several businesses is a church that hasn't sold. It's possible buildings of that nature that are hard to sell could either be purchased for a low price, a donation negotiated, or leased for a low rate.

Several people have identified the need for a dress shop in Neosho, but at this time it would be hard for one to be successful and compete with the variety of shops Joplin offers. One way to fill that need and still compete could be with an upscale women's clothing consignment shop. These types of shops for both women and children's clothing are becoming more popular in urban areas. They typically won't accept clothing that is more than a couple years old or anything that shows any amount of wear. The appeal is high-quality clothing at dramatically reduced prices. They also offer women a place to sell something that they've decided just doesn't work for them. With children's clothing, children often outgrow their clothes before they've been able to wear them very much, especially dress clothing.

People in Neosho are encouraged by the progress they have seen so far, but are ready for a unified plan that identifies what needs to be done next and sets goals for downtown. Developing and communicating both the plan and achievements of the plan will be critical to maintain the public's support and enthusiasm for the redevelopment. If people don't know about the plan, understand it, or know what has been accomplished, to them it doesn't exist. Communication is vital.

Now that renovations and improvements to the properties in the downtown square have gained momentum, it will be important to expand the improvements to properties surrounding the square. The conditions of the surrounding properties can either enhance or inhibit the continued revitalization of the downtown square. Looking for higher and better use of properties in the surrounding areas might be one way to address this need. Other ways could include maintenance code development/enforcement, zoning changes that would allow historic homes to be converted into businesses, etc.

An old high school has been turned into senior citizen apartments. It is located close to the downtown. This is a perfect place to market downtown shops. You might want to provide transportation service once a week since it might be difficult for seniors to walk to the downtown. Also, make sure the OATS bus picks up seniors and drops them off in the downtown. Market the downtown to visitors of the seniors at the apartments. Grown children and relatives returning home to visit seniors are a good market for downtown shops. One shop on the square already says many of their clients are visiting family from out of town. Placing promotional information about the downtown at the senior apartments would be good.

Many Baby Boomers are starting second careers. Downtown provides good options for starting business because the prices of buildings in the downtown are reasonable. Also, rehabbing and selling properties is big now. Again, Neosho's downtown provides good options for investments of that sort and should be promoted as such. Placing articles and ads in periodicals that appeal to Boomers and rehabbers would be good.

There is not much shopping available on the east side of Neosho, and people on the east side have to travel through the downtown to reach the west side of town where most of the commerce is located. The east side of town would a good place to promote the convenience of shopping in the downtown area.

The public library is an essential service that draws a large number of people to the downtown; however, it needs to expand. Helping the library expand and still remain downtown will not only keep this essential service downtown, but will also increase the number of visitors to the downtown.

Communication opportunities should be fully utilized. The city doesn't produce its own newsletter, and to date relies on reporters and editors of local media to get information to the public. A city newsletter would enable the city to the information it deems important to residents, and would better position the city for information and promotional campaigns. There are a lot of civic clubs and local organizations that have newsletters and some information could be sent to them. In addition, area churches are active in the community and they have newsletters, so they would be another good outlet for information. All of these newsletters, however, are not controlled by the city so there is never a certainty that the information the city deems important will make it into these newsletters and to the public.

The renovation of the auditorium will provide more meeting-room space in the downtown. Once it is available, a serious effort should be put forth to bring in small workshops and seminars that would require the use of these meeting spaces. In turn, this will bring more people into the downtown to shop and eat. It would be advisable to have at least one or two promotional pieces and a map of the downtown available for visitors at the auditorium and prominently displayed.

As events are held throughout the downtown or at the auditorium, a trolley service with off-and-on privileges would be beneficial. It could run only on weekends, during special events or when there are productions at the auditorium. It would also make parking in the off-street parking lots more appealing if it limited the distance people have to walk from the lots to the event or auditorium. Trolley shelters at the parking lots would be needed to provide protection from the rain during inclement weather.

People who enjoy browsing through antique shops will drive for miles to go to towns that can boast being antique centers. Neosho already has several nice antique shops that seem to do well and people from surrounding areas tend to come to Neosho to browse these shops. Promoting Neosho as an antique district in Southwest Missouri would help bring people to the downtown. The more it is promoted as an antique district, the more people will come specifically for that. More antique shops will be able to open in Neosho, which in turn attracts more people.

Neosho Threats

Springfield and south to Joplin are growing rapidly. Unless Neosho is positioned as an attractive alternative to those communities, Neosho could miss the opportunity to share in that growth, and could even lose population to those communities. In either case, if that happens it will become harder for Neosho to attract the businesses it needs to revitalize its downtown.

Because Joplin is so close, it is common for residents to automatically take their guests there for shopping or dining. A trip to Joplin has become an automatic response for residents wanting to shop or eat out. In addition, residents of Neosho have not only formed a habit of trading in Joplin, but have an attitude of being proud that they are positioned so close to Joplin. It is important that Neosho residents are reeducated to consider Neosho first for their dining and shopping needs, and see Joplin as too far to travel when they have viable options close to home. To do this, residents must be kept aware of the new dining and shopping opportunities coming to downtown Neosho. A city newsletter can provide a key communication tool with residents to engineer this reeducation.

Most shops and restaurants in the downtown aren't open during the hours that the majority of consumers prefer to shop or dine out—in the evenings and on weekends. Until shop and restaurant hours are scheduled for the convenience of the consumer rather than the convenience of shop and restaurant owners, shops in the downtown and the downtown as a whole will continue to struggle for viability. The city may need to take shop hours into consideration when new businesses apply for a business license in the downtown.

Neosho is located not only close to Joplin, but also sizable communities in Arkansas. Until Neosho can position itself with residents as a viable option for shopping and entertainment, it will continue to experience spending leakage to these other communities.

Wal-Mart has taken much of the business away from the downtown square. It offers convenient parking, a large selection of items, and discount prices. To remain viable, stores on the square will have to compete through niche marketing and through making a trip to the downtown an experience in itself. People will go downtown when it becomes fun to do, not just a place to buy supplies. It will be important to position downtown as a fun experience, not just a commerce center.

Businesses that locate near major stores like Wal-Mart or Lowes don't have to spend a lot of money on advertising because they are able to feed off of traffic coming to the large retailers. This makes these areas more appealing for new businesses wanting to locate in those areas. There isn't room for large retailers to locate in the downtown, however, even if they wanted to. As a result, the small businesses there must commit a larger percentage of their dollars to advertising in order to draw customers. This makes locating in the downtown less appealing at this time. Group advertising of downtown businesses in conjunction with special events would help lower the cost per business. Also, if a city newsletter were developed that gave favorable rates to the downtown businesses, that would also make it more appealing.

Currently, there are five services located downtown and it is essential to the viability of downtown that they remain there. The services are: the county courthouse, the community bank and trust, the hospital, the Division of Family Services and the public library. If any of those services move out of the downtown, it would be a crippling blow to the downtown. They bring workers and the general public into the downtown, which provides potential customers for downtown shops and restaurants. Although these services compete for downtown parking spaces, which are in short supply, the city needs to do whatever is needed to make it easy and appealing for all of them to remain in the downtown.

While historic preservation of the buildings in the downtown will contribute to the appeal and ambience of the area, it is important that business owners are not driven away by the cost of the historic renovations. Affordable options are needed along with a relaxation of some codes that put undue hardship on owners of historic buildings. In addition, shop owners in the historic district will need education and assistance to take advantage of any tax or financial incentives available to them.

At this time property owners are responsible for the sidewalks in front of their property. Since the sidewalks in the downtown area are very wide, maintaining them represents a sizable financial responsibility for downtown property owners. This limits the number of people who can afford to invest in downtown properties. It will be important that prospective and current investors understand any financial assistance or tax breaks available to them to handle this issue.

There are private homes immediately adjacent to the downtown area that are poorly maintained. Without maintenance-code enforcement, these properties will continue to deteriorate and drag down the viability of surrounding properties and the downtown area. They will make it less appealing for investors in the downtown, and will be a deterrent to building a viable economic base of consumers within walking distance of the downtown square. In addition to code enforcement, a campaign is needed to boost residents' pride in the city and their homes.

Although most of the stakeholders believe the city is moving slowly in the right direction, some of them are concerned that plans for the downtown might not be as clearly defined and cohesive as they need to be to maximize and sustain the revitalization. If a significant percentage of stakeholders lose faith in the process, the whole revitalization process could suffer seriously. Clearly defined and communicated goals, objective and accomplishments will be needed to sustain the momentum. Communication and celebration of accomplishments with both residents and business owners will be a key component of the strategy to keep the revitalization moving in the right direction.

As the city grows, so will law-enforcement issues. It will be important to have the appropriate law-enforcement resources available to address the issues of a growing community and commercial area. One of the strengths of Neosho is it is perceived as a safe community and a good place to raise a family. It is important that that perception and the statistics to support it are maintained.

The city's parks need some major investments to address some deterioration issues. Since the beauty of the city's parks is an important strength Neosho can offer potential residents and visitors, it will be important to maintain the integrity of the city's parks and recreational amenities.

The problem with parking in the downtown area will only worsen as amenities, such as the auditorium, are developed and the downtown becomes more of a destination. These parking problems, left unaddressed, could discourage further development and hinder the success of current development.

The lack of clear signage and traffic direction around the downtown square will continue to discourage some people from attempting to shop in the downtown, in spite of developments that are located there. People have complained that it is dangerous to try and merge onto the square because of visibility problems. As long as traffic issues discourage people from shopping in the downtown, revitalization of the area will be hindered. It will also be important to inform the public of actions taken to improve the traffic issues in the downtown. Correcting them won't be enough if the public is unaware of the corrections made.

As new shops and services move into the downtown, they will compete for dollars with existing businesses, and a backlash of resentment could develop as that happens. Unless all the business owners are educated to understand that many successful businesses in the downtown means strength for all businesses in the downtown, there could be a splintering of downtown efforts and a breakdown in cooperation among merchants. If this happens, it will hamper the overall revitalization of the downtown area.