

# FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

## FINAL SURVEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

CITY OF ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI

May 30, 2007



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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



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## SECTION I FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted six focus groups in St. Joseph, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the St. Joseph community in regard to the downtown area. The six groups included the following: 1) the DREAM committee, 2) City Council members and administrators, 3) downtown area residents, 4) business owners, 5) college students and staff, and 6) high school students and staff.

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

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

### **A. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE BUSINESS OWNERS:**

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

- **General Questions about St. Joseph**

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

- **Downtown Specific Questions**

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

- **Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown**

08. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown St. Joseph. We'd like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...
  - Additional/types of businesses would you like to see downtown?
  - Dining and entertainment?
  - Parks and outdoor recreation?
09. Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?
  - Street repair?
  - Landscaping/beautification?
  - Green space?
  - Building repairs, renovation, upgrades?
10. Thinking specifically about the riverfront area, are there other amenities you would like to see in this area?
11. Of all the potential improvements we've just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the city?
12. What could the City do to help your business thrive or keep your property values strong over the next few years?
13. St. Joseph currently has a "special business district" in which an additional tax is collected. Is there a different funding option you would prefer to help provide extra funds to downtown revitalization? Would a TIF be appropriate?
14. How important do you feel the future of downtown is to the future of the rest of the community? How important do you feel the riverfront area is to the redevelopment of downtown?

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

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

- **General Questions about St. Joseph**

01. Generally speaking, how would you describe this area to someone visiting from another city? Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?
02. What are the main shopping areas for area residents? From how far away do people come to do their regular shopping (groceries, household items)?

03. What about dining and entertainment options? What are popular choices for local residents? When friends or relatives visit from out of town, where do you take them?
04. What kinds of recreation are popular with local residents? What kinds of opportunities are there to participate in these activities in St. Joseph?

- **Downtown Specific Questions**

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

- **Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown**

09. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown St. Joseph. We’d like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...
  - Additional/types of businesses would you like to see downtown?
  - Dining and entertainment?
  - Parks and recreation?
10. Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?
  - Street repair?
  - Landscaping/beautification?
  - Green space?
  - Building repairs, renovations, upgrades?
11. Thinking specifically about the riverfront area, are there other amenities you would like to see in this area?
12. Of all the potential improvements we’ve just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the city?
13. How important do you feel the future of downtown is to the future of the rest of the community? How important do you feel the riverfront area is to the redevelopment of downtown?

14. What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* St. Joseph to resemble?

### C. THE ST. JOSEPH AREA

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

The groups described St. Joseph as a friendly town with a small-town atmosphere and a population of between 70,000 and 80,000, which makes it one of the larger towns in the region in population. They mentioned a few other things that would attract residents, including the award-winning schools, Missouri Western College, a good healthcare system, a helpful and charitable community, a strong sense of values, a variety of shopping options, and a location within 35 minutes of Kansas City. The area has a rich history as a town that thrived in the 1800's and is famous for being "the beginning of the Pony Express and the end of Jesse James."

The groups, overall, felt that the area is moving very slowly in the right direction. Many participants mentioned St. Joseph's "potential" or "unrealized potential," and felt that the town has the possibility of major changes in the right direction. Some participants felt that the area is already moving in a positive direction, with downtown and uptown redevelopment and new residential living downtown, while others described the town as "stagnant" or "not moving in any direction."

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

The main shopping areas in St. Joseph are North Hills, East Hills, and the Belt. The northeast shopping developments house many chain stores and restaurants, such as Wal-Mart and Chili's, and the Belt is a stretch of retail that serves as another shopping hub for St. Joseph. The participants mentioned a few shops downtown, but felt that downtown currently is not a "main shopping area." Some described it more as an entertainment area than a shopping area. Many residents also drive to Kansas City for a wider variety and more exclusive shopping.

People come in from surrounding northern towns to shop, from Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, but a lot of neighboring Missouri towns use Kansas City as their main shopping destination. The people who come from other towns to St. Joseph shop at the north and east side shopping developments at chain stores and restaurants. Many of these chains are visible from the interstate.

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

The participants felt that there is a variety of entertainment options, many of them downtown, including events at the Civic Arena and the Missouri Theater, college sports and events, and restaurants. There are many downtown or near-downtown restaurants that the groups

mentioned, and all of the groups brought up Boudreaux's as a unique and excellent restaurant in downtown St. Joseph. There are also a number of bars. The groups mentioned going to see movies at the movie theater, but the movie theaters are all located in the northeast.

For downtown entertainment, while there are specific events at the Missouri Theater and the Arena, there is not currently much "consistent" entertainment, according to the group participants. They felt the need for more dining and nightly entertainment downtown that is family-friendly or more upscale-adult than the current "dive" bars.

The parks and the new riverwalk were mentioned as popular outdoor options, as well as the softball fields north on the riverfront.

#### **D. DOWNTOWN ST. JOSEPH: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT**

- **Generally speaking, would you say that downtown St. Joseph is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?**

The participants felt that downtown St. Joseph is moving slowly in the right direction. There is much more residential development downtown, which the groups saw as positive, but they felt that more market-rate housing—as opposed to low-to-moderate-income housing—would make the residential developments even more positive. They felt that, by bringing residents in, the downtown could begin to develop more retail, more restaurants, and more consistent entertainment.

There were a few areas in which the participants saw downtown as "stagnant". These participants felt that keeping the food kitchen where it is downtown would continue to encourage homeless people to mill about the area, which perpetuates the perception that downtown St. Joseph is unsafe. They also mentioned that the residential developments are currently not mixed-use, and suggested having retail space on the ground floor and residential spaces on upper floors of buildings. In addition, some felt that aesthetics, parking, signage, attracting new retail, and business hours would have to be addressed to move downtown in a positive direction.

- **What are the major reasons you visit downtown? How often do you visit downtown St. Joseph? Is there anything that you used to do downtown but now do elsewhere or vice versa? Why?**

Participants mentioned entertainment opportunities as their major reasons for visiting downtown, including shows at the Missouri Theater, dining at a few of the restaurants downtown, and events at the Civic Arena, such as home and garden shows, tractor pulls, sporting events, circus shows, and other special-interest events.

For shopping, most participants said that they do not come downtown. A few go to the antique shops, or destination shops such as Artful Life, but overall, participants felt that the downtown lacks shopping variety, and therefore they rarely go to the few good shops downtown.

A few of the older participants described downtown St. Joseph, in its heyday, as an up-to-date shopping and socializing hub for the town, but concede that the downtown has not been such a hub since the early 1960's.

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

In discussing user-friendliness, the groups brought up parking as a major issue. While there are enough parking spots downtown, according to the participants, there is a “perceived parking problem.” People *believe* that parking is difficult, for various reasons, which deters them from coming downtown.

One major reason is that the two-hour parking limits and all the street parking rules make downtown visitors more likely to get tickets. According to some in the groups, this gives people the perception that they are not wanted downtown, and also makes them more likely to go to Wal-Mart or other chain stores to shop, where they can park for as long as they want for free and not get a ticket.

Another major reason for this perceived parking problem ties in with the perception that downtown is “unsafe.” The parking garages, according to participants, are “not well lit” and seem unsafe to people trying to navigate them. In addition, the top levels of many downtown parking lots are closed because of disrepair, which participants feel sends residents and visitors the negative message that the city does not care about downtown.

Signage was another issue, both an issue of aesthetics and an issue of user-friendliness. The groups felt that more attractive signage, more strategically placed, would help people unfamiliar with downtown find their way around. In addition, signage pointing people to available parking would help solve the perception that there is not enough parking downtown.

The groups brought up business hours as an issue. Many of the downtown businesses are open from 9:00 to 5:00 on weekdays only, making it difficult or impossible for many working people to patronize these businesses. While regular business hours are fine for government services, the participants felt, evening and/or weekend hours are very important for retail businesses, shops, restaurants, and other services that rely on a working customer base.

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

Residents and visitors get information from the local newspaper, from the television station KQ-2, and by word-of-mouth as their major sources. Other sources include the Chamber of Commerce, the downtown partnership flyers, and the City’s website. The college students in one group felt that a more effective electronic advertising system, especially geared to Missouri Western students, would help get the word out to a younger population. They felt that an e-mail newsletter or a website linked to the College’s website would be effective.

## **E. DOWNTOWN ST. JOSEPH: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

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

For additional types of businesses, the groups felt that businesses to provide services to the growing number of residents would be welcome additions to downtown: a grocery store, a bookstore, a pharmacy, a deli, and other such businesses to serve residents. For shopping, the participants felt that specialty stores, art galleries, and craft stores are the most realistic and desirable for downtown, since downtown cannot compete with Wal-Mart or other chain stores, but it can offer visitors and residents a unique experience.

For dining and entertainment options, the groups agreed that more restaurants would help draw people downtown, and specifically suggested dining options with outdoor patios, more fine dining options, and upscale bars. In entertainment, the participants felt that there should be a more consistent stream of entertainment downtown; while there is already a smattering of live music, art, shows at the Missouri Theater, and events at the Civic Arena, they felt that something open every night, such as a movie theater, would help bring people more consistently into downtown.

In considering parks and recreation, the groups suggested more green space and beautification downtown, as well as the possibility of a small playground to help draw families downtown. In addition, a stronger connection to the riverfront area, and perhaps a continuous path connecting the riverwalk to downtown or a similar bike path, would help incorporate riverfront recreation options into the downtown.

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

According to the groups, there is a streetscape plan currently in place that will beautify the downtown considerably, and all of the participants were optimistic about this streetscape plan helping the downtown area. They felt that beautification is an important step in conveying the feeling of safety and desirability that will draw skeptical residents downtown and bring visitors back to town.

The groups focused on abandoned buildings as a focal point for renovation. Many buildings have their historic facades covered by work that was done in the late 1970's during the town's "urban renewal" time, and many participants felt that if these metal coverings were removed to expose the original facades, the downtown would look considerably more attractive.

Parking structure renovation was another concern for many participants. Many of the parking garage's top levels are in disrepair, which, according to the participants, is unattractive to visitors and residents. By repairing these parking garages and adding more natural or artificial light in them, the City could improve the public's perception of downtown.

The groups focused on signage, as well, in discussing the aesthetics of downtown. They felt that official signage, such as street signs and directional signs, could be improved and upgraded to have a historic feel, matching the look of the buildings around it. They also mentioned that the City should set standards for signage outside businesses, not allowing businesses to have unattractive signs.

- **Thinking specifically about the riverfront area, are there other amenities you would like to see in this area?**

The groups unanimously felt that the riverfront area is currently “underutilized,” and that it has potential to be a focal point for the community. While there was general consensus that the riverwalk is an excellent start, participants wanted to see more to draw people to that area. Ideas included a restaurant with outdoor dining (perhaps a dock patio), some sort of riverboat with a casino or a restaurant, expanding the riverwalk to make it longer and connect it with downtown, and putting in a sports venue in the area.

The challenge these focus groups identified is the riverfront area’s location—in relation to the highway and the railroad tracks, and as a flood plain. Because of flooding, nothing very elaborate or permanent can go in much of the riverfront area, but the bigger concerns were the noise from trains and cars, the industrial feel of the area by the tracks, and the perception that the area is unsafe because of its industrial character.

- **How important do you feel the future of downtown is to the future of the rest of the community? How important do you feel the riverfront area is to the redevelopment of downtown?**

The participants had a range of ideas about how the future of downtown fits into the future of St. Joseph as a whole. While some participants felt that the downtown is absolutely integral to the success of St. Joseph overall, many participants thought that it would be nice to have downtown redeveloped, but not crucial to St. Joseph’s success. They echoed similar sentiments in discussing how the riverfront fits into St. Joseph’s future, and also proposed that connecting the riverfront area more clearly to downtown would help both areas thrive.

Those who viewed the downtown as crucial to St. Joseph’s future cited other cities with thriving downtowns, described how potential residents and companies feel about cities with redeveloped downtowns, and felt that without a strong downtown, St. Joseph cannot grow stronger. Those who saw the downtown as less important mentioned a number of other developments in town, including uptown and the areas northeast of town, and felt that these developments would help St. Joseph thrive, with or without a redeveloped downtown.

- **What other downtowns in the area would you say St. Joseph is most like? What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* it to resemble?**

The groups mentioned a number of other downtowns, picking features that made these downtowns desirable or strategies that helped revitalize these downtowns. The larger cities and areas they looked at included the following: Minneapolis/St. Paul, for its mix of the historic and the modern; St. Louis’s Washington Avenue Loft District, for its use of historic

buildings in mixed-use residential and retail; Kansas City's Country Club Plaza, for its unique shopping and its appeal as a destination; Denver, for its public transportation system; and Chicago, for its ability to make people not mind walking from their parking spots, because of the variety and number of shops and restaurants. Smaller cities and communities the groups mentioned included Lincoln, Nebraska; Wichita, Kansas; Lawrence, Kansas; Savannah, Georgia; Charleston, West Virginia; Charlotte, North Carolina; Pasadena, California; and Sacramento, California.

## F. KEY POINTS

### • **Key points about the St. Joseph area:**

- ◆ St. Joseph is a friendly town with a small-town atmosphere and a population of between 70,000 and 80,000, and has award-winning schools, Missouri Western College, a good healthcare system, a charitable community, and a rich history.
- ◆ The focus group participants felt that St. Joseph is moving slowly in the right direction, but still has quite a bit of "unrealized potential."
- ◆ The main shopping areas in St. Joseph are on the northeast side of town, and some residents also go to Kansas City to shop; many towns north of St. Joseph in Nebraska and Iowa use St. Joseph as a shopping hub.
- ◆ There is a variety of entertainment options, many of them downtown, including events at the Civic Arena and the Missouri Theater, college sports and events, and restaurants.
- ◆ They groups felt the need for more dining and nightly entertainment downtown that is family-friendly or more upscale-adult than the current "dive" bars.
- ◆ The parks and the new riverwalk are popular outdoor recreation options, as well as the softball fields north on the riverfront.

### • **Key points about downtown St. Joseph in the present:**

- ◆ Downtown St. Joseph is moving slowly in the right direction, particularly because of the residential developments and the renewed interest in redeveloping downtown.
- ◆ Things that are holding downtown St. Joseph back, according to the participants, include the food kitchen and the population of homeless people, the fact that the new residential developments are primarily low-to-moderate-income, and the residential buildings that do not have first-floor retail.
- ◆ People visit downtown primarily for entertainment, including shows at the Missouri Theater, dining at a few of the restaurants downtown, and events at the Civic Arena.
- ◆ Most participants said that they do not come downtown for shopping, and those that do come downtown visit just one or two specific stores.

- ◆ Parking is a major obstacle, currently, to user-friendliness, because of a “perceived parking problem.” People perceive parking as a problem because of the parking rules that make it easy to get ticketed, the perception that the parking garages are unsafe, and sometimes the lack of knowledge about where viable parking is located.
- ◆ People get information about downtown events and businesses from the local newspaper, the local television station, word-of-mouth, the Chamber of Commerce, the downtown partnership flyers, and the City’s website.
- ◆ College students would like to get more information about downtown events and businesses electronically, through campus e-newsletters and other possible delivery systems.
- **Key points about the future of downtown St. Joseph:**
  - ◆ Businesses to provide services to the growing number of residents would be welcome additions to downtown: a grocery store, a bookstore, a pharmacy, a deli, and other such businesses.
  - ◆ For shopping, specialty stores, art galleries, and craft stores are the most realistic and desirable for downtown, since downtown cannot compete with Wal-Mart or other chain stores, but it can offer visitors and residents a unique experience.
  - ◆ More restaurants would help draw people downtown, specifically dining options with outdoor patios, more fine dining options, and upscale bars.
  - ◆ There should be a more consistent stream of entertainment downtown; while there is already a smattering of live music, art, shows at the Missouri Theater, and events at the Civic Arena, something open every night, such as a movie theater, would help bring people more consistently into downtown.
  - ◆ The groups suggested more green space and beautification downtown, as well as the possibility of a small playground to help draw families downtown.
  - ◆ A stronger connection to the riverfront area, and perhaps a continuous path connecting the riverwalk to downtown or a similar bike path, would help incorporate riverfront recreation options into the downtown.
  - ◆ Beautification, according to the groups, is an important step in conveying the feeling of safety and desirability that will draw skeptical residents downtown and bring visitors back to town.
  - ◆ The abandoned buildings should be a focal point for renovation, exposing the historic facades underneath the metal ones put up during the city’s “urban renewal” time.
  - ◆ Parking garage renovation—particular upper floor renovations and the addition of better lighting—should be a priority.

- ◆ According to the groups, official signage, such as street signs and directional signs, should be improved and upgraded to have a historic feel, matching the look of the buildings around it.
- ◆ The City, according to the participants, should set standards for signage outside businesses.
- ◆ The participants had mixed feelings about how downtown fits into the future of St. Joseph as a whole: while some participants felt that the downtown is absolutely integral to the success of St. Joseph overall, many participants thought that it would be nice to have downtown redeveloped, but not crucial to St. Joseph's success. They echoed similar sentiments in discussing how the riverfront fits into St. Joseph's future, and also proposed that connecting the riverfront area more clearly to downtown would help both areas thrive.
- ◆ The groups unanimously felt that the riverfront area is currently "underutilized," and that it has great potential.
- ◆ The riverwalk is an excellent start, there should be more to draw people to the riverfront area, including maybe a restaurant with a dock patio, some sort of riverboat with a casino or a restaurant, an expanded riverwalk connected with downtown, and a sports venue in the area.
- ◆ The groups identified the riverfront area's location as a major challenge—in relation to the highway and the railroad tracks, and as a flood plain.
- ◆ Towns and cities with desirable features, identified by the participants, included the following: Minneapolis/St. Paul; St. Louis's Washington Avenue Loft District; Kansas City's Country Club Plaza; Denver; and Chicago; Lincoln, Nebraska; Wichita, Kansas; Lawrence, Kansas; Savannah, Georgia; Charleston, West Virginia; Charlotte, North Carolina; Pasadena, California; and Sacramento, California.

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## SECTION II

### DREAM COMMITTEE DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Clint Thompson with the city planning and community development department. Working with the DREAM initiative. I sat through this yesterday, so I may just chirp in from time to time.

I'm Joe Braden, provost of Missouri Western.

I'm Doug Bell, I'm on the downtown partnership board, and I'm with Riverfront Park.

I'm Jim Rock, president of the downtown partnership and represent the Hilliard Company.

R.T. Turner, (unintelligible).

Al Purcell, and I'm on the executive committee with the DREAM initiative and part of the finance team. Community volunteer, and I serve as vice chairman of Heartland Health.

Ted Allison, I'm the new Chamber president, and I also bring the perspective of being a new resident for the last 6 months after spending a lifetime somewhere else.

I'm Winston Bennett, local investor.

*Moderator: Thanks again for coming. I'd like to start by asking you to describe St. Joseph as a whole.*

It's a family-friendly old river town, good schools, low crime, attractive...

Of course, you'd expect the Chamber guy to say it's a business community. We have a stand-alone local economy.

It's a small town, 80 some thousand people here, good workforce, low crime. The biggest thing I would say is that you get an awful good product for the price. I know some people don't want to hear this, but if you go someplace else, the taxes in St. Joe are not very high. The one thing I've said is that the biggest problem with St. Joe is that 50% of the people here have never left St. Joe and haven't seen the rest of the world.

That's a positive thing in a lot of ways. We have a lower cost of real estate and other things because the market dictated that cost. It's a great place for families unless you want to do nontraditional things, like activities and that. I see a lot of unrealized potential. I think that's in a nutshell what St. Joseph is, unrealized potential.

We've lived all over the United States, in 26 different homes and many different areas, and we've lived here 11 years right outside city limits. I'd say it's a very livable community for existing residents, but it's not very livable for folks that are looking to running companies and coming to

town, in terms of shopping and restaurants. It's the most charitable community I've ever been in. The per capita giving here is the largest in the United States. And I've never seen a community this size that has the culture—I'm talking about the museums and the history...

...and the university.

And I think the educational system here is very good. The tax base is, unfortunately, far too low. I think the healthcare system is probably one of the best in a community of this size. Security, very low crime. I think I've probably said enough.

I agree with Winston. The potential here is unbelievable. When I look at life science, it's an untapped future potential, and likewise with the university. I think there's untapped potential even there.

The truth is we need to do things that people that don't live in St. Joseph will appreciate. Unless you're doing a focus group of people that may or may not want to move here, a lot of this I hope is weighted appropriately. We have a community that doesn't invest in itself. When we talk about its culture, it's former culture. It's all historic things. We don't look at things that are being done now. No one is investing in the culture of downtown. There's no initiative looking forward—there's a lot of maintaining our past. Unless this community floats some bonds and invests in some large capital projects...

To build on Winston's comment, my comment about the livability of this town. The executives of our plants and organizations don't live in this community, and they need to live here.

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

We're not sure that it's moving.

I agree.

Notwithstanding the new shops, I do not believe it's moving.

You know, I lived in Pasadena, California, where they transformed it, and Pasadena basically was a resort town from the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in the 60's and 70's, it wasn't all that different from downtown St. Joe. You know, the go-go areas in LA were out in Westwood. Well, something happened in the 70's and 80's where that town completely transformed itself, and the foot traffic downtown exceeded that in Westwood. So these things can be done. I'm not sure how it was financed—they had a lot of people with lots of money and lots of ideas, and they were able to contribute to Pasadena's development. I think we have people like that here. My personal feeling is if you want to build on the major employers, you're going to have to move sort of towards Country Club Plaza sort of atmosphere, although it would take a while to get there, rather than something like the Crossroads Art District.

This community does not have a unified vision, both politically and also with businesses. It certainly doesn't have a governance process.

*Moderator: What about downtown specifically? Is it moving in the right direction, the wrong direction?*

It's not moving, and I don't know much about the existing strategic plan, but I'm just wondering what's in there, whether it has to be revised after 6 years, and how realistic and thorough it was. Was there an inventory of properties, a list of things, employers that had to be moved in, opportunities between job-producing entities and residential, what are the funding sources, are we going to go TIF in order to get things moving here? I don't know whether that plan exists, and if it does, how complete it is.

There have been a number of plans. A very comprehensive one in 1987. There was another one in 95 or 96. Many of those things have not been executed, especially the financing... bonds, infrastructure. Things like trash pickup and sidewalks. These things have slowed down progress.

We do have a master plan, but I guess it all depends on how you define moving. The master plan does have to be redone. We have made some great strides in getting people to move downtown, but we're still in first gear. I agree, the funding, the financing for some of these projects, and for people to invest is not there.

We think it's organic, it's not planned. Steve's putting 30 million dollars in the Maryville. I think we both know tenants and other things that are substantially changing, but it's not a plan. It's organic. There's no overall commitment. You're going to be bringing 700 people downtown. I just signed 2 new tenants that will hopefully bring employees. I think we're seeing incremental change, but it's not planned change with an overarching vision for downtown.

I think when you mentioned organic growth, that's evidence that there is potential here, if this much private investment is going on. We can't wish things to happen. But given that that's been the case, we're very fortunate that we have people that have brought their checkbook in and made investments downtown and stand to do more if there's more promise. When I was going through the interview process for the Chamber process, I didn't know the community, and I called the past president/CEO and talked to him about it, and I asked him to summarize the culture, the mindset, and he said, "We have a collective inferiority complex and great potential that's totally unrealized by the general public." Somehow we've not been able to put the pieces together for a unified leadership base to carry a strategic plan forward. Piecemeal would provide successes, but if we really want to make the leap to bringing what we'd all consider new revitalization downtown, it's going to take some thinking on a grander scale. Many communities are on a max point on taxes, and we're not there. If we could put together a plan with elements in it that would light this thing up, we have that little window where the voter might just agree that would in turn spark new private investments. We've seen success stories across the country—Springfield is one. They've been able to accomplish some of the things that we've talked about. The model works. It just takes collective, unified, visionary effort, and everybody to agree on some basic steps to get it done. We've talked planning for a long time, but we need to take the steps to implement these plans.

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

That's the 64-million-dollar question.

Are we talking residents?

*Moderator: Sure.*

Residents are only coming downtown for the new, cool, lofty stuff that we're building. There's nothing else down here for them.

Downtown, at this point, is still ugly. Every building has changed hands, and it's merchandising each development. Do we actually need more loft apartments? No one has actually calculated these things. Those are numbers that need to be set in the plans. Unusual things would bring people downtown. It's not going to be traditional retailers. It has to be something that they can't find somewhere else in St. Joseph, and there's going to have to be a focus on the density of whatever that is.

I think commercial investment will come when critical mass starts to take place. There are people looking for a place to invest. You have to give them reason and confidence. Once we can establish a long-term vision, I think the private side will be there. To get specific, I don't go to a lot of baseball games, but I have seen many times where a new ballpark in walkable distance from downtown brings new nightlife and weekend activity, and you see hotels, restaurants, all kinds of things spring up around that. Just went to a ballgame in Springfield, and they had sky boxes, and people were being brought in from out of town, but the general seating was full, too. If not a ballpark, something of that scale, a public investment that will spark foot traffic.

We could get rid of the scrapyards on 229 and put in a ballpark. And take some of those empty buses and do a trolley from there to downtown. The people who make a decision to move to the community isn't the CEO or CFO. It's the family of the CEO or the CFO. They don't want to drive to Kansas City when they want a touch of culture. That stems from the arts. The arts have a much larger impact, because people want to feel cultured. That's the first touchstone that people will settle on, a sense of creativity, whether it's music or the tactile arts or just coffee shops, salons, funky Indian restaurants. I've never been in a city that's regentrified its downtown without the arts. St. Louis, Kansas City, New York, San Francisco. It creates a general sense of well-being. Until we start to keep our kids here after college...

The arts... you don't have to schedule when you take your family to the museum, you can go there anytime. The arts and the areas around that speak volumes about the community. With the exception of a couple of restaurants, there aren't really things that pull you into this area. There isn't a huge pull for people.

Your downtown is what you call a diamond in the rough, and if you would take TIF money and clear out all the crap, you'd see the diamonds.

I'm amazed that the visionary folks years ago said, you need some kind of transportation system. And the salvage yard is one of the gates into the city—it's an unbelievable eyesore.

The Chamber is the economic heart of the community, and thinking about the youth, our future of the business sector depends on our ability to capture this talent. We have a great university, a lot of bright minds coming out of our high schools, and they go somewhere else after graduation.

Too often, they're going somewhere else. To me, that has potential written all over. If we want to build this local economy, we have to give that young segment a reason to want to stay here or move here. I think everything that Winston and Al have just described, is exactly why they left. They went through bankruptcy, and new people were hired, and they took one look at St. Joseph and said, "No way. We're going to Kansas City." This isn't an overnight thing. The CEO they hired looked at the town and said, "We'll operate here but we're not going to manage here." If we want to attract management-level people, we're going to need to reestablish this community as a place in the sun. The bottom line may be promising, but the family will make that decision.

*Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown, in terms of parking, navigation?*

I think it's dead at night, or the kind of entertainment that don't really appeal to CEOs and their families. There are a couple exceptions—the symphony's pretty good, and there's a lot of music events that run out the university that use downtown venues, and that's probably going to increase. There is this issue that Auburn-Kemper isn't really downtown, but I spent a number of years in Huntington, West Virginia, which is an amazing river town, and what they did there is to put a destination mall in, but as far as I can tell, what that did was to attract from their main street the same customers, and I don't think it was a net increase. It was basically a comedy club, eateries, and a multiplex. They had the advantage that Marshall, which is about twice the size of Westin, is probably within a mile, and they run a shuttle bus between the campus and the downtown area. That really doesn't address the issue of going after CEOs and management teams to live here. I think the residential areas in St. Joe are much more attractive to that type of manager person than Huntington, West Virginia. I think they're just treading water in terms of their development.

I don't think that question should be asked by this group. I've lived a long life, and I don't have a problem getting around downtown. When you talk to people that come in, they've got all sorts of problems. I don't know if that's just a perceived problem, or if we need to educate them on what to do. Personally, I have no problems, but I'm the wrong one to ask.

I think it's very accessible. If you have a general idea of route, the road system is easy. Once you get here, then what?

We do stupid stuff. Here we have people that get one ticket here, and they never come back. They say, "I got a parking ticket here, so I'm going to go to the mall or someplace else." We do have some tail wag the dog issues here, and we're going to have to say, "This is stupid. Why are we letting this affect the rest of the community." There's an old West Indian adage called crabs in a bucket, which is when one crab tries to crawl out, the others pull him back. There's a sense of fatalism or lack of optimism here, and that really affects our politicians. The most vocal people are the ones who fear change the most. It's not about what we can do, it's what we shouldn't do. You seldom see people standing up. There's a cultural mistrust of government in St. Joseph. I think the Yankees and the Jayhawkers have something to do with that. So people want to keep government small, they don't trust it. There's a cultural shift that has to occur, and that's going to occur when our politicians unite and focus on a singular purpose and stop listening to the negative people.

Contrarian populace. There's a lot of pandering to that.

One of the systemic failures we have is the way we elect our city council. Our charter calls for the entire body to be elected at once. There's no continuity. I agree that the voters should be considered, but we throw it all out at once and start over too often, so it's difficult to put any long-term strategic plans in place. We've had plans and great community leaders, and yet, obviously the implementation has been lacking. I think you can draw lines to some of that, is we keep starting over.

Can I ask a question? Getting back on the question of accessibility, let me just throw this out. Are parking meters an answer? We want our downtown to be like in Kansas City, the urban retail areas, and they have parking meters and parking garages, and in St. Joe it's a different mindset. Why shouldn't we have a revenue through parking meters?

I have an issue with them. Our economy is too fragile. I don't think we're trying to be negative, we're trying to be pragmatic. We have ownership in St. Joseph. We're not going to blow sunshine off the focus group's... the idea of somebody that's miserable...

I will park some days from 3 hours and not get a ticket, and I'll park for 1 hour sometimes and get a ticket. If I know there's a meter, a machine and not a person, ticket... to have this randomness, these parking people, the little things are tipping points. People that come downtown are trying to support downtown, and once you get a ticket...we've had to pay for people's parking tickets as a cost of doing business. I would support parking meters. Doing that, people would begrudgingly say, "Oh, all right." If they know their ticket will support downtown beautification...

This is the simplest small town to get around downtown. The streets are north-south or east-west, easy to navigate...when I think of parts of Chicago or DC or Manhattan, this is *very* simple. Parking is simple. You might have to walk an extra 100 feet, but I do agree on the parking. I got 2 tickets in one day. I just happened to pick the wrong side of the street.

We're looking at charging for special events when there's free parking, so our largest crowds are getting a free service while our patrons during the week are paying. KCI shows how many spaces are available in the garage, and that kind of a thing will get people's attention and show them that there is parking.

I have driven around Zona Rosa and those squares waiting for one of those spots to open up, and cars are following me. They're waiting in line to find a meter, because it's a destination. If we get to that point, the problem will solve itself. I think we've got enough parking, frankly. It's the rules we're tripping over. I'd like to see us actually have a parking problem, because then you've achieved the goal of bringing people down here. We do hear at the Chamber that when somebody gets a ticket, it's a stigma.

It's another reason not to come downtown.

I think if we can take the steps to bring that critical mass...

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

I think we need a core group of service providers, and the rest will be judged by opportunity. A grocery store, a dry cleaner, a bookstore. Opportunity will help you move some of the rest. We have how many kids under 21 at Missouri Western. Like 75%? So that gives us 3500 kids. It would be a big help to get those kids to want to live in St. Joseph instead of commute home, so you want to create something interesting to them. They have disposable income through their parents. We need things that they can go do. There's no place... Missouri Western is going to come downtown with some of their programs, and Northwest is going to do graduate programs downtown, and activity begets activity. The core is going to be, if we have 700 residents coming in or the other new apartments, all this stuff is going on now, but we need to merchandise and promote specific businesses that will make downtown livable, and then, if you want to do an entertainment district...you've got to do fundamentals first, and we always skip the fundamentals, and we do convention centers and other three-point shots, and we skip things like parking meters and grocery stores.

The essentials need to be down here. Also, some restaurants would be beneficial. There are some good restaurants downtown, but still, I think a lot of people opt to drive somewhere else. There's not a lot of convenient places just for sandwiches.

We're trying to change that.

We go down to Zona Rosa quite often, and when you eat downtown here, you eat and you leave. In Zona Rosa, we walk to the bookstore, the Sharper Image, or we walk down and look in the window at shoes...there are many other things to do. That Coldstone ice cream place. There are places to work. When we first moved here, we'd go over to Dante's and walk to an antique shop. Things to walk to.

I'd like to take this back to a principal of economic development. I've only been here 6 months. We have a number of incentives that aren't being fully used, and I think that's because the rules have changed. No longer do we just offer financial incentives, free land or reduced rental rates. Site selections are being made on the quality of the community itself. I think this whole thing, and especially downtown, I think is fundamental to bringing quality employers. If we can accomplish these things we've already talked about, and we can capture the talent from our youth, just if we can keep that up, where we have the assets here that will inspire those young people to stay, then the employers will come. We won't have to worry about an economic development fund. Deals on a reasonable scale are within our grasp, if we can keep a pool of these young, talented people.

(unintelligible electronic noise.)

...We are rethinking the game rules for that fund and adjusting our strategy...

11 million dollars for the uptown development fund.

You know, that's a piece of ground just waiting to be developed.

The contract's been signed with Pioneer.

(side conversations.)

*Moderator: What about parks and recreation? What role do you see things of that nature downtown?*

That would be great, but unless they change their attitude, you can build parks but they need to maintain it.

Old is not historic, and sometimes we confuse that. Time has overtaken the functionality of some of these buildings. The city needs to decide whether to save these buildings. All these empty lots could be turned into green spaces, and at least to apartment developers, and if you rent this apartment, you get a little section of garden or something. Maybe gated gardens with limestone, something so this doesn't collect trash. We've been very distrustful and unwilling to use condemnation in this community. And I'm a libertarian, so this is kind of like sacrilege for me, but we're putting shiny new hubcaps on a crappy little car.

(many people talking at once.)

...we have to convert the people living there from the kinds of people that are there now to the kinds of people we want there...

...sometimes even free isn't enough. He got that house for free and spent \$150,000 on it, but his neighbors... I have a duplex and a six-plex, and I have a prostitute living on one side. Activity makes those kinds of nefarious individuals uncomfortable. If you have a lot of people walking the streets, if you have landlords held to a standards, you have families walking the streets... there's been a lot of defensive investment. We need people who believe in the future, not people doing section 8 housing because they're assured of getting their money back.

Investors see crime, they see drugs. Nobody's going to come here if they see that.

I think we're going to have to have a comprehensive master plan. Just one initiative is not going to fix it. I think you've got the issue of the demographics. There is promise, but you don't have to drive very far to see that there's a lot more of that. I think we'll attract more investors, the risk-takers, if they see that there's promise, that the public investment has been made and the trend is positive. I think there's a lot of potential here, and the private investment will be here.

Well, Western would like to participate more directly in the economic development. We're already in workforce development, but we can't seem to make the connection. I don't know if you could create Bed and Breakfasts to bring in tourists... I just don't know how to make that connection. To me, that's an issue. I'm trying to see what Missouri Western is in a position to offer, and I don't seem to get any answers to that.

(side conversation.)

Well, we want to use the history of St. Joe in our curriculum. St. Joe is exemplary of American history. I'm trying to get our faculty with this inferiority complex, we have the same problem within the university—someone has to take the risk.

We're certainly willing to take the risk.

*Moderator: I wanted to ask, thinking a little more broadly about downtown, how important is downtown to the St. Joseph community at large?*

I think it's a resource that we should tap into. I don't know if I see a major leap forward on the part of downtown. I've seen a lot of communities where this has been done.

I think this could be a tipping point. If there's political will and public and private investment, it sends a very powerful message to companies that wish to come here.

Al, would you agree with what I said earlier about, if we could establish this community as a place for young talent, that our need for financial incentives to bring companies here will be reduced? Companies are more and more focused on the quality of the community rather than the financial incentives. We need to assure them that the long-term picture is solid.

We're not attracting new young professionals, period, notwithstanding the two young gentlemen at this table. Fortunately, we have a group of young professionals that have invested interest in this community, but they don't know how to get engaged. But we're not attracting the companies to bring in new young professionals.

Missouri Western trains nurses, and they leave. I'm just saying, a lot of nurses leave the community when they're done.

A large percentage of our nurses come from Missouri Western. We're getting a big chunk from there.

If you talk about health professions (noise, unintelligible)... this may be something beyond nursing. We're looking at recruiting students primary and secondary age so they're prepared when they go to college. This contributes to keeping people in the community with a high disposable income. There are lots of things that we could contribute to improve the mix of high-salary folks.

*Moderator: Thank you.*

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## SECTION III

### CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS AND ADMINISTRATORS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Chad Kemp, and I'm from the city manager's office.

Jesse Spelmeyer, just graduated from Missouri Western and have worked for the city a few months.

I'm Steve Offenberg, director of (unintelligible) and involved with the property maintenance.

Bill McKenny, parks and recreation and riverfront development.

Barbara LeBass, I work for Missouri Gas Energy, office just south, a mile or so. I'm also on the St. Joseph City Council.

I'm Chris Kenally, police department.

Clint Thompson, planning and community development... (unintelligible)

Mike Herder, I'm on City Council, lived in St. Joe all my life. Was on the police department for 31 years before retiring, and I was one of Bill McKenny's students in high school.

I'm Donna (name unintelligible), I'm on the City Council, and I'm the large representative. This is my third term on the council, and I'm a retired teacher.

*Moderator: Let me start by asking you to tell me a little about St. Joseph. If you were describing this area to somebody from outside of town or that was thinking about moving here, what would you say?*

It's very friendly towards family. It's a family-oriented community, a good place to raise kids. Really low cost of living. I've only been here a year and a half, so I've got a different reference. From my perspective, it's a very well off community that has a little bit of low self-esteem with its self-image.

I think there's a lot of history in St. Joseph, which is good for our community, but also it's a negative to those who have grown up here, and some of the local residents view some of our historic buildings as liabilities, where you see a lot of out-of-town property owners purchasing property because of its potential and recognizing that, and seeing those properties as an asset, so I think it's combining the historical makeup, as far as what we have in and around our downtown and our neighborhoods, to take advantage of our local residents, and attracting the people of St. Joe to rehab these old buildings.

I think St. Joe is a very diverse community, not necessarily culturally, but it's getting that way. If you look at the socioeconomic makeup, you'll see one end of the spectrum to the other. You'll see the very, very poor, the homeless, and you'll see the very wealthy, and there's a, in my opinion, a very definite division along socioeconomic lines. Our cost of living here is very low when you compare it to communities our size in the Midwest or east or west, tax base is very low, which again in my opinion tends to hold us back in a lot of ways. I think the potential for St. Joe to grow, to explode, population-wise, both industrial and retail markets, it's here, I just don't think we've quite developed the potential yet.

We all think that St. Joe has opportunity. If you look at the last several decades, the population has not increased. We've stayed pretty much stagnant, just over 70,000, although we do have growth on our east side of the community, the majority is either people who formerly lived in older neighborhoods, so we have this disinvestment in our community around our downtown, so how do we utilize this initiative to focus not only to bring people back to our downtown, to increase population by providing more amenities for people looking for downtown opportunities, but how do we increase our population rather than transferring our population?

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

The right direction, slowly. Probably too slowly. Given the history, this area started around 1820 as a training post... it was a centrally located place in the Midwest. The city became a recognized city in 1843. There was a lot of millionaires, because of the westward migration, and more people left St. Joe from here than any other city. At one time, we were great with the warehouses and manufacturing, and I think there was a period when people didn't want to be known as a "dirty river town," and they started moving east, and a lot of renewal, I think, tore out a lot of our historical structures, but recently in the last 15 years, there's been quite a few people in the city especially which have improved the riverfront, which of course was kind of embarrassing before, and they've improved that, done a lot of things, are starting to build some public facilities on the river, riverwalks, all that kind of things. There's a lot of people that think that with our epics of history and our draw, we could become a destination tourist attraction, which is not the only thing we want to become, but it's a great addition to the manufacturing base, and the city has been doing quite a bit of things on the river to attract that. One of the problems downtown is that the downtown has not done the things to back up any type of destination tourism, and we have all kinds of things where you talk about museums and things like that, but people want to do more than just come in for an hour or two and look at, say, a nature center or a museum. They want to be able to do other things, like in places like Paducah, Kentucky, where their downtowns are conducive to giving people who come for a visit or a quality of life for citizens to go hand-in-hand with more of a family atmosphere, and some of those taverns downtown for people to come to and enjoy. I think the downtown has not kept up with those type of initiatives to help bring people into town.

One of the things that I like about St. Joseph is the size. Cliff mentioned that population has been increased substantially, but even if we were to become a city of millions, we would lose our flavor, our atmosphere. I like being able to go shopping and encounter people that I know, go to a restaurant and see people that are friends. So, we have this small-town atmosphere, but we have the amenities of a larger city.

*Moderator: What are the main shopping areas in town for people that live in St. Joseph, for regular household goods?*

East Hills and North Village.

There are several locally owned businesses like People's Furniture and Colony House, that are not associated with either one of those places, but people still tend to go to those.

The national tenants are all on the east side of the highway, but thinking towards downtown, you have specialty shops downtown. Not as many as we hope, but... St. Joe's location to Kansas City and other towns, you have people who will take day trips to Westin, Parkville, Atchison, smaller communities than St. Joseph, but they're going to their downtowns to do that specialty shopping, and areas that really, we have probably a larger makeup of historic buildings and a setting that could be fitting for those type of shops, but people go to those locations as opposed to our downtown, because we currently don't have as many options for those types of retail.

I'd say Mike's answer kind of indicates progress, because 3 years ago, if you asked people where they shopped, they'd say East Hills and Kansas City. There's probably more people shopping in town now.

I think if you just drive parking lots at shops at North Village, you see Iowa Plates, you see Nebraska Plates, probably 35 to 40 percent of the cars you see in there on a given day are from Nebraska, Iowa, and occasionally others. Nebraska and Iowa people come here specifically to shop there.

Lot of Kansas tags.

You'd see the same thing for the casino. You know, three years ago, the parking lot was most of the time half full and practically all Missouri plates. You go there now, and the parking lot's full, and there are plates from everywhere.

*Moderator: What about dining and entertainment options? What are popular choices for residents and visitors?*

I like to go to Boudreaux's, and I work in the Kansas City area, and I know a lot of people from Kansas City come up and go to Boudreaux's.

A lot of people come up and go to the Hoof and Horn. I guess the ambiance is the lack of ambiance. It's a very old building down in the south end by the stockyards, very colorful history, it's been everything from a hotel to a brothel, and a restaurant. That's good food.

I think they're struggling, but Gerianne's.

Oh, I love Gerianne's.

That's kind of in a residential neighborhood, but...

It seems like most of the time when people from St. Joseph entertain people from out of town, they take them to a locally owned restaurant. You don't see them taking them to Chili's. There's probably 6 or 7 local owned restaurants.

I think the places that you mentioned, they have a unique flavor. It's not what I call the cookie-cutter food.

Where we take people from out of town, we want them to see Historic St. Joseph, so we take them some place that is uniquely a St. Joseph facility, so they go away and say, "Oh, yeah, we went to this really neat restaurant. It wasn't Applebee's."

That's one of the nice things about it. There are a lot of restaurants that aren't franchises, and a lot of people just want to go to franchises, but those of us who like something more original, there's a lot of choices here.

*Moderator: Let's talk about downtown specifically. I asked earlier whether you thought the city as a whole is moving in the right direction. What about downtown?*

Well, I think the announcement in the paper today was wonderful, about the university coming into St. Joseph, because college students add a special flavor to a community, and I think they will be a wonderful asset here.

When I first moved to St. Joe 18 years ago, City Hall's not too far from downtown, so I decided to walk downtown. I walked downtown and I came back, and I said, "I think I went the wrong way." It was so empty and so deserted, and I don't think that would be the case today. I think I'd at least know I found downtown.

It's been so long since downtown has moved, it's really tough to assess the direction. Personally, I think it's moving in the right direction, but moving very slow. 1975, if you wanted to punish a young policeman for doing something wrong, you made him work downtown, because there was nothing there. He'd ride around for 8 hours, and if you were lucky, you might see one or two local drunks wandering around. That was it. And like Steve said, that isn't the case today.

For a long time, I remember in my childhood and teenage years when downtown was the place to go, because that's where all the action was. The movie theaters, the retail stores, utility companies where you'd go pay your bills... we would ride the bus and spend several hours walking around downtown, looking at store windows.

(many people talking at once.)

I think one thing that shows that downtown is turning around is that we have interest in residential. Lofts are downtown. And throughout the country, that's the kind of thing that turns first, is an interest for people to move back downtown, and after you have a substantial makeup of residents, the restaurants and shops follow to be where the people are, so I think the city's committed to helping increase downtown's view as a residential neighborhood through some of the different programs we've put in place to encourage downtown loft apartments, plus with the recent demolition of the downtown hospital, that opens up several acres of new infill.

There's also a lot better promotion of events downtown, concerts and parades, Mardi Gras. I don't know if there was anything going on there in the 70's and 80's, but there have been a lot more promotion in the last few years.

Back then, too, we had the "pedestrian mall," and that effectively shut downtown down. You couldn't have a parade because there was no place to have it. There were planters and benches and stuff like that, and we called them condos for the drunks. There was absolutely nothing downtown. No burglaries, because there wasn't anything to break into.

*Moderator: Let me ask you about the riverfront area in particular. What are your thoughts on the development that's going on in that area?*

I think the trails, the walking trails, the hike and bike trails, are a real asset—very widely used, safe. There are things to see along them, especially along the riverfront hike and bike trail. Family-friendly.

There are some that are working to improve that with utilities and so forth, so we can have some more riverfront festivals and nightly happenings, to get lighting, and we're working on it. We're hoping in a year or two, there will be lighting all over the trail and transformers for other electrical uses, and I think that may be the key to keeping the people downtown, having them walk and tying the north of the river with downtown. So, some of those things are in the plans.

Do you remember when they had that Freedom Festival on the riverfront? I really liked that.

I did too.

I like having 4<sup>th</sup> of July on the riverfront, because it did bring people downtown, and afterwards they'd go to some of the eating places.

In fact, it became too popular, and there isn't that much land there. That's why the trails west came into being. But there's no reason why we can't bring some of that back downtown.

I was thinking, when we're tourists, what do we do? We look around, and then we find a place to eat. While we're walking around, looking for a place to eat, we shop. I see so many possibilities for the St. Joseph downtown streets, for an area with restaurants and shopping for people that visit the riverfront, they walk downtown, they buy some souvenirs.

But you have to have those type of retail stores that people will walk around and see. The specialty shops. I know Paducah and some of these other cities have almost whole buildings where somebody's making candy, and I don't know about the rest of you, but I love to see how you make fudge. Those type of specialty shops are what those type of people are wanting to do, because they can't do them any other place. I might add here for everybody's knowledge, but Mr. Kenny O'Meara and Mr. Bruner are very interested in working on a lease for the riverfront, and they want to put a building down there at the landing, put a little diner in there and build around there on that ground that you're talking about. And they were talking about putting portable, small little buildings down there up against the railroad tracks for specialty shops, to just start this process, because we can't acquire these tourists and other people to come down

there, if we don't have the things. It's kind of a Catch-22, and their idea is to put these smaller portables down there that don't cost a million dollars, and get people coming downtown and doing some of the retail buying. So I'm real enthusiastic about them doing that, and I might make a point here—it's almost like our parks. We have so much trouble with vandalism and so forth, but every time we find a way to put more people in an area, that undesirable element leaves, and I think why we're having so much trouble down there now on the riverfront is that nobody's down there. You bring a lot of people in there, and those type of people will leave.

And the riverfront's close to the food kitchen.

Yeah.

Speaking of food kitchen, I think that is something that needs to... and I know, they tried to get that moved, and it is very unsightly to come off 229 and see drunk people laying on the sidewalk by the food kitchen with pit bulls. It somehow does not send a good message, seeing people passed out on the street.

*Moderator: We talked about specialty shops downtown, but what are other reasons that people visit downtown?*

Special events. Theater.

Museums.

In the not too distant future, we might have a downtown entertainment district. We've got a good start, we've got a theater. People I've talked to say the theater is really nice, and they do a great job with their plays.

What other components would be in an entertainment district?

Well, all I've got to compare it to is a couple I've visited, like Springfield. They have a theater, but then they have 3 or 4 art stores, they have a theater that shows nothing but foreign films, they have one that shows nothing but old films, some even black and white, and they have nightclubs and specialty bars, like martini bars and wine bars. Omaha's a lot the same way.

The theater's an old theater with tables and dinner, wine, whatever, and you could see a regular movie sitting in a comfortable spot. They've been very successful.

I think even ice cream stores, that type of thing. Not necessarily entertainment, but something people do.

And family-oriented.

Something to do after the museums close at 5:00.

We've got a couple of nice restaurants and we've got the bars, but there isn't really anything in between that. Like in Lincoln, there's some bar/restaurant type venues that are really kind of

family-oriented. There's sports-themed type bars, and you wouldn't feel uncomfortable taking your family into them. Downtown, other than the restaurants, I don't think that you'd take your kids out there. Some of the elements that we need are actually there, they just need to be upgraded. They need to be a little nicer than what they currently are. I'm just using one for an example, but that Shooter's, I went in there the other day, and it's actually a pretty good sized place and there's a lot of stuff in there, but there's boards over all the windows. It looks pretty threatening from the outside, but when you get in there, it's not too bad, if it were cleaned up a little bit.

At night, it's not a very good place.

Probably not.

On the weekends, there's no place, unless there's a special event going on, there's no place to take your family to have a nice lunch and browse the shops.

Here's one of the problems I'm facing, but we built the complex, and this summer we'll have 6 state tournaments, and we book all the hotel rooms, and it's great. But there's really not much for those parents and those kids to do at night. So far, we get these, but people are eventually going to say, "There's nothing to do here." We've got to start bringing people to town.

*Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? Parking, navigation, sidewalks?*

Parking is a major problem.

Yeah.

Well, coming from where I came from, parking's the best I've ever seen here. There's never a time when you have to park more than a block or two away.

We had a consultant that came in and said that downtown parking complaints are a Midwest issue. People from the coasts don't complain about downtown parking, but in the Midwest, people expect to pull up, park in front of where they want to go, and walk right in the door, including the business owners.

I think you have to distinguish the complaints from the business owners or workers and the visitors.

I think that if you look at a downtown map, you're never more than 2 blocks from a parking garage, so the parking supply's always there. The rates are low, so there are spots available. There's always the issue of street parking, because that's the most convenient. I don't think the issue is supply, but it's the mentality. It's an issue of wayfinding and education. Parking is what you see, so if you can't see the parking, there's no parking. So if you pull up to a spot, you've got to have good signs so people can understand, there's parking up here, there's 80 slots or whatever. You want people to know where to go, and if you get there, if you can park. For some reason, we're all herd animals... if we can't see it, it's not there.

I think a lot of the parking issue stems around the demographics of St. Joseph, because we have a very high percentage of elderly people here, and for any of us, I mean, many times, I park three or four blocks away just because I like the exercise, but if it hurt me to walk, I probably would consider two blocks or maybe even a block, it's harder for people, so I think a lot of it is the demographics.

Well, I think, too, the more developed downtown becomes and the more attractions or stores or whatever there might be, I think walking becomes less of an issue, because there's things to look at, there's things to see. There's always 4 to 7 or 8 places on the street to park within 2 blocks of anywhere, so there's not really a big challenge, but there may not be anything on the way to look at, no windows to look into to see retail goods or people working in an office. I think one of the problems is that there's nothing to entertain yourself along the walk that you're making to get to where you're going.

And the food kitchen people, when they're hanging around, when people see that, they're not comfortable parking and walking.

And if you want to go more than one place, you may be within a block of the first place, but three or four blocks from the last place.

There's some national studies out on this very thing, and if you go to the shops in North Village, and you park there in front of Old Main, and then you decide you want an ice cream cone, you can walk about 2 blocks to Coldstone, and you walk another block to the bookstore, that's 3 blocks, but because you can see where you're going, nobody thinks that's a long distance. If you're going to park in front of Wal-Mart, you're going to walk a block and a half in the Wal-Mart lot, and several blocks around the store. Old or not, it's a mentality thing. It's what you're used to. We measure distance with our eyes, with how long it seems, versus how long it is. You could have a tape measure and say you're walking further, but that doesn't matter. It *seems* further. That's just a human thing.

But even if you can, there's things to look at. In a way, I agree with you. It's easy to walk 4 blocks if you've got something to look at, a shop to go in and look around a little bit, but you've got to remember, you can only do it for 2 hours, and if you don't go move your car, you're going to get a ticket. And when I say move your car, to this day, I don't know why the ordinance was passed to where it's 2 hours on that block. So many people in this town don't understand it, and then they get a ticket. You can't park for 2 hours by the courthouse, be gone for 5 hours, and come back. You'll get a ticket when you're back.

I can tell you, it's a problem that happened about 10 years ago. When they took out the meters, they wanted to put that in, because company or store employees were parked in a spot and decided, "I'm just going to move my car to another spot," so to get rid of that, they just passed the ordinance where they can't park on the same block, and that freed up the parking for the shoppers.

The very fact you have to explain it tells you it's wacky.

And people get really mad over parking tickets.

Jim Rock with Hilliard's says that when they have visitors come in from St. Louis and Kansas City, they laugh and they get the parking ticket for \$7 and send it in. They park there all day long and they don't care about that.

That's a good rate for parking.

If we solve all these other problems and make downtown vibrant, those trolleys could be put back in service.

I don't think those trolleys can be. They're 25 years old.

Instead of building a bunch of parking lots, if you had trolleys.

It doesn't have to necessarily have to be trolleys. It could be a bus system for downtown. It just costs money.

And the cars on the street, too, will make the downtown look nice.

Kind of the way it used to be.

And speaking of parking, too, as a driver, I don't like to parallel park, so if I can find a parking lot within 2 or 3 blocks of where I'm going, I'm willing to walk rather than have to struggle to get into a parallel parking place.

Usually half the people we'd poll say they circle the area twice before they parked, because they were looking for streetside parking, and a small percentage would say, "I just pulled into the parking lot." It might be interesting to ask yourself what you did on the way here. That's a good indicator.

Well, that's interesting, because before I left the house, I thought, "Where can I park easily? Well, the Commerce Bank parking lot."

(many people laughing and talking at once.)

I parked in the garage and I griped all the way over here, because there was nothing to look at on the way over here.

*Moderator: Let me shift gears a little bit and ask you about how people find out about what's going on downtown.*

Our Chamber does a nice job, especially promoting businesses.

The downtown partnership puts out flyers, also.

If it's something they take an interest in, the newspaper.

The newspaper tells what's going on, usually. Or channel 2.

Doesn't the resident theater pick up some corporate sponsors sometimes? Some advertise through that.

The library.

At the college, I found out everything through the campus email system. I didn't watch channel 2, I didn't read the newspaper, but I got stuff through campus email.

There's some communities that have similar services that send things out as to what's going on that weekend. An e-newsletter.

We also do some street banners and that type of thing.

In the mid-80's, they had a plan for a little electronic message board with things going on. It never took out, but there's an old plan pushing that idea.

The city's website has stuff that's going on.

The tourism office does a great job, too.

*Moderator: Let's look forward a little bit. What kinds of businesses would you like to see downtown?*

Antique shops. Mom and Pop type places.

I think if you could put together a block or two with specialty retail fairly concentrated, it would really bring a lot... my wife isn't going to come downtown for 2 or 3 shops, but if there were 6 or 8 in a block, she could come down and spend half a day. I think if we could concentrate that type of business, that would entice shoppers.

And most families are working families, so shops need to be open after 5.

Is the hardware store downtown successful?

No. Not at all. There aren't enough people coming by. If you had a lot of different things, people would come down.

I was thinking of an upgraded convenience store, not really a grocery store, but ice cream and soda.

Maybe like an old-time drugstore.

Well, we had a coffee shop down there, but they said they weren't busy enough. I had issues of going at 7 am, and they weren't open, and I quit going. Places need to stay open later than 5:00.

It's not a bank job.

They need to cater their business to their customers.

Let's also think of people that are going to be buying houses. These are folks whose grandchildren are coming to visit. We need some places where the kids can go.

The college students, we're all out on the belt with the movie theaters, the putt-putt course, the bowling alley. There's no reason for us to go downtown.

One idea that was laughed about some time ago was put the moratorium on movie theaters downtown. People go to movie theaters, and if you put one downtown, then you're going to have people downtown. Looking backward now, that kind of idea... how do we get that unique destination, retail or activity, that people go to multiple times in a location downtown, and then build off that synergy in and around that.

Lincoln used to never approve a movie theater outside of downtown, and eventually that wasn't practical, but their current policy is for every screen you build outside downtown, you build a screen in town. They actually have about 20 movie theaters in downtown Lincoln.

Springfield, I think, is also...that's that development they have.

One thing is, working with universities to have a presence downtown, and hopefully you have classes at night, and you encourage the population to be in an area past the normal 9 to 5 business crowd, and so you start seeing people on sidewalks and hopefully with university, different types of specialty shops, maybe, if it's an arts campus, you start having the students operating their own stores to sell some products, some sort of place with that crowd. Unless there's a reason to come downtown, then no one's going to come to that area.

*Moderator: What about dining and entertainment options?*

We've all mentioned that Boudreaux's is an excellent place, and I think more of that kind of a place that's open at night...

I'd like to see a dinner theater downtown.

Even that movie theater that I told you about, they didn't even sell tickets before the show, because they were always sold out.

If you want to go to a good dinner theater, you've got to drive 80 miles.

(side conversations.)

This may sound off-the-wall, but I see the downtown population, it really will kick off once we get college students down there, and we have a lot of large industries around here, and I would like to see a medical facility...a small hospital.

There used to be...besides the hospital, and practically every doctor was downtown, and now there's nothing.

I think another...we've talked about this quite a bit, but I think some type of a neighborhood grocery store. A smaller store to fit into the downtown area.

I don't know the name of it, but in Prairieville, there's a little grocery store with a dining area.

I think the challenge is going to be that you can get anywhere in 15 minutes.

Well, you hear that little grocery stores don't survive in big cities...

I don't think a supermarket could make it downtown. First off, the people who live downtown, the younger people, they don't cook much. But a store where you could buy groceries, I think it would make it downtown.

(many people talking at once.)

What's the name of that grocery store that closed when they built the Taco Bell across from City Hall?

We need a deli. I would go at least once a week. A good deli. It's a specialty type thing.

The other thing that I think we should have is the chains in an older building. The Subway or the McDonalds in an existing structure, and it seems odd to me that we don't have at least a couple of those downtown.

A Starbucks?

In Washington DC last month, I was walking around, and you'd have a row of big stores, and right in the middle, a little building would have a Subway or a McDonald's right in the middle of everything.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: What about parks and recreation? Are there improvements that need to be made?*

(many people talking at once.)

Well, so far, what they've done downtown, we do not like. These little malls, that's not recreation. Recreation blends more with green space. If we were going to put... if we put something in, and we wanted a little rec center, you're talking about go-carts and bumper boats and stuff like that. If you're talking about that kind of center, we'd prefer to be further north on the riverfront, but we need that tie with downtown. At one time, we were going to put a little rail system to connect them, but it was too expensive. We'd rather do it out there where there's more parking, more land, but we still need a link to downtown.

We do have the riverfront area.

There was a plan that was done 4 or 5 years ago that looks at the riverfront, and they put together a plan for it as a park, but to tie that into downtown, and also to cover the parking lots, because asphalt doesn't look that good... this was part of that riverfront thing. It wasn't a big fancy thing, but it was a nice idea, because it flexible enough to incorporate restaurants, a park area, an activity area.

I think it died because of funding.

Is that anything that we're working into this DREAM initiative?

Obviously, downtown and the riverfront need to be connection.

(many people talking at once.)

You could have concerts and stuff outside. They were trying to orient themselves from downtown. They would have these trees arranged in such a way to make it more appealing.

*Moderator: Let me ask you a couple other quick questions. What about the look and feel of downtown? Are there those kinds of improvements?*

I think the sidewalks need to be redone.

I like the feeling of some of these old towns like Liberty and Westin. We do have some nice old buildings, but the feeling of being able to walk around the sidewalk.

Some consistency in the look, too. You get some people that really maintain their buildings, and others that just sit. We just need more consistency in maintaining the property.

Encourage people to open up their windows with some kind of display.

With the streetscape that's going to go in, just having a nice-looking sidewalk with some sort of design that links together, and have that throughout downtown, so that you have a consistent pattern.

Trees on your sidewalks are real nice.

That's going to be part of the new design.

One unattractive feature of our downtown is that some of the historic buildings are covered with metal, and the metal has preserved the brick underneath. Take that metal off to encourage new investment, to help people envision what it could look like.

I used to live in Omaha, and what I knew of St. Joseph was to pull off the interstate and eat and get gas. You get a totally different perspective of St. Joe of 229 than you do just pulling off the interstate. I think if we had something to encourage people to take 229...

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

When you're coming on 229, it sparks your curiosity. You go straight down 29, and you don't see anything.

*Moderator: I've just got one more question for you. What role do you think the future of downtown plays in the future of the city as a whole?*

I think downtown has to prosper for the city as a whole to prosper. You'll still see the growth to the northeast, but I think you'll see faster and more meaningful growth if downtown plays an integral part.

Downtown adds a lot of character.

Downtown's our history.

Even until today, all the political units are downtown.

A lot of people, when they travel, they look for downtown, and I've been some places in the last couple years—like Athens, Georgia...and it's a very vital downtown with a lot of shops and restaurants, and I've been to other downtowns that are just horrid. We need to make sure that our downtown is not the second one. I don't know that we can expect it to be as good as Athens, but if we could get it to where people feel like coming back...

I always thought it was interesting, in watching sporting events, they shoot a shot of downtown. They don't shoot a shot of a mall. In every community, you can identify where you're at based on downtown. I think we're a little unique because of the river. Downtown isn't a really central area, but I think it's still a focus, and it's still our core. If there was an event going on, you'd take a picture of downtown, not of the softball complex.

(laughter.)

*Moderator: Thank you.*

## SECTION IV

### DOWNTOWN AREA RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

My name's Larry Buck, and I live at 716B Francis, and I own 714A Francis. I've been in the real estate business for more years than anybody wants to count, came back to St. Joseph in the late 70's, when the renewal was starting to kick in, and many of my friends' families were in business downtown at that time, and we saw the whole thing go through from stage by stage by stage when they tore down a lot of great looking buildings and trying to do what they thought were the right things at that point in time, so I've been involved in downtown redevelopment since that point in time, and I guess I've lived downtown for 14 years now. There's a gazebo and a park, and when I bought my property, it was a nasty-looking gravel parking lot out there, and it had been redeveloped during the urban renewal days, so it's just a long history of loving downtown and growing up downtown. When I was a kid, I worked at a lot of stores down here... and I've been a commercial real estate broker for 37 years, I guess, and I've sold a lot of buildings downtown, I guess more than everybody else combined.

My name is Mark Nicholson, I also live in the same building that Larry lives in. Came to St. Joseph from the University of Kansas, and I teach at Missouri Western, and I've lived downtown for 10 years, and in the 19 years I've been in St. Joseph, I've tended to live in the old neighborhoods. I've lived in Lincoln, Nebraska and in Lawrence, Kansas. My wife is from the Kansas City area. I also lived a couple years in Germany, and I've been involved in activities on campus related to downtown, I've been chair of the landmark commission, historic preservation, so those are some of the connections.

I'm Greg Bagen, and I live downtown at 513 Felix. I've owned the property there for about 10 years, lived there for the past 6, bought it and started it as a small business, which went the way of a lot of small businesses. Lifelong resident of St. Joseph. When I was growing up, my family owned a business downtown, so I'm familiar with the downtown area, and I spent a lot of time here as a kid growing up during the urban renewal time, sitting on the hood at the car watch watching them tear buildings down. I've been a member of the board of the downtown association for the last few years.

I'm Cheryl Wagner, I work at Heartland Health and Marketing Communication. I live in the lofts at 415. We've lived in St. Joseph about 5 years, we moved downtown from the east side of town, we moved from Topeka where we had been for 12 years, and decided to give downtown a try and see if we liked it. I think we're ready to either build downtown in the uptown redevelopment project that the pioneer group and Heartland are partnering with, looking for a downtown building to rehab. We have 2 teenagers, a dog and 3 kids.

I'm Bob Collins, I am not a resident of St. Joe—I'm from Kansas City. I'm assisting by chairing the DREAM initiative, which is the committee that the city set up to oversee the downtown planning, and I'm sort of observing here tonight, but I've been planning director in Kansas City, I've been chair of the landmark historic trust in Kansas City, been involved in a lot of downtown development, and I most recently bought a condo in downtown Kansas City, in the metropolitan, which is one of the tall three ones in the north. I bought it for my mom, but I assume I'll be there someday. Hopefully, that's the kind of thing that'll happen here.

My name is Sally Wertzler, and I live at 113 South 7<sup>th</sup> in some of the apartment that Winston Bennett developed, and I grew up here for about 12 years, and came back and I'm practicing as an architect, so I have a special interest in urban spaces and urban living.

*Moderator: Thanks. Tell me a little bit about the St. Joseph area in general. How would you describe it?*

Mid-sized town with lots of unrealized potential.

Historic, lots of historic buildings.

Underappreciated. St. Joe's one of those places that everybody that lives here should go live somewhere else for a while and come back.

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

I would say right direction. I've very encouraged by uptown development, downtown, the east side. I've very encouraged.

I think it is moving in the right direction. I think St. Joe is a victim of some things in the larger world that you can't control, like manufacturing leaving, but I think there's a lot of potential for business like healthcare and animal science and other things that could be a genesis of new ideas in St. Joe.

I sell St. Joseph for a living, and I can explain the positive aspects of this community, to the parkways to the advantages for kids through schools, and I hope some people on your team could get a better description. I've recruited thousands of jobs for St. Joe, and the feedback we get from people who have moved here is tremendous, from people who work downtown or on the east side. Once they discover it, they love it. We have all the advantages of a larger city, because of Kansas City, without the crime here. If somebody gets stabbed, it's the biggest thing in the news. I don't even know where to start, because it's a larger process. We've had a tremendous amount of business that has begun here and gone national, like Herzog, and it's just a longer process to give you a full picture of why people should live in St. Joseph, and downtown is an important part of that picture.

I think the town is moving in the right direction, but slowly, and I think the comparison between here and other places, is the takeoff has to occur. There's a constellation of things that if they were put together, including leadership, investment, I think there's been a shift of perspective in the Chamber, I know this from the university side, in getting people to think more in terms of 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs and education, the importance of that, rather than being a low-skilled labor market. There's lots of shifts that are about to happen, and it's a question of leadership and getting together to determine whether it's really going to happen or not. You keep thinking that something's going to happen, going to turn the corner. You've rolled the stone up to the top of the hill, and it rolls back down, and you think at some point you're going to get it to the top and it's going to continue to roll, and we can't quite get to that point. All the factors are here, but it just doesn't seem to move beyond that.

*Moderator: What are the main shopping areas for people that live here? Where do you go to get everyday household goods?*

Kansas City.

(laughter. Agreement.)

Sam's Club is always good for weekly groceries. The North shops are new, they have a variety of things. There's still some things left in East Hills mall.

Just about everything is 5 miles east.

There's not a lot of retail downtown.

Where's the closest grocery store?

Kovak's. I guess I'm a dinosaur. I totally shop locally if I can find it in St. Joseph, and I prefer to buy from a locally owned business. We have a group called St. Joe's Originals, and if I'm going to eat or buy something, I tend to go to where I know the guy that owns the store, because I have a good chance of getting his business back. I think we have to support ourselves and support each other in the business community. I shop on the avenue a lot. I don't go in Wal-Mart at all—my wife does, and I wait in the car. I don't mind K-mart.

It is the case that you have to go all over town.

The other thing is the convenience of St. Joseph. My office is in the Belt, and I can make an appointment at the stockyards in 10 minutes.

There's not a lot of trendy, upscale shopping in St. Joseph. The new shops are fine, but they're just mid-level.

My wife does catalog shopping.

Specific for downtown, even in Kansas City there's still no grocery store.

St. Louis has got one.

That clearly needs to be an element of the uptown development, and it was part of the precise plan, but exceptions were made because there's not the mass to support it.

There is the furniture store downtown.

(many people talking at once.)

Artful Life is a great store.

Just a small thing like that restaurant closing temporarily has been an issue, Papa Joe's. The couple that has the antique shop across the street, and it's amazing the business that they generated for that store.

The big comparison is Winston did consciously decide to put Artful Life in the region, and that's the hard thing for the region, is all the dollars flow south from Platt City, and it's hard to get anybody to come north, and the standard comparison is if they'll drive to Westin, why wouldn't they drive to St. Joseph? Because the potential here is far beyond what Westin has. They'll drive to Westin to do certain kinds of shopping. Why can't St. Joseph attract that?

You walk to shop in Westin, and you don't walk a block and a half to the next shop.

That would be a concentrated effort here.

Yeah, we're spread out a lot.

Some people will recall... my wife had a retail store downtown for 8 years, very nice party gowns for girls going to prom and wedding dresses and luxury items for couples, and her business was very original. She probably had more out-of-town business than from St. Joseph. The bridal shop was very regional, too. Her business reached the point that it was more than one person could handle but not enough to hire additional help.

*Moderator: What about dining and entertainment options?*

Boudreaux's is great.

Boudreaux's has been very successful.

Chloe and Bernard's.

People will drive from the east side to Boudreaux's.

They'll drive from Nebraska for it.

A lot of people come to Houlihan's from the region.

The 229 connection or cutoff is underutilized. When I used to go through Lincoln to visit my parents, I would get off the interstate, and 229 has never been utilized in that way. There's potential for a string of businesses there.

We've got a great new pizza shop down here with a variety of Italian food. We've had a tremendous amount of people who want to eat at Gino's. We had a lot of restaurants downtown, and we lost homestyle breakfast and lunch places.

The coffee shop's pretty popular.

But it's not open weekends or evenings.

The entertainment scene, people come up from all over Northwest Missouri to the entertainment district on Francis Street. The expansion of the club and bar business has been in more upscale businesses. We have a new place that's bringing people downtown that never have come before. They're doing a wonderful business, drinks are certainly not cheap, and they're doing very well. It's beautiful. If the city inspectors don't clear the deal, we have another place ready to open. We've got some dives that need to be cleaned up and straightened up. And there's a pretty good downtown music scene—they bring in regional and worldwide rock and roll groups that people want to see. And our newspaper has a little piece called "off hours" that does a pretty good job promoting these.

The newspaper has taken an interest in promoting this music and entertainment scene. It's an interest.

Benny McGoo's was an established deli, and that's been remodeled and opened with several nights a week of music and good food. The city's letting them move ahead. They've been working on this for two years.

And the Missouri Theater has been great.

We have a 1200-seat theater that's beautiful. There's virtually something going on there every night.

*Moderator: We've been talking about downtown already, but would you say the downtown is moving in the right or wrong direction?*

I don't think it move anything but one direction. Everything has to be improvement.

I know that from having visitors from out of town, it's easy to despair, but if you make a list of things that have changed with the 4<sup>th</sup> street project, the lofts at 415, renovation of the Missouri Theater, Foster's opening, you can go through the whole long list of things... it is so much better than 20 years ago.

It's so much better.

The story goes that 20 years ago, the Columbia building was boarded up, and if you talk to anybody who was here 20, 25 years ago, things are so much better now... you can't imagine how bad it was.

The area that we consider downtown, looks better. Someone said that you have to be gone for a while, and I was gone for 14 years. It looks better than it's looked since I returned to town, and the area west of 22<sup>nd</sup> is better than it's looked in my lifetime.

I think it's really encouraging to know that the colleges are moving down here in some respect, because I think that'll be a huge turning point in getting younger people down here, and seeing it as a place to live, to study, to work.

There's an issue we've tried to address that I'm not sure how we continue to do it, but over the last 3 years, with the assistance of Missouri Housing and other tax credits, we've established a number of development projects, and they're doing well, the market rate housing is doing well, but there's a very uneven balance at this stage. Several things happen as you use up very desirable buildings that maybe could work for market rate deals, and the low-mod project is a 15-year project, so to a certain degree, we've tied ourselves to a certain market for quite a length of time. The last development that got approved, the downtown groups, I'm president of the downtown association, and kind of after the fact, we learned at the new City Council's meeting about another low-mod project. We need to figure out a way to achieve a better balance. We're talking about retail and all those of sources that we need, a place to eat, a place to do that, and it takes a certain amount of spendable income to support those kinds of businesses, and I think the City Council now understands, but even after the fact, that particular project, I think it's real important that we don't use up our really cool buildings for a tremendous amount of additional low-mod until we achieve a better balance.

*Moderator: Are there things that you used to be able to do downtown that you now need to go elsewhere for?*

Just the reverse.

I'm the only one that could answer that, because I grew up coming downtown to buy a pair of shoes and anything I needed that my parents needed to buy for me.

Anybody who doesn't go back past the 70's...

In 1962, you wouldn't buy anything anywhere except downtown.

There's fewer antique stores, which is presumably...

But, you know, in recent years, we haven't had people...we've been kind of an incubator. A lot of successful businesses on the east side started downtown.

*Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? Parking, navigation, sidewalks...?*

Where we live, Hilliard's owns the parking lots on both sides of our building, and they boot you if you park there. Most of us who live down there, that's a challenge. We walk our dog all over the place. There's still a lot of debris in the streets, broken glass. We usually carry a trash bag with us when we walk our dog, and it's interesting when people are going to the Holiday Inn for breakfast meetings, they don't make eye contact with us, they just walk by like we're street people with our dog and our garbage bags. The Gateway Park downtown is very nice. Our dog enjoys it. There are challenges. Parking is an issue, just around where we live, and there are places that probably should be taken down, because I don't think they can be rehabbed.

When we had the business downtown, that was a big thing as far as the customers were concerned. There was no parking right outside the front door. A half a block in 3 different directions was a parking lot, but people didn't want to have to walk half a block, or didn't realize they could walk a half a block. You go to Wal-Mart and walk 2 blocks to get in and another 2 blocks to get across the floor.

In Kansas City, you go to the Plaza and you have to walk two blocks. There's not a perspective that that's what you'd do when you go downtown.

It's a perceived parking problem.

I think it's a much larger perception than a reality.

You'd walk way more at Wal-Mart.

I come home on a Saturday night, and the parking lot on Edmund is full, behind Felix Street Pub, so I drive around the block and pull in the parking garage. It's not that difficult.

When parking was developed downtown, it was developed cheaply. If you compare on Edmund and New Hampshire. Well, they solved that problem, it's beautiful, and they add new garages. When they've done parking garages, they've combined with retail, while we did the classic putting up parking garages and replaced the retail. There's plenty of parking, but there's nothing to buy anymore. It was not done well and intentionally, and there's a lot... the rumor mill in town is the top floor of every one of them is unsafe.

They're not pretty, but they hold a lot of cars, and they're functional.

If we did them today, we'd do them better.

It's just so perceived. I had some people fly in from Dallas who had just been in San Francisco, and we were up on the roof of the building, and I pointed at all the parking lots, and they said, "This place has got great parking." They were looking for a place to locate a Cyber Hotel. They asked how much it costs to park, and I said, "25 bucks a month." They said they paid more than that to park for lunch in San Francisco. It's a marketing thing, because it's a perceived problem.

You're marketing to people who have lived here all their lives and have nothing to compare it to. When we moved downtown, the people that I worked with were just aghast. They were like, "aren't you afraid?" Afraid of what?

The same story for us. These are perceptions that need to be changed. The newspapers could help.

*Moderator: What about business hours? Are they convenient?*

(laughter.)

Nothing's open early in the morning, late at night, or on weekends.

They're not open at consistent times to compete with east side retail.

You can hang out there if you don't have a job.

(laughter.)

There are very few retail businesses, when I get off work and come home, they're all closed.

Most of them are operated by 1 person. There's only so many hours in the day.

*Moderator: How would you say that you get information about what's going on downtown?*

Newspaper does a pretty good job.

In terms of entertainment...

And the people putting on the events contact the news press.

The television station comes down when we have something to report. We could always improve the way we deal with our media, but our downtown streets are filthy.

They're not that bad.

They're bad.

We don't really have a plan. We're supposed to have a plan, but we don't see it. I was in your city looking at downtown, and I didn't notice that kind of trash. I understand they have a contract for security and some kind of cleaning.

Sidewalks are a problem. We have narrow streets and sidewalks. The landscape, it's not inviting downtown, because you don't have the space for walking.

In a town this size, you don't want a sidewalk that big.

But you can't walk even 3 people in many places.

It doesn't appear that there's an organized cleanup effort. For example, I saw broken glass by the Holiday Inn for over a year. However, the little park, someone does clean it.

There's a contract with the city, and they're supposed to pick up the trash in the containers and on the street. A lot of my friends walk around in the morning, and they say if the container isn't full, the trash people ignore it.

Well, people leave beer bottles in my planters and pull up my plants.

We have the vodka bottles in Gateway Park.

Appearance, that would make a big difference. The city's limited...

The guys in Universal adopted that park, and they're the ones that put the weed killer in.

*Moderator: How do other people get information about downtown?*

Same resources.

Yeah.

From us.

Information we provide to the press, and word of mouth.

That's the big one.

The association has done those concerts for 8 years, and they just know they start the first Friday in June. In any case, a lot of people come regionally to those events. The one thing we have found out—if you give people in Northwest Missouri to come downtown, they'll come.

Give them something free.

The barbecue wasn't free, and they came.

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

Well, we have a real solid bona fide proof that service businesses have been successful here. The girls at God Bless do really well here. We know the service businesses are going to succeed. The dining and entertainment businesses have a good foothold here, and we could see that aspect grow. Specialty retail always comes last.

A lot of people complain about tourist traps, but that's something that people staying at the hotels will go to. We don't have any of that downtown.

Who sells the Pony Express t-shirts?

The museum.

As the daytime population increases through businesses, students, and residents, that niche for retail's going to fall in line, and you have to be realistic as well as optimistic. We want a grocery store, sure, but it takes a certain amount of demographics. I thought it might be able to be done with specialty food operations, the meat guy and the bakery. That might be a better start than a fully diverse grocery store. One better-known grocery chain is experimenting with the urban concept. Retail tends to supply demand where it exists—and sometimes over-supply it—but as we can show retail that there's a market, they'll probably overpopulate us, and I know of several people working on buildings now... when you go downtown, there's very little ready space here. Most people that are interested in doing retail are not developers. It's a massive project. But now we have some building owners that have realized that, and I know of 3 or 4 projects that are going to create ready retail space, and that'll help us.

Coffee shop and Laundromat would be nice.

I think all the big buildings, they have built-in facilities, right? I've had several people ask me if a Laundromat would be welcome.

There is one on Frederick.

And that's always packed.

The low-income, do they have laundry?

Yeah, they have they own built-in facilities.

*Moderator: What about parks and recreation? What sorts of that stuff should be part of downtown?*

It depends on how the riverwalk and the river has been developed. The riverwalk is an amazing development, and the problems of developing the river, there's all sorts of potential.

The ball fields are there, and those people gravitate downtown.

There was a big planning conference, and one of the big contests was how to develop the riverfront.

It's aimed mostly to the adult population. I don't think it's child-friendly.

Not at all.

I know people that have kids, and they say, "Is there any space for just a little playground area?" I think there's space, maybe around Francis Street.

A little green space would be nice.

I think there should be some place, that's centralized, where you could have things like you see at the stores where kids can climb and slide.

With more families living downtown, that could be an issue. And the uptown project, it could be incorporated into that area, too.

The uptown development, are they going to consider that "their neighborhood"?

The association will maintain the green space. The club house and the pool and the playground will be owned by the association.

Will there be public space as part of it? The real issue is if we want a mixed economic development downtown. If that gets integrated well—we need more market housing, and schools. If there are more children downtown, where do they go to school?

We think that we'll see some families from Cathedral that want to live in the development.

That makes sense, but in St. Joseph, we would not have to rely on people moving in doing private school only.

It's a good school district.

But it's far away. You've got to get the perception that that's where you want kids to go, so people know.

And the types of people that I want to live around are the types of people that will want to see their kids educated in a more melting-pot environment. I think that diversity is one of our selling points.

I agree, but I think the issue is you've got to have the perceived diversity. We do tend to segregate the schools by neighborhood and by socioeconomics. You're going to be dealing with people that are less open-minded than some.

You're really selling a lifestyle with downtown living, and what we're offering has to do with that lifestyle.

If we're comparing ourselves to Kansas City with issues of schools, we're way ahead.

Very little of the residential downtown that's for families.

You're not going to be able to build a community of urban professionals without considering this stuff.

But we think there will be more empty-nesters.

*Moderator: The next question I wanted to ask you is something we've talked about a little bit as we've gone along. What about the look and feel of downtown? What sorts of aesthetic improvements need to be made?*

We've already prioritized that a lot with the streetscape plan, and that's going to make improvements, and we have plans to expand that, so it's going to look a heck of a lot better than it looks now, but from certain perspectives, you see an awful nice landscape. If you look up from 8<sup>th</sup> looking across the park with the church steeples, it's as pretty as you're going to see any place.

Appearance of the parking lots and garages. The one on Edmund is the ugliest parking lot.

More green space. We're moving a lot of the urban development facades and going back to the original buildings, determining whether some buildings can be saved...

*Moderator: Are there aspects of other downtowns that you think would be good to incorporate here?*

I steal ideas every place I go. You have to relate to how we are like and how we are different. People say, "Why can't St. Joseph can't be like Westin or St. Charles?" Because they're small. They didn't create these huge buildings that cost tons of money to restore.

The towns I'd compare us to as far as building structure would be Lawrence or Omaha or Wichita.

Public art. You go to Wichita, and that's the big thing downtown is to find the sculpture. There's very little public art in St. Joe.

You could decorate parking garages with public art.

There is public art, but it's not concentrated. You've got the Pony Express and the Gateway.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Any other aspects of other cities or towns?*

I'll just throw in Denver's bus system. It provides a tremendous amount of transportation.

Portland, Maine has done some nice stuff with an addition to the public library.

Fort Worth is larger, but it's older, and they've done a lot with their existing preservation and kept the downtown feel and used a lot of smaller development.

Even Chicago, there's a tremendous amount of situations where you have to walk three blocks.

San Diego's done a really nice job in the last 10 years.

Charlotte, North Carolina. It wasn't that way 20 years ago.

Other communities that are discussed as comparable are Savannah and Charleston.

Those are good examples of what you'd like downtown to feel like. The scale isn't too large, there's community downtown, there's a good mix.

Don't forget Wichita, Kansas. It's pretty much on this scale.

*Moderator: The last thing I wanted to ask you is, how important do you think the future of downtown is to the future of the town as a whole?*

I think it's as important as we make it. I don't think we'll live or die by what happens downtown, but I think there are enough of us that believe it matters, so we need to convince the rest of the community that it is a viable asset.

Without exception, every time I've ever brought a company to town, I've never had one organization come to St. Joseph that didn't want to see downtown. Ted Allison, our new Chamber director, make a comment that we're a healthy city, but our heart's sick. I think it's very, very important to our community in total that downtown have a strong heart.

Lots of communities have lost their downtowns, but it would be a lost opportunity, because there's a lot in terms of identity that hasn't been taken advantage of, and if it were done well, it would make a tremendous difference.

There's a lot of frustration, but I think we're too hard on ourselves. Some of the visitors comment... Boudreaux's, well they're a good draw, and people will say, "Your downtown's really looking good." All we talk about is how horrible it looks. Outsiders have a higher opinion of downtown than residents.

My friend from Chicago was amazed at how beautiful the city was.

I gave the 50-cent tour last week to a couple of customers from the Czech Republic, and they loved downtown, but they wondered, "Where are the people?" That was their concern. No one socializing, shopping...

I had the same experience with a visiting scholar from Belgium.

They're all at home watching American Idol.

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

The other issue is the larger issue of public space. Other places have public space. A place other than Hy-Vee that people can run into each other.

To answer the question, every place I've been here and in other countries, and I don't think there was any city we were ever in that we didn't visit the downtown.

The groups that I've been involved with... we're able to get the Missouri Association of Realtors here sometimes, and if there's overflow from those meetings and they don't get to stay downtown, they're really upset. When their convention outgrows what the Holiday Inn can accommodate, they don't want to come to St. Joseph for their meetings. They want to stay downtown.

You go down the Belt Highway, and you could be in a thousand different cities.

*Moderator: Any other comments? Thanks for taking the time to speak to us tonight.*

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## SECTION V

### BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

John Wilson, and I don't own anything. I have two connections, one with Heartland Health, and part of the uptown redevelopment corporation and downtown partnership.

Mike Garby, I work at HPI.

Bill Garby, I work at HPI. We own 3 or 4 buildings.

Bob Dempster, Commerce Bank, and in the uptown group and downtown partnership.

I'm Jason Warren, I work for US Bank, and I have some midtown property.

Chuck Douglas, general manager of the Holiday Inn.

*Moderator: This is my first time to St. Joseph. Describe your area to me.*

We're kind of on the outskirts, which made me wonder why we were invited, except we have one building downtown.

Well, downtown kind of belongs to the whole community, so we want to develop, we want our downtown revitalization to be reflective of what the entire community wants, so from a business aspect... you may be on the fringe of what is the traditional core of downtown, but you're also very well-versed with the community, a lot of businesses.

We have a lot of underused assets, but a lot of assets. Lot of historic properties, fairly open buildings that could be converted to businesses or residential. We're growing, starting to take off. We're kind of on the edge of potential future growth. It's moving in that direction. From a downtown standpoint, I see the opportunity for redevelopment in a very structured way, that we can build something that'll last rather than a fad. There's a concern of a redo of urban renewal.

I've been in town for 15 years, and it's been, I haven't seen the attitude downtown as good as it is now, with the loft conversions or the colleges that are heading this direction. It gives me, one of the original attractions for me was the historic architecture, and to see it preserved and made productive is favorable.

As far as the uptown area, it's 10 acres of dirt that there's a development group out of Topeka putting in 100 or 110... I think that's the right number... you've got, you still have your core of various banks and such downtown. Financial and government center is still...

Yeah... a lot of history here. You know, more than most cities. This is one of the oldest cities in Missouri, and there's a lot of history with the buildings, and a lot's been preserved, and there's a lot of assets we can build on. There's people that talk about history being backwards and

baggage, but history's something we have and can be proud of, our heritage. A lot of people with wild dreams took a chance and did well many years ago, and it's the economic engines they created back then that have helped sustain our community.

(unintelligible)... we've got to create that kind of a lifestyle where it's desirable for companies to stay. They usually want to be close to a major metropolitan area, and Kansas City's just down the road, but it's not here.

Now that they're a larger company... we find it difficult to recruit talent here, and it's lifestyle... we're making some changes...(unintelligible).

We rely quite a bit on tourism. One of the most frequent comments we here at the hotel is the interest is initially there, and then the tourist gets here and they go, "I thought there was more to this. There's too many empty storefronts."

We've got customers from all over the world, and they see the Slime Line, and they think we're a little hick town.

(many people agreeing.)

It's a total embarrassment.

To be honest, until you redid the Holiday Inn, our people wouldn't stay in St. Joe. They'd stay in Kansas City and drive up. We have a tremendous amount of people that come in. We're a contract chemical and packing business.

*Moderator: Where do people in this area do their retail shopping?*

Not downtown.

There's maybe only 10 retail stores downtown.

They're all niche things.

They're destination shops, not shopping centers.

It used to always be East Hills.

As North Hills developed, our whole market has changed, and downtown has destination restaurants.

Mostly retailers are located on Belt from one end to the other.

A long string. It really is. It's 5 miles long and 2 sides of the street wide.

*Moderator: Do people come downtown to dine?*

Yeah. I would say it's more of an event type thing.

Yeah, if there's something going on downtown...

Boudreaux's and Houlihan's. Those two do good business, if there's something going on at the Arena or the gazebo area. When you get an influx of people downtown...

A lot of birthday, wedding anniversaries...

The feeder streets that come downtown, they have more wholesale and some retail, restaurants, and bars. I think most of those businesses do a good job.

*Moderator: What about entertainment options?*

We've got the theater downtown. The majority is downtown, but the movies are on the east side. All your art and music is downtown, Missouri Theater, Civic Arena.

For productions and stuff like that, people still go to Kansas City. It's not a big presence here.

*Moderator: What kind of stuff goes on in the Arena?*

You name it.

They do the Circus.

Live concerts.

Garden shows.

Boxing.

Home shows.

Tractor pulls.

Basketball.

Football.

Yeah, there's another group interested in coming back, the St. Joseph Minutemen.

Arena football.

*Moderator: What direction do you see downtown moving? Do you think it's in a positive direction?*

I see the residential developments as positive, even though many of them are low-mod. It increases your population downtown, at night, so they can visit retail. Those still have to develop.

In the process of developing. Getting in the new arena of market-rate housing. Retail will follow. Until you get the people in a mass downtown, I don't think you're going to see a lot of success. It'll feed the retail and move out the less desirable component.

They hide down here.

We look at the retail development in the north, and it's because of the surrounding areas developing and changing. We did that project as a two-pronged project. What do you do with 10 acres of what was formerly a downtown hospital, and how do you get the surrounding area to start to change, so people would have a desire to be close to it.

You definitely need market-rate housing.

I think the low-to-mod will help, and when the 5-year period is over, they'll be desirable for mod-high.

There's still waiting lists on all of them, and I think all the market-rate ones are full.

There's lofts several different places.

(many people talking at once, agreeing.)

They were high-income based rentals. They were full for a while.

(side conversations about housing developments.)

*Moderator: What about the riverfront area?*

It's underutilized.

It's not utilized, as far as I know. We have a homeless population down there. We don't use it at all, we don't acknowledge our river at all. You've got the riverwalk and the nature center, but it's still underutilized.

(many people agreeing.)

It's tough because of the train. And the highway.

That's where the homeless people take their showers when it rains, under the drain spouts.

*Moderator: Do you feel the riverfront's heading in the right direction?*

Not really. It's pretty stagnant.

When the casino was a barge...

...that company tried to sell us that floating barge, and we didn't buy it, and now it's floated down south, and they revitalized their whole riverfront. We missed out on that.

(many people talking at once.)

St. Joe has a knack for screwing ourselves.

The challenges are the railroad and 229. We don't have much footage between those two to put a facility.

There's paving and about 35 feet of grass. Not much real space.

There's talk of developing it, but I don't know how many people want to hang out underneath the highway or by the trains.

But, one of these days, we'll find an acceptable place for American Steel to locate, and it would be nice to put a ballpark or something right there. It would be awesome to have something like an A-ball stadium there. It's good for parking, for destinations. It would be a neat place to see the ballgame down by the river. If there's another place we could find them a location, it would be awesome to move them to an industrial area and to bring in entertainment.

Keep in mind, that is an industrial area. 10 or 12 years ago, you had to about give it away. There were incentives.

(many people agreeing.)

When you're on 229 looking into downtown, you don't see anything really pretty. It's just, it looks like an old river town.

It's what it is.

An old river town with nothing moving, no people, cars, activity. Gotta get em down here and give em something to do.

We've got a good corporate base at the hotel, and they get back at 5:30, and they ask, "Where can I go? What can I do? Give me something to do."

Gamble, eat, or drink.

Weekends are tough unless there's something going on. They go, "We've seen the Jesse James house, that took about 10 minutes, went to the museum... okay, let's go to Kansas City." Usually the intent is to do a Friday-Saturday stay, and it's usually just one night.

Still get a lot of bus traffic?

Bus traffic's really up. A lot of the big boys are retracting, and they're more the Branson-Nashville type of thing. It's the little guys that we're hitting hard on.

What do they do when they get here?

Mostly it's overnights. I think we've got about 5 Canadian coaches this year. They're heading for Branson, and it's usually a stopover.

Both the Theater and the Civic Arena are managed by the city. So there's no entrepreneurial spirit...

They're managed by parks and rec. We met with them two weeks ago on a proposal on this conference center, and they're like, "It's 9 to 5 Monday through Friday, and if we get an opportunity, fine."

*Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown, in terms of parking and lighting and anything else?*

If people from Commerce go to Chloe and Bernard's 5 blocks away, they drive. It's tough to park.

Parking is a big issue.

And the streets are confusing.

They're all one way.

I see people come the wrong way on Francis, west on Francis all the time.

Well, with all the new apartments around Boudreaux's, it's hard to find a spot.

I think the reason people go the wrong way is because there's not enough traffic.

There's plenty of parking in the garages, but no one wants to go there.

They're dark, they're dingy.

Brighten them up somehow.

Then you get an event downtown, and you're slammed. There's been nights when we've lost business because they're all parking in my lot, and my customers just go somewhere else.

With the low-to-mod housing downtown, there's no parking requirement.

You know, they made provisions for parking, but it's a half block away, and people still park on the street.

At Boudreaux's, there's probably 50 residents that use my lot, because there's not enough. My ownership's been thinking about permits or starting to charge.

If any of us were to build a business, we'd have to have parking for a permit. But these apartments, they don't have to do that. They don't care if you've got parking.

They're working on parking plans... signage is an issue. A lot of it's confusing, some is contradictory.

One of the big reasons people don't go to Chloe and Bernard's is the parking's right in front of the food kitchen, and people hassle you. It's uncomfortable to take a group of people through that.

Clients or something.

So you go another place.

(many people agreeing. Side conversations.)

*Moderator: Any ideas for ways to make parking better?*

No.

It's a long-standing hassle.

I wouldn't know what it would be. They're trying to make the garages look prettier.

(unintelligible side conversations.)

The parking garages have narrow entrances.

Hard to get in and out of.

Dark.

Older people won't use them at all.

They're no different than downtown Kansas City, but...

They're lighted better there.

You feel safer.

We can't fix em here, but if we could brighten them and lighten them up, make them more friendly and less intimidating here.

Replace those walls with cables or something else, it would let a lot of lighting in there.

*Moderator: What about business hours?*

Other than the food, I don't think anything's open late at all.

Most businesses are open 8 to 5.

(many people agreeing.)

Bars and restaurants are open, but nothing else.

Martini Bar.

Foster's.

Foster's is closed Sunday, Monday, Tuesday.

(side conversations. Many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: On the weekends, there's nothing open?*

Restaurants, unless there's something going on.

Retail.

Artful life is open, and a new secondhand store, but that's about it.

There's a new secondhand store?

The fabric store.

(many people talking at once about the secondhand store.)

I mean, there's really not a lot of retail now downtown.

It's a ghost town on weekends.

There aren't any cars at all.

Now, at night, when you drive down here at 6 or 7, there's people out. It used to be at 5, everything was done.

We've still got a lot of the homeless people still out here.

(many people agreeing.)

I think it's because we tolerate it.

It would be nice if they could move the food kitchen closer to that new shelter, what's it called?

They tried to move that thing a number of times. That would help their situation a lot.

There was a "violent" reaction from some of the board members when we proposed that, that you were just trying to hide them.

*Moderator: Let me change focuses from the past and present. The DREAM project looks to the future. If you were creating a master plan, what kinds of businesses would you like to see downtown?*

I think you need retail that helps people here, groceries and pharmacies.

Restaurants.

Support the people that live downtown, some sort of grocery store, a pharmacy, that kind of thing.

If you had more offices downtown, too.

Dry cleaner.

There's still going to be destination shops, you know. You know, you won't get the frontline retailers, but destination shops...housing over retail, retail below and housing above. Not like a Country Club Plaza, but something like that.

Art stores and that kind of stuff.

Those are springing up a month or two at a time anyway.

One mistake we made is these low-mod things have residences on the main floor rather than retail. Also, rather than the one-time shots of entertainment events, have a more consistent presentation of the arts or something, something more consistent.

(noise, unintelligible)... it does, it takes people that are willing to take a chance. A lot of people have lost, but a lot win.

If you picture the speedway being here, and the amount that would've sprung up...

*Moderator: What about restaurants?*

I think there's room for fine dining and casual. We've got every damn chain in the world, but we need some non-chain stuff. The more of the Boudreaux's and the small business type stuff...

The amount of people that come to Chili's everyday...

You need something down here that draws people to it, something specialty. You've got to bring something down here that isn't a big chain that people can do at the north end.

I can't say that there's going to be a fine dining... I mean, there's Houlihan's.

Maybe Chloe's.

But they've backed off.

We don't really have fine dining.

They've gone a little more casual than it used to be.

(many people agreeing.)

Boudreaux's seems to do pretty well here, doesn't it?

Oh yeah. He does good business. And it's a risky business to get into.

What attracts people to Boudreaux's?

Good food, consistent service.

Good atmosphere.

It's a fun place to go.

And he doesn't have any competition, really.

When we have customers from out of town, they don't want to go to Chili's. They want to go to Boudreaux's or Hoof and Horn. I'll go to any one of the small places, and I'll know the people there, but the chains, I don't know anyone. Those are people coming off the highway.

At least we've stopped them from going to Kansas City.

If there was a way to get them on 229 rather than 29...

(many people agreeing. Side conversations.)

*Moderator: What kind of aesthetic stuff needs to be changed downtown?*

Wouldn't just a new look of new faces and new businesses help?

I think the streetscape project will help. It'll give us an idea of what it can look like. It's only one street, but if that looks nice, then there's new problems.

I think the problem is once you dress it up, how do you keep it up? There's money to get it built, and that's it.

Even the park across the street...

(many people talking at once.)

One of my pet peeves is to look at the windows covered with painted up boards. It doesn't make it look like anyone's there. A lot of them are the façade improvements of urban renewal.

I'm amazed how many compliments we've got just from redoing our parking lot. When you think about it, some of these lots are pretty damn ugly.

It's rare that you see a property really well-maintained, and to see a well-maintained district... the trees, the grass, the buildings.

It's getting to that tipping point.

It would be nice to not have so many damn street signs. There's 300 of those things.

Those are coming out. Master block signage, and that's it.

Then you'll see normal stuff rather than signs telling you what you can't do.

It's that critical mass wanting to take care of it.

It would be interesting to see what the other DREAM cities are doing. What kind of ideas do they have? It would be nice to start a conversation with them. How do they do it?

(many people agreeing.)

If you could get just one good store down here, just one or two anchors, the rest will follow that. That'll bring the people down here.

Maybe we don't spread the money out so much. Maybe we try to get one big thing, a Gap or something like that.

You get that downtown, and shit, everybody else would follow.

We did a survey, and everybody wanted a grocery store and an Old Navy.

You'd want a men and women's type of thing down here, something down here for everyone. If my wife says she's going to whatever the hell store she goes to, I say, have fun! I'm not going to go.

If you get a good tenant, doesn't matter if it's retail or restaurant, it's something to bring people down here.

*Moderator: Are there any amenities that you'd like to see in the riverfront area?*

They've got that dock for the original casino. Somebody needs to figure out...

Fishing trips, I don't care.

It's a facility that, what's that restaurant, Sunset Grill...that facility over there, make it an outdoor bar or something.

Joe's Crab Shack.

But they don't have water or sewer over there.

There's no water or sewer? There's bathrooms there.

(many people talking at once.)

The whole city seems to just have, we do things half-assed.

We do it with shitty attitudes.

Every generation does this. My parents probably went through the same damn thing, blaming their parents. We do have a tendency to repeat ourselves.

I was complaining about the Slime Line on Page 2. What's it called, really?

"It's your column."

We have people in from all over the world, and that's their view.

As bad as it reads, it's all I hear about. People love it. They read it.

I agree 100%.

It increases sales.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

St. Joe's mentality, I mean, so many of the people are just...it's an uphill battle.

As far as economic matters go, this isn't really a fair focus group. Every one of us here is probably in the top 10% of income.

You need guys like that Steve from (unintelligible...North Park?), guys like him, to represent more of the St. Joe, the neighborhoods that spend money.

That's a good point.

I was thinking down here on the way, ideas I have, like boutique hotels with cool restaurants, but that doesn't work here. It's a totally different demographic. It's the people who are out for the Apple Blossom Parade or Mardi Gras.

Look at the Buffalo Bar. When Tommy Huffer had it, it was packed.

The place across the street, the dance bar, Tracy or whatever the hell it was, and it was packed.

You get, like this Y project, if they're talking about building this 16 million dollar facility out there, that's going to be a big hit to downtown.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

*Moderator: I have one more question in the next few minutes. How important is the future of downtown to the future of St. Joe?*

I think it's important. It offers an alternative lifestyle for people, people who like that life.

I think it's important—the government, the banks, the courthouse, all that's downtown. They're not going to move. You've got that core group that's going to stay in downtown, and it's been here 1000 years, and it will be. The police department's down here, the state offices.

I don't know. From my perspective, I don't know if it's absolutely critical to the future success of St. Joe. I don't know if St. Joe can't prosper without it. I think it would be great, because there's a lot of character and history, but the direct answer to your question is "I don't know." If we didn't have it, could we not function?

I've seen smaller cities with much cooler downtowns. Cool little squares, like Savannah...

Columbia...

There are some little bitty towns with really cool downtown areas.

And it's usually on the riverfront or the town square or something...they need something like that to help the rest of it out.

It's there...we just got to figure out how to do it. I think we've got a lot of passion for it though, a good group of people working for it.

*Moderator: Thank you very much.*

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## SECTION VI

### COLLEGE STUDENTS AND STAFF DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

I'm Ron Olander, I'm vice president of financial planning and administration at Missouri Western. I've lived in St. Joseph for about 13 years now and worked at the University 5.

I'm Dan Nekis, I'm vice president for university advancement at Missouri Western, and I've been here 3 years.

Brett Aisley, I'm the compliance officer and director of athletics at Missouri Western, and I've lived here all 28 years of my life.

Jeannie Dakron, I'm the assistant vice president for academic and student affairs and graduate dean at Missouri Western, and I've lived here longer than I care to admit.

I'm Natalie Daly, I'm the student government president at Missouri Western, and I've lived here 4 years.

I'm Fritz (name unintelligible), I'm the graduate dean at Northwest Missouri State University, and I lived in St. Joe for 8 weeks a long, long time ago, in 1960.

I'm Stu Osterten, I'm marketing specialist at Northwest Missouri State, and I live in Maryville, but with our ties here to St. Joe, it's kind of why I'm here.

I'm Morgan Lybold, I've lived here all 22 years of my life, and I'm a student at Missouri Western.

I'm Amber Leigh Holman, I've lived here all 21 years of my life, and I'm a student at Missouri Western.

*Moderator: Thank you. I have some really basic questions for you. Tell me a little bit about your community. Describe St. Joe.*

We have a new dean of professional studies, and he's been here about 3 weeks, and I might just tell you his observances. Yesterday, he was telling me about some different things that different organizations he'd interacted with...he was telling me just how much he appreciated the friendliness and helpfulness of everyone. He said, actually, their dog got loose and ended up at the pound and he had to pay the fine, but the person felt bad about giving him a ticket, and he did have it licensed, and so there was supposed to be another ticket or citation or something for that, and they said, "We just won't do that, because you haven't been here very long." He said all around town, he's found people to be very helpful, from setting up utilities, buying his house...he believes that it's a very friendly and open community. He's really impressed with the architecture, very impressed with cost of living... they were able to find a home that they really like, and it was very reasonable. He has a daughter coming, who will be a sophomore at Central, and found the school district to be very helpful. Actually, it's new technology—she was

able to try out for the Pom Squad on YouTube, and made the squad. That also impressed him, that our school district was very open to doing that, had the kind of technology...those are just a few things that he's told me about. So that's from a newcomer.

I've been here 13 years almost, and I'm just amazed at the growth in St. Joseph. The community, from a population perspective, hasn't changed, but there were things 12, 13 years ago, that...I came from suburban Minneapolis, so I kind of had the expectation that there's a mall around the corner somewhere...you know, it's just, to me, I think the community has grown as far as its retail and restaurants and, you know, I think there are those that still see us as kind of not quite as progressive as we should be, but I really do believe that the community has really grown. I mean, 13 years ago, I thought we needed a coffee shop. Now how many coffee shops do we have?

As somebody that moved here 3 years ago, which is more recent, the thing that I noticed right off the bat was the friendliness and also the size of the town is a comfortable size. You can get to know most people and you can get involved... you have a chance to be part of things, but then anything you need is right here, but when you want something that's beyond what you have here, Kansas City is really nearby.

I think I would echo that. I get asked all the time, Why St. Joe? Whether it's hiring candidates...I say, it's not too big, not too small. You can be in the country in 5 minutes, and the big city atmosphere, Kansas City's 35 miles down the road. The location's great, and the town's expanding.

I kind of have a different perspective, not having lived here. I was a student at Northwest 25 years ago, and we'd come into St. Joe, and I had a chance to work in Maryville, but I left in August of 85, came back to Northwest in October of 05, so I was gone for 20 years, and of course Maryville's changed, but I couldn't get over how far north St. Joseph had progressed. You know, East Hills was it when I was a student, and my gosh, you know, and I feel like back in the early 80's, it seemed like St. Joseph was kind of flat-economy, stagnant, but now, with the shops at North Village, it seems like it is moving forward. It's real progressive.

It's kind of amazing how many construction projects are under way on the Belt right now. They're all the way up and down the Belt.

(somebody walking in)...I'm Wayne Major, with Vatterott College. I was born and raised in St. Joe, and I think it's friendly. I live in Fawcett, but St. Joe is about friendliness. People help each other. I know when our corporate office comes in, they say that people in this town are real friendly. The other thing is, not only in the whole world but in St. Joe, there's a lot of transition going on, and how people react is really interesting. There's a little book called *Who Moved My Cheese?*, and it's about that, it's a cool little book. But I think the community, with the base of being friendly, of transitioning into this change is just remarkable. It's hard to do. This computer thing is a hard thing for us to battle with right now, but the change is happening. The other thing that's great is this downtown. I think it's awesome. Very few towns have a river that go right next to it, and being able to utilize that would be great, kind of like Kansas City with the river market. Now you see a lot of changes downtown.

My recent contacts with St. Joseph have been education, working with student teachers at local high schools, that type of thing, and I think in the last few years, the education has been very progressive. The other area that I see progressing is the historic museums and that part of St. Joseph. And then the 4-lane highway is definitely an asset.

*Moderator: Are there a lot of dining, entertainment, and shopping options here?*

I think the dining options have increased dramatically in the last 5 or 10 years. You know, my own personal tastes, I'd like to see a couple more fine dining places. I think it tends to run to the more family-style and the more bar scene type places.

I think with entertainment, it's getting better, but for the college-aged group, there's only a few places you can go. We don't have live music or much else geared toward that population. I think we've increased that a lot, but there's still a lot left to be desired.

I think the idea of dining and entertainment, both, and expanding entertainment to include recreation...it depends a little on the audience and what you want to accomplish. I think if we're going to attract younger professionals to the community for the life science industries, we're going to need more dining and entertainment for that particular segment of the community to appreciate. I think the river does provide an opportunity, though we do have a problem with the railroad tracks...

*Moderator: What type of recreation things are there?*

Our theater, live theater, is really good. The Missouri does lots of stuff. We have lots of museums, an ice skating rink. A lot of random stuff that I don't see where I'm from.

Well, in Kansas City, they had Friday night concerts downtown, and you saw a lot of younger people down there. Those were fun.

I think a lot of that... which comes first—the people or what attracts the people? There's not going to be much interest from investors to put the types of activities downtown until there's a population to make it feasible to do business. I know it's a much larger city, but my original home is Indianapolis, and we've been back there several times, and it's absolutely amazing how much growth there has been in downtown residential life for that younger professional set, that are either working at the state capital or a lot of the downtown companies, and then you go down along the streets, and just about all the restaurants have outside sections now, and it's just busy. Those kinds of things would be great here, but you gotta have enough of those people to support em before they can make it, so that...

But that's an interesting thing, you know... you can do that in downtown, but you really can't do that in strip malls. You're not going to have that same environment, so the only place to develop that is a downtown area, where there's not a lot of traffic.

The only place that's tried that here has been pretty successful.

I was in Lincoln this past weekend, and their downtown has an open-air market, and I saw so many college kids down there. They had a coffee shop, live music, and it was packed on a Saturday morning. It was a really neat experience. Something like that here...

*Moderator: Now I'd like to focus on downtown. What direction do you think downtown is going?*

I think it's taking a positive direction. There are more restaurants downtown than there ever were. I think the bars continue to be down here. I think what's missing, though, is that business component. There aren't really any new businesses coming into downtown.

I think that...it goes back to what we were talking about. If you have more businesses downtown, then retail and restaurants can do better, there's more demand for housing...it seems the biggest challenge is how to put the pieces together. Nobody wants to put housing in that market for the professional until they know there's enough people to fill it, but those people can't come until there's units... how you get who's going to come first and do what is a challenging puzzle.

I think a piece of it is we have to make downtown attractive, pleasant. It has to make me want to sit outside and eat. That whole environment and the streetscape is critical. And you have to move all of these things together, but if it's attractive, and there are places you want to go to, then people will want to move down here. I think there's evidence that that's happening.

Right now downtown is really an entertainment district, and that's about it. The restaurants, the theater...that's about it. There's not as many...there have been some businesses lost. There isn't a lot of shopping or businesses downtown anymore. I think you're going to have to recapture that.

Niche type stuff, specialty shops.

I hadn't been downtown in St. Joe for a number of years, because everything was out east. There has to be something down here to bring people in. As a child, St. Joe was the big place to go, and we came downtown. There was lots of things here.

Growing up here, my folks used to tell me that people would come to St. Joe from Kansas City to shop, which was amazing to me. Well, if it was like that once, why did people come? It was probably a neat feeling at one time. I would've been curious to see what that was like.

People like that, that old, revitalized...I think it's heading the right direction. You see a lot of life on the streets, people outside eating, lights...we just need to get the word out and show that it's back alive again. Flags and music...

*Moderator: Why do you come downtown?*

For me, it's pretty much either restaurants or to something the Missouri Theater's doing, or a meeting.

If you ask the younger crowd, it's to go to Buffalo Bar...

They're popular with different groups...Felix Street and the Bone and Hi-Ho.

Foster's...but it's kind of expensive. It's not really a college partying kind of place. It's more of an after-work drink kind of a place.

And the Missouri Theater, and restaurants...

Is Cobblestone still open?

I don't come down here to shop.

It's hard to come down here and shop, because the North Village has a lot of stuff, and it's fairly new. Downtown is more for entertainment.

Plus, a lot of stuff's unknown. I don't see a lot of the downtown shops advertising to college kids. I don't see marketing towards us.

I come down just to eat. I probably come downtown 5 times a year. We'll have an event at Boudreaux's, or go to the Buffalo Bar. There's nothing downtown I shop for. I go to the mall or North Village or Kansas City.

A lot of antique stores downtown, but I don't shop for antiques.

My mom loves shopping down there for antiques.

It doesn't appear that the Civic Arena is used for as many public events as I feel it should be used for.

I think it is used quite a bit, but it's real diverse. A couple home shows, the Chamber event...

I'm thinking more of concerts and...maybe it's too small for George Strait or whoever...

They used to. They had a couple concerts there a couple years ago. I don't think they use it as much as they could, with smaller bands, local acts...

I don't know, this may just be a total erroneous perception on my part, but I feel it's not big enough for the big names, but it's big enough that when they get smaller shows, they don't draw enough people.

There are other things...we have something similar in Sedalia where we do stuff on the fairgrounds—they do fashion shows and proms and indoor football.

It's my understanding that it is pretty busy.

A few years ago, the Arena looked booked a lot...garden shows and chili cookoffs, things like that.

*Moderator: Tell me about the direction the riverfront area's going.*

I think it's heading in the right direction. When they put in that walkway, that's fantastic. It's beautiful, it's quiet...and for them to put in that path, it's fantastic. I think they took a stretch—we talked about the railroad tracks, and I think that kind of thing's really a draw. If we could continue to develop the riverfront... there's always going to be a problem with that stretch now, but we don't have to have that as the main focal point, but cities that have rivers are always looking to develop it. If you look at Omaha...retail and restaurants along the river. It's always a huge asset.

As an outsider that moved to town 3 years ago, I was from Evansville, they had a lot along their river by a casino. It seemed a shame that the casino moved out of downtown here, because it fills up.

I'm amazed that no one's developed anything out there.

There are restaurants that have tried.

(side conversations.)

I've been out there like twice, and I see the casino... develop it where you can see it.

Are there even restaurants out there?

What goes on in that parking lot?

Well, people park there and watch the river rise when it's going to flood. Why don't we have a farmer's market down in the parking lot?

The riverwalk starts there and goes north, but there is a whole landing there and some things, and it looks in disrepair.

It looks abandoned.

The other thing that was big was the amusement park...

A carnival there once or twice a year...

If you set up a little river park... people would start coming downtown for that, for something to do with their kids. I'm sure they'd come.

I think a big thing to bring people downtown is to have some nice streetscape type thing that's a little trendy, more than the chain operations...I don't mean just the kind of bars that you mentioned already, but a little brewery type establishment, something more trendy... (unintelligible). Something like that that would be fun to go to. Foster's would be an excellent participant in that.

People are willing to pay more for atmosphere. At Foster's, people pay 7 dollars for a drink. I'd be willing to pay more at a trendier restaurant for the atmosphere.

*Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown?*

I think it's clean. I know for Greek Week, we came down and cleaned up parking lots and garages, and we had a hard time finding trash. There wasn't much to actually clean up. I feel safe most of the time when I'm down here.

I think there's a perception that downtown may not be safe, and I'm basing that on calls we had when they found out we were going to have a graduate center downtown. I think there's an outside perception that it might not be safe.

I think you read in the paper that somebody got stabbed or robbed...

That's not in the true downtown area, though.

Yeah.

Muggings and homeless people...

And St. Joe downtown is different from Kansas City downtown. People kind of assume that downtown anywhere isn't going to be that safe.

Even the homeless people are really nice.

(laughter.)

They just hang out and talk to the college students. I don't even feel threatened by them. A lot of them are really nice.

And I don't think it's a cleanliness issue or a safety issue, but I think the conditions of the buildings give you that perception.

Well, we have that parking lots, and you can't park on the upper levels because they're unsafe. I think, well, the city doesn't see the need to replace that... that's a problem. It's kind of like an abandoned building. They've abandoned the top level of their parking lots.

And Shooters...you have kids down here at places they shouldn't be, and the police are called. There's several places around downtown where you see that, fights in the parking lots, so...

*Moderator: Is parking an issue?*

It's never been for me. If you haven't been down here much, it's probably confusing, but if you know where you're going, there's plenty of parking garages. I've never seen parking as a problem. The only thing I will say is by Boudreaux's, I don't think parking's really good out there.

You park out back and you could get towed. If you're going to Felix Street or Buffalo Bar, I don't think it's an issue.

I finally feel comfortable, after 4 years, navigating my way down here. It's a maze, and the one-way streets killed me. But I think you get that in any downtown.

*Moderator: Is it well-signed?*

To the museums, yeah. And the historical landmarks.

I think the signage is an opportunity to give the impression that we want to give. Cool signs that set the mood, that help navigation but look interesting. I think those little things make a big difference.

I think it would be nice to have a directory, a map on the website with the one-way streets and parking marked, and the businesses. There's a yoga place down here, and Artful Life...a lot of shops that I didn't know were here.

*Moderator: How do you find out what's going on downtown?*

Channel 2 has information on events, and they have those banners on Frederick. I think there's a lot of steps they could take for better marketing.

I think KQ2 has a website now.

The "off hours" section in the newspaper has information on weekend events... (unintelligible).

*Moderator: As you know, this DREAM project is about developing a plan downtown. Let's look to the future. What kinds of businesses would you like to see downtown?*

I think, kind of what we've discussed—some open-air restaurants that you can eat in or outside, sidewalk café type businesses, anything that would attract the two students in the room... 18 to 30 age group. Right now, it appears that it's all east and north, and people have to have a reason to go somewhere. Why do you go to the Plaza in Kansas City? It's cool! There's shops and fountains. Downtown St. Joe needs something fairly unique. If they can capitalize on the history in this town, Pony Express, there's some opportunities there...

I went to Sacramento for a while, and they have the same Pony Express statue we have, but their statue is mounted in an area that looks like an old west building, right in the bend in the river...but it's entirely an entertainment and shopping district, bars, restaurants, novelty shops and all that. If you look at our history, and what one town did with it, and what we've done with it...

As far as types of businesses, the trendy things we've talked about, but we need some quality office-type facilities, ones that will attract professionals to have their offices downtown. You mentioned the new development up north, and I think there's supposed to be a professional building there. With the right facilities, a law firm might locate downtown. I truly believe in historic preservation, but if they get too rigid and you can't replace things that need to be replaced, it makes it harder to get investors in buildings next door... I would hope that if we

found somebody to build a new office building downtown, we wouldn't discourage them. The other thing is, I know we've got the housing going in, and that's great, but I still that for the younger professional type person, there needs to be more downtown loft-type housing. One of the things is over by Boudreaux's is the whole block is going to be loft housing, but it's subsidized housing, and not many of those people are going to eat at Boudreaux's. There needs to be some place downtown that will attract people who will spend money downtown.

There's one down there, and I have friends that live there, and it's subsidized, but only for 5 to 10 years, but after that...

You have to be rich?

(laughter.)

That's the kind of thing... Boudreaux's would be a perfect business for outside seating, and he's limited by the housing around with the kinds of people that won't go there.

And they need more shops around it.

And the Arena's right there. We need a cluster. The Artful Life is a good example, a nice shop, but usually those are amongst 5 or 6 different types of shops, and we need that kind of cluster.

That's a real concern for many people is, "Who will our neighbors be?" That would be true for anyone. "Who's going to be on the same block?" I just think, in the plan, that's something that needs to be addressed. And maybe we need to do it just in certain areas...

Makes it more user-friendly, too.

And then, like you said, you get one or two blocks really developed, and then you can build another block. If they're scattered...

And we need to focus on the 18 to 30 age range...we spend our money on entertainment. If you go to the north shops, you're going to see half at least are 18 to 30 year olds. I think we need to focus on those ages, because we're the ones who have the money and want to spend it, and we'll be there on Wednesday night rather than just Friday and Saturday.

(many people talking at once.)

*Moderator: Are there any other entertainment options you'd like to see downtown?*

I'd love to see—every downtown I've been in, I look for a piano bar. They're fun, unique...I don't think St. Joe has one. It doesn't appeal to everyone, but it's fun.

Café Acoustic is the only thing I can think of that's kind of like that.

A place where you can request anything...

That could fit real nice with the type of trendy feel we want.

I'd like to see a convention center added to the Civic Arena. I've been to other towns, too, where they've had downtown, they have the big hotel, the Civic Arena with a convention center attached. We're a little small for it, but if we had a convention center, it would bring people downtown.

(background noise)...I know the community's pushing towards more stuff like that.

If you think of it as a conference center, a smaller place than a convention center... I would think maybe we're just far enough from Kansas City that some companies there that need a retreat for a day or two that they can get away, but it's not too far away. Especially if we had some neat things for there to do at night.

*Moderator: What about parks and recreation?*

I think any...the path along the river, it's a mile long, right? I ride my bicycle on that, and it's too short. What if we extended it through downtown? To have bike lanes some place... that sort of thing would get people down here.

The riverwalk goes around there, but there's no destination.

It's not like riding on the highway—you can ride your bike downtown and feel very comfortable.

*Moderator: What kinds of aesthetic improvements would you make?*

Signs are a big thing. I think we have some ugly signs.

A lot of greenery. Dress it up. More of that streetscape type of thing. I've seen some towns with walking malls or plaza, and a lot of places do it, but that's the kiss of death for them. But our buildings are so close to the street, and it wouldn't be easy to develop the streetscape atmosphere because of that.

It would be nice to have a little zoo downtown...if we're dreaming.

A lot of these are good ideas, but we need enough to make them succeed. My wife and I like to go watch baseball here, and it's amazing—it's fun—but  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the seats are empty. Here's something that we do have, but is it getting enough draw? I don't know. A lot of these things are neat ideas, if there's enough market.

Is there any kind of public survey of this?

*Moderator: That's the next step of this.*

You know, you need a destination downtown, whether a multiplex theater or an entertainment district. Missouri Theater's kind of a destination, but we need something there every night of the week.

St. Joe just has a lot of... you look at the shops, Tuscany, the shops down on Southville, downtown development, a lot of things going on. There needs to be something unique down here.

They're almost competing.

Yeah. And you're not going to get that kind of retail downtown.

That's why you need the specialty shops, rather than mainstream. If you go to Lawrence, they have really neat used bookstores... even if you put something down there like a college bookstore that sells sweatshirts and Greek stuff, to draw the college students down there because they're cheaper than the bookstore on campus. Focusing on needs in the community that you can't get at Wal-Mart and people will pay more for.

*Moderator: Including the riverfront into this project...what would you like to see on the riverfront?*

I'd like to see expansion on that trail. Go look at Boise, Idaho's 25 miles of green belt they have along the river. All we have is a mile.

I used to live by Wichita, and they've developed a lot along the river. That's where they have Riverfest, and it's like 10 days of entertainment, food vendors, fireworks. Like we talked earlier, there's just so many communities that have an opportunity to be along a river, and we can make it attractive, even though it's just the Missouri River. I'd say expand walking and biking/hiking trails down there, and kind of a natural tie into the downtown.

I just never know how you know what will succeed as a hotspot...when I moved here from Indiana, out in this little town next to the railroad track was one of the most upscale, wonderful steakhouses anywhere, and the place is packed. People drive an hour, two hours to eat. And you wonder, "Why did it ever make it in this little town in the middle of nowhere?" You think, what like that could find a niche here, and who would feel comfortable taking that risk?

*Moderator: How important is the future of downtown to the future of St. Joseph as a whole?*

I don't know. The unfortunate thing is that the Belt has become the true downtown of St. Joseph. That's the retail center now.

Quite honestly, being a lifelong resident here, I come downtown maybe 4 or 5 times a year. When I think of St. Joe expanding and attracting businesses, I think of Tuscany... I like downtown areas, but I don't know that it's a vital part of St. Joe's success.

I think downtown has to become a destination for people, and it isn't right now.

It can add value to the community and be an attractive, really neat entertainment and restaurant district, or a really neat developed riverfront...

It could become very important in helping to attract young professionals, if it helped life science businesses recruit those professionals, but without developing a much more active business center and trendy spot, it could contribute to the whole town's economy, but right now, I'm not sure how crucial it is.

I don't know how many downtown buildings are vacant right now, but, I guess, if downtown isn't successful, there will be more buildings in disrepair, and your crime rate will increase...it certainly plays a role in the whole community.

When I think of downtown areas that are impressive to me, the buildings may still be the old buildings, but they're redone, and they're like new buildings inside. They're not just dressed up. They've really been redone, with character of the old building, but they're really nice inside.

How old is Boudreaux's? It looks older, but it's nice inside.

It's an older building.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

I think that's a good example of the trendy downtown... I know there's some signs, for signage, that are just spray painted plywood. I think some kind of standards for professional signs...

*Moderator: Are there any other downtowns that you would like to emulate?*

Somebody mentioned that you can have historic buildings that are well-maintained, and also have some new buildings. I think Minneapolis has done a great job of that. I wouldn't want to say that everything has to be old. Where there's opportunities to put things in that complement each other, it'll make it more interesting.

The riverwalk in San Antonio's an example, and on a smaller scale, something like that along the river...and Indianapolis downtown...

I remember Savannah. It has a block or two of historic district, and some new buildings around it, but a core of old, southern, historic type buildings.

Richmond, Virginia's the same way.

*Moderator: Thank you very much.*

## SECTION VII

### HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND STAFF DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

I'm Abby, I'm 16, and I've lived here 16 years.

I'm Monica, I'm 17, and I've lived here since I was born.

I'm Andy, I'm 16, and I was born here.

Jamie, 17, and I've been here forever.

Mike, 45 (laughter).

I'm (name unintelligible), and I've been here since I was born.

I'm Terri, I'm 48 (laughter), I've worked here for 20 years.

I'm Laurie, I don't live here, but I teach here.

I'm Robert, I've lived here since 89.

I'm John, I'm 40, I've lived here all my life.

I'm Jake, I'm 17, and I've lived here 11 or 12 years.

*Moderator: This is my first time in St. Joe. What could you tell me about your town if I were thinking about moving here from St. Louis?*

It's a good town to raise a family.

It's boring for teenagers, because our movies cost \$8.25 each.

I think all towns can be kind of boring if you've lived there your whole life. It's not like a tiny suburb, but it's a small city.

It's a good sized town.

It's kind of unremarkable. Good place to live, though. Not a lot of crime, pretty safe.

A lot of antique shops.

I think we're considered an urban school district, because of our population, but we don't have a real urban feel, because there's not really a lot going on downtown.

I like how you can be in the country in 5 minutes and the city in 40.

I think we're trying to build on the outside of the town rather than the middle.

It's clean.

It has good schools. If you were going to move here, I would tell you that.

I do think it lacks stuff for teenagers. I think that's huge.

Good healthcare system. There's a social welfare board for those without insurance.

Low cost of living.

I think the shopping is getting better, but there will always be people who will go to Kansas City. They'll always drive the 50 miles. But it's nice that there's Old Navy here now, and some things we didn't have before.

*Moderator: Where do people shop in this area?*

North shops.

Even with the north shops now and the new shopping areas, I still go to Kansas City. I don't think there's a lot of shopping here.

It makes me sad to see what's happened to the mall. I never thought it was good, but it's too bad what's happening to it.

Same with downtown. I still wish there were little shops downtown.

See, when you said antiques, I was like "yes!"

I want downtown to come back.

When you go, just traveling around, other downtowns are eclectic little places and have little shops. I think we're missing the boat on the river. There's huge potential there. So shopping in this area could be big.

Like Savannah.

I agree about the river. It seems like other communities have been able to capitalize on that. I think St. Charles is a very cool area.

One reason there's not better shopping, which kind of goes along with the low cost of living, is there's a lot of poverty. I've taught in all different parts of St. Joseph, and there's a lot of poverty here. It's probably hard for a lot of shopping places.

There's also a lot of elderly.

Why did you look at us?

(laughter.)

We do a lot with demographics in my classes, and we spent 3 weeks getting the most upgraded demographics we could find, and we found some interesting things. We found out, by just doing some low-level surveys, is our schools are pretty old. We have 26 or so schools, and we're having to constantly update 100-year-old buildings to make them conducive to schools today. As far as downtown, it's really convenient to drive out to the North shops and park 50 feet from the entrance door versus downtown, when it was built, it was not built with the idea of having 80,000 people in town. It's a lot of work to go downtown and shop, even with the parking garages. You have to plan on getting quite a bit of exercise. But it's a really neat place. If people would just take the time, it's unbelievable. Everything's so fast-paced now, though, that you have to hurry up and wait to go downtown. I'll go to a ballgame or Boudreaux's, but even though I want to go to the Jazz Festival and spend the whole afternoon there, I don't have time. I'm a parent, and there's like 8 days a week where we have stuff going on. I think that's why you're seeing a lot of apartments renovated downtown. Shopping is kind of like planning a camping trip, because it's an all day trip, and it sure is convenient to park at Target and Best Buy.

I think that's what happening with the mall, too. That's one of the reasons people are moving out of the mall.

If you ever go down to the Downtown Furniture Emporium, and in its day, it was state of the art. Its day is gone.

*Moderator: If you have people in to see you, where do you take them?*

For me, I always take them to Boudreaux's. I don't like the chain restaurants and stores, so I take them to places that are special to St. Joe. They can go to Target at home.

I had family in this weekend, and all we really did is go up and down the belt. They went to Chris and Kate's, went and saw my sister... there isn't a lot to do other than see what's up and down the belt. We went to the movie theater. That's kind of what I do. We don't think to go to downtown because there's just not a lot there. I think, sure, we're busy, and we want to get done with stuff, but if there were shops downtown, I would go downtown, but there just isn't anything for me down there but the YMCA.

I go thrifting a lot. I just realized that not a lot of people do that.

*Moderator: Are there a lot of antique shops downtown?*

There are like 4. But some of the thrift stores are going to the belt.

We held a 1000-student state convention here in 1999, and we kicked around the Pony Express thing, and the kids were like, "no way." But when I tell people I'm from St. Joe, they're like, "Pony Express! I want to come there." That's a huge tourist draw for our community.

I like the Pony Express.

I don't.

I grew up in Kansas City, and I've never been to the Truman Library, and they're doing a huge push for it right now. But the Pony Express should be a big attraction. But I would take somebody instantly to the Psychiatric Museum.

We used to have a psychiatric hospital, and the museum has a lot of displays on how they treated patients in the 1800's. The hospital has since turned into a prison.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

My family's sports geeks, so we go to a Black Snakes game. I think that's been a great thing for us to have, Missouri Western sporting activities. You mentioned how it's a good place to raise a family, and my family goes to ballgames all the time. I take my family to games.

I think St. Joe's getting to be more diverse, with the growing arts community. My family's artsy people.

We stick on the river and the parks. There's a new riverfront park we go to. And my family likes the casino.

We have an extensive parkway system that's nice. I had family come from out of town, and we went all the way down the parkway. I showed off downtown going off 229. We don't have a real nice skyline, though.

*Moderator: Let's talk about downtown specifically. Do you think it's improving, or do you think it's the same or worse?*

I'll speak as an adult. It seems, since I've been in college, downtown has been in an upswing several times because of nightlife, but with that comes problems, which is difficult for daytime businesses down there. I've seen it swing back and forth a couple times. I can think back to when they put the pedestrian mall in downtown, and there was a tragedy there in our community, and I think that changed the way we viewed downtown. We had this nice, safe bubble where we all lived in, and I think, my parents viewed things differently after that.

When I talk to people who were in high school in the 60's and 70's, all the games were played downtown, and I thought it was a really nice atmosphere. Rather than home games at other schools, there was more of a social aspect when all the schools played down at the Civic Arena.

I think there's a lot of ups and downs, but it seems like people downtown are mad at each other a lot. There's been times when you drive downtown, and there's a big sign up that says something to the mayor, or the two groups that argue about the trails west. They can't get along, and they can't make a decision, so it kind of has a bad feeling for me. But on a positive side, somebody mentioned the jazz festivals and the parties in the parkway, and those are very positive things.

I think there's something to what you said earlier, that it's tough to get in and out of downtown for those festivals.

Everything's built on speed right now.

Yeah. So being able to go downtown, park, and find a place to get into the jazz festival...we didn't go this year, and I think part of it is the parking.

I've got to be honest, outside Boudreaux's and the Civic Arena, I don't think we could name 5 businesses downtown. Could you?

Barbosa's.

Papa Joe's. It has the best French toast ever.

No... I couldn't.

I could name 2 or 3 businesses, but they don't have very good connotations.

Yeah, it seems like there's a lot of night clubs and stuff.

*Moderator: What about the riverfront area? Is that heading in the right direction?*

I think so. I think when they put in the new walking trail, that was good, but they also closed the Sunset Grill a few years back.

I kind of like the river being kind of in the city but kind of a wilderness type of atmosphere.

I have the same question. If I asked these guys, "give me the boundaries of the south end." I have to ask, where are you talking about?

By the softball fields and stuff.

I'm being sincere. Where's the riverfront.

The master plan for the riverfront starts north of Heritage Park, where the old waterworks are, and then it goes south all the way.

(many people talking at once, trying to figure out the boundaries of the riverfront.)

One of the things we're working on is that connection off of 29. There's one way in and one way out. We're working on another connection to get into the riverfront area. And then you've got the new nature center they're building.

I think it would be cool to see something built where the riverboat used to be. When they had the casino sitting there, there was a real purpose. Now it's kind of a big parking lot, which is kind of a nuisance for skateboarders and vandals. There's not a lot of business going on right there.

In Washington, Missouri, they have a phenomenal riverfront, a huge festival on the riverfront, little shops. It's an incredible place. It's not built up and commercialized. Now, if you go north on 29, a lot of the Iowa towns have skateboard parks and things to do. I don't know why nobody's ever done that here. It's all the same river...

There it's strictly used for recreation, but here it's used by barges and things. But people boat on the river.

There are some people that would swear by the river.

And you'd think because there's that access point by the river, people use it.

*Moderator: When and why do you come downtown?*

We go to the Trail. We like going to the Trail Theater.

Everybody goes to the Civic Arena for sports. If we didn't have that, would people come down here to sightsee? I doubt it.

There's also Missouri Theater.

If something big is going on here, they come down, but when else are you going to get people down here. How often are you going to get that many people from St. Joe to come downtown? It seems like there has to be a big deal downtown. It depends on what it's worth to you to get out and walk. For an event at the Civic Arena, people will walk 12 blocks to see it.

Other than Boudreaux's or Barbosa's or basketball at the Civic Arena, I don't go downtown.

Both my parents work downtown, so I go there a lot. I guess I go a lot more than most people.

I deliver scholarships to the downtown banks. I do business there because of school.

Honestly, with the advent of technology, I hardly ever need to go to the bank.

I go to the bank close to my house.

You don't have to go downtown to get access to a bank...there's one 5 seconds away from everybody's house.

*Moderator: Are there things you used to do downtown that you don't anymore?*

I don't ever remember coming downtown except for Trails West or the Civic Arena.

There's somewhere we used to go that closed, but I can't remember it.

I think there were old stores downtown. The Paris.

What was that store on the corner? On the same block of Missouri Theater, there was a little store with artsy stuff, a bunch of art... a lot of books and things like that.

If my kids said that they were going to go with friends out to the mall in the evening, that's cool, that would be all right. If my kids said they were going to go downtown at night, I wouldn't let them.

*Moderator: Because it's unsafe?*

I think that's probably it. I'm not trying to be disrespectful, but I don't see it as safe. I don't know if it's about the homeless people wandering.

There used to be shows downtown, and my parents would be hesitant to let me go downtown. I talk to the homeless people downtown, and my parents are really hesitant about that.

And I never really thought about that either, but we come to the trail, and it's kind of the edge of downtown in my mind, but I know when we come down at night, and there are packs of kids running around there, but I don't think at night I would be comfortable with my wife or kids coming down by themselves.

Could the same thing be said about the north end or the south end?

There are other parts of town that I feel the same way about.

Maybe I've driven downtown and seen homeless people or people outside the food kitchen...

Well, and at night, there's a lot of bars open. And one street will be good, and the next street over won't be.

That's probably common in all downtowns.

I think the lighting would make it better.

Right next to Boudreaux's, they have those loft apartments, and they're expensive. I wonder why people would live there.

It attracts younger people. It's cool.

And there's amazing views.

Maybe my perspective is inaccurate, because people do do that. I would never do that.

I think the majority of their tenants come from the city. They didn't grow up with 100 acres. That's their way of life.

I'm from the north end, and I'm not comfortable walking around the south end at night. I think a lot of that is because the town feels so divided.

I know that a lot of college students hang out at the bars downtown.

(many people talking at once.)

There's kids in Benton that drive up here to drink at Shooter's.

There's so many kids there, and they're all drinking. It's kind of scary. I went there once, and I was nervous, and there was a drunk down there hitting on all my friends, and it totally freaked me out.

Also, it's how you were raised. I was always in downtown Kansas City, so I think I'm just used the downtown feeling. I'd never go to Shooter's, though.

You're probably the youngest adult here, but where do people your age go for nightlife?

Kansas City.

Yeah.

They do. When I was in college, we would go downtown, but if you were to go to Missouri Western and ask where they go, I think they go all over.

You guys had made comments about other river towns, and I've heard this comment before... they tried to do a thousand things kind of good instead of five things outstanding.

(many people agreeing.)

And you talk about the Black Snakes and the Saints, and people wonder why they'll never make it, and they'll never make it because there's so many things to do. Everybody gets into a routine and do the same thing over and over and over, because they never get out of their comfort zone. Downtown's kind of the same way. They try to be everything to everybody, rather than doing these three things really well.

I think it goes to all the arguing and fighting going on.

Would it be great if our downtown was really cool? Absolutely. But am I really sad about the way it is? No.

And people live on budgets. Wal-Mart's always full.

The University should be a huge drawing point for this community. I had this conversation with some Missouri Western official, and I asked, "Why aren't there Griffins everywhere? Why aren't there events? Why aren't there signs that say, 'Welcome Back Students?'"

It's because our town is cursed by its size. It's too big but not big enough. There's too much to do to focus on one good thing.

Just the mere size and the shape of the town has lent itself to little pockets.

It's not as big as Kansas City where it's okay to be in your own little pocket.

Part of it is I think the location, where it is. And there's been a lot of discussion about bringing some part of campus downtown. It seems weird to me to do that.

I think it is, too. I think they want to bring some art classes down here.

Well, Missouri Western isn't really a destination college, even though it's a great college.

Well, and why isn't there going to be a gold-black day—because it's not really about college loyalty here. They're loyal to their high schools. I'm not saying nobody cares about the college, but it's not one of those places where you're going to get a whole class from Benton or Lafayette saying, "We really can't wait to get to Missouri Western."

But that's how a lot of towns are. A lot of kids from Kirksville come to Missouri Western.

A lot of people are bored here. They want to go somewhere else and meet new people.

It's like going from middle school to high school.

*Moderator: You had talked about lighting and parking. Are there other things that would make you feel better about downtown?*

Washington, Missouri has streetlights and flowers and planters, and every window says "Welcome." There's not an invite down there in St. Joe.

And there's a lot of abandoned buildings down there. They're great to take pictures of, but that's not enough.

I don't even know where you can and can't park.

(many people agreeing.)

It's too much work to go down there.

And seriously, the parking meter lady is like a tyrant.

And the parking lots, they keep changing whether you can park there and for how long.

It's the similar types of problems with the schools. In its day, we were state-of-the-art, and it's not that anymore.

We have something in this community that no one else has, and it's our old buildings. Everybody knows deep down would be to build one or two new high schools, but we have all of this loyalty to our high schools.

Couldn't there be just one huge high school? They have that in Columbia.

*Moderator: We've talked about the past and the present, but let's look to the future of downtown. If you could dream a little bit, what kinds of businesses would you like to see downtown?*

Some of the North shops could have been moved down here. Where would you put it downtown, but if you figure that out... Would you come to an Old Navy if it was downtown?

Absolutely.

Some of these buildings are old department stores.

It shows kind of a lack of faith in downtown.

I think that's driven by the retailers, though.

But if you get enough shops down here and make downtown a place with an Old Navy or a Gap or something, people would think, "You know, downtown ain't that bad."

You need one or two big-name retailers downtown before people will start shopping down there.

Well, what about a movie theater? Old Navy you go to a few times a year, but a movie theater...

The Trail is okay, but if there was a nice movie theater downtown like the Hollywood 10, I'd be down there all the time. People go to the movies every weekend.

Do you really think that all those people that want to go to movies would say, "I don't want to go downtown."

A lot of kids who go to movies are middle schoolers, and a lot of parents wouldn't want them down there.

Well, if it's the big theater in town...

Food would get us down there.

More food options.

Like Boudreaux's.

Places where you can choose to eat.

But before that can happen, the parking has to be addressed.

But you can't tear down the old buildings.

If you're not going to tear down the buildings, you at least have to make them look better, because they're stagnating. They're horrible.

What would get people our age down there?

I think they're on the right track in getting people down there, but you miss the boat when you don't think about the history. Craft shops and antique shops.

Yeah, that too.

Shops and historical themed places. Like Parkville.

We took the money and the time to build the three softball fields, but we could put in a theater. Instead of building something that could help the riverside, we put in softball fields. We didn't put something in there where a ton of people would go all the time. Instead you get 200 people down there who get drunk and pass out. Something else could've been put there that was way better. I mean, I understand that the casino is a major attraction, but you could come up with something that was 10 times better. And the parking there is great! There's so much room there.

Other than a theater, what would the younger people do?

I like the ice cream shops and all the old type of stores.

They're so homey, and you don't ever feel uncomfortable.

Westin has festivals that they build around downtown. And think about Jamesport. Five times a year, you go there for whatever their good old festivals were. If you had a festival or a celebration, people would go.

Downtown does. When they put Trails West on, people go.

I think it only appeals to a small part of St. Joseph, but people feel like they're obligated to go.

People go down there and get drunk, pass out.

It's an arts festival, and there's music every night.

I don't think they have a lot of cool stuff to buy.

When I was little, I used to want some of that stuff. But it doesn't appeal to the artsy people, because it's kind of like old western art.

And now you have to pay to get in.

You could go stand 12 blocks away, and you could still hear the same music. Why pay when you could sit in your yard and hear it.

Do you guys ever go to the drive-in theater?

No.

I've never been there.

I went a few times, and they have new movies. It's like 6 bucks a carload on certain nights. It's something to do.

(many people talking at once.)

There used to be two drive-in theaters when we were kids, a long time ago.

I think the drive-in's kind of a niche thing. It's not a huge deal. Some people think it's really cool, but you're not going to see a ton of kids there or anything.

(many people talking at once.)

I would go, but I don't know where it is. If it were on the Belt Highway.

*Moderator: Is there anything else you would put downtown?*

(many people talking at once.)

I think if we went with the river and the Pony Express...

...Coffee shops...

You have those in the south end, and one's opening up.

It's the mentality. We try to do a thousand things kind of good instead of a few things really well. The Civic Arena, for example. It's not big enough for a big event, but too big for smaller things. If you do have something decent, the Civic Arena's not big enough.

It is small when it comes to things like that. Like Larry the Cable Guy.

And you could drive 45 minutes to Kansas City, so we have to compete.

I've heard a lot of discussion over the years about a convention center. I think CBB's worked really hard to try to do something like that, but you're limited because of the size of the Civic Arena.

(many people agreeing.)

...and then you run into parking problem...

*Moderator: I have one last question. How important do you think the downtown development is to the future of St. Joe?*

I think it depends on the event. It depends on the events down here.

I think if the crime rate increases, it will hurt the town as a whole. It spreads.

Like cancer cells.

Isn't that what happens in all urban towns?

That's why people...urban sprawl. I kind of had to stop and think about what John said about driving down the highway and seeing downtown, because the view is awful. That's what people see. Honestly, when I have to describe to people how to get to Lafayette, and I send them down 229, it's embarrassing. That's what people are viewing. I guess if there was something on the river side, it might offset it, but there's not.

If you look at every city, as soon as the downtown started going to crap, it was like a cancer cell. The trouble gets so big and starts going to other parts of downtown. And people just move. It causes other communities to grow and prosper.

*Moderator: Thank you.*

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