

DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION &
ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE FOR
MISSOURI

July 2009

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

FINAL SURVEY
FINDINGS & RESULTS

Strafford, Missouri



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



CITY OF STRAFFORD, MISSOURI

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



Strength, Dignity, Quality of Life
MISSOURI HOUSING
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

PLANNING CONSULTANT



PREPARED BY



This Page Intentionally Left Blank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. FINAL REPORT	1
A. Business Groups Discussion Guide.....	1
B. General Groups Discussion Guide.....	2
C. The Strafford Area	4
D. Downtown Strafford: Describing the Present.....	5
E. Downtown Strafford: Looking to the Future	6
F. Key Points.....	8
II. SCHOOL BOARD & ADMINISTRATORS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT	11
III. ELECTED OFFICIALS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT	19
IV. BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT.....	31
V. CITY STAFF DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT.....	47
VI. CITY RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT	63
VII. HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT.....	81

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

SECTION I

FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted six focus groups in Strafford, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the Strafford community in regard to the Downtown area. The six groups included the following: 1) school board and administrators, 2) elected officials, 3) business owners, 4) City staff, 5) City residents, and 6) high school students. Participants of all six groups are from a variety of backgrounds.

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

A. BUSINESS GROUPS DISCUSSION GUIDE:

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

General Questions about Strafford

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

Downtown Specific Questions

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

08. How do you communicate to your customers about information about what's going on in Downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation) or with your own business? What is communication like between business (or business groups) and the City's Administration and elected officials?

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

09. As you know, the City is in the process of developing a Strategic Plan for Downtown Strafford. We'd like to ask you what direction you would like the Downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...

- Additional/types of businesses would you like to see Downtown?
- Dining and entertainment?
- Parks and outdoor recreation?

10. Now, we would like to talk about the look and feel of Downtown. Do you think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?

- Street repair?
- Landscaping/beautification?
- Green space?
- Building repairs, renovation, upgrades?

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

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

13. Would you be willing to support a Special Business District in which an additional sales tax would be collected that would provide services specifically for Downtown?

B. GENERAL GROUPS DISCUSSION GUIDE:

The following questions were included in the general groups discussion guide ("General Groups" includes School Board & Administrators, Elected Officials, City Staff, City Residents, and High School Students):

General Questions about Strafford

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

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

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

04. What kinds of recreation are popular with local residents? What kinds of opportunities are there to participate in these activities in Strafford?

Downtown Specific Questions

05. Generally speaking, would you say that Downtown Strafford 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 Strafford? Is there anything that you used to do Downtown but now do elsewhere or vice-versa? Why?

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

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

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

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

10. As you know, the City is in the process of developing a Strategic Plan for Downtown Strafford. We'd like to ask you what direction you would like the Downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...

- Additional/types of businesses would you like to see Downtown?
- Dining and entertainment?
- Parks and recreation?

11. Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of Downtown. Do you think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?

- Street repair?
- Landscaping/beautification?
- Green space?
- Building repairs, renovations, upgrades?

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

13. What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most like Strafford to resemble?

C. THE STRAFFORD AREA

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

Participants described Strafford as a friendly small town with a good sense of community, an excellent K-12 education system, a good sense of history, and easy access to Springfield, Missouri. Participants focused on the unique history of Strafford—Route 66 runs directly through Strafford, the town has a strong transportation history, and it was on the Trail of Tears. Some described Strafford as a “bedroom community” to Springfield, and stated that Strafford is a great place to raise a family because the community itself is so small, but the residents have such easy access, a 15-minute drive, to the diverse shopping and entertainment options in Springfield.

Participants felt mixed about the direction in which Strafford is moving. Many were encouraged that there is a new industrial park under development, and that the City is beginning to invest time and energy into developing the Downtown. However, people felt that the town in many ways is “stagnant,” and is not moving in any direction. Some participants expressed frustration that Strafford is not capitalizing on its Route 66 history as much as it could be.

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

In Strafford, people shop at the grocery store and gas stations, which are located off the highway rather than in Downtown. However for everything else, residents generally go to Springfield, Missouri, where there is a Wal-Mart, a mall, and a variety of shopping options.

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

There are several restaurants in Strafford, including mostly fast food and a few independently-owned options: Taco Bell, Subway, McDonald’s, a truck stop, pizza places, and Joe’s Diner.

Participants, though, overall felt that there are not enough dining options in Strafford. They often travel to Springfield, Missouri, to dine with their families and friends; reasons for this included that Strafford simply does not have as many dining options and that Strafford’s restaurants are unable to get by-the-glass liquor licenses, which makes residents more likely to travel to wherever they can order a drink with dinner. Participants indicated that they would welcome a wider variety of restaurants including a Chinese restaurant, a Mexican restaurant, a higher-end bar, a coffee shop, a restaurant with outdoor seating, and restaurants with a by-the-glass liquor license.

For recreation and entertainment, Strafford has two parks, softball fields, a student center for middle school-aged children, an animal park, and a number of activities at the high school. Most people, however, travel to Springfield, Missouri, for entertainment, such as movie theaters, restaurants, bowling alleys, and other entertainment options there.

D. DOWNTOWN STAFFORD: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT

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

Participants generally felt that Downtown Stafford is moving neither in a positive or a negative direction. Some described it as “stagnant” or “stale.” Many buildings are vacant, and some that are occupied were cited as being aesthetically unappealing. Participants were encouraged, however, that the City is working to revitalize Downtown.

Participants also indicated that there is a lot of unrealized potential that could make Downtown Stafford move in the right direction—adopting a Route 66 theme to draw tourists, adding more dining for both residents and tourists, adding some retail, improving parking, improving sidewalks, improving lighting, improving building conditions, and increasing cooperation between building owners, business owners, City government, and the Police Department.

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

The business owners cited low cost, tradition, and location as major reasons they located their businesses Downtown. The participants indicated, in different points in the discussion, that new businesses might be attracted in the future if the City focuses on incentives, on marketing the Downtown with a focus on historic Route 66, and on becoming more user friendly and encouraging to potential business owners.

General Public: What are the major reasons you visit Downtown? How often do you visit Downtown Stafford?

The groups mentioned a few reasons that they visit Downtown, including mostly services such as auto repair, a photo shop, beauty shop, pharmacy, and a diner. Residents also come Downtown during the annual Route 66 Days festival.

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

The participants had major concerns about user-friendliness, including parking, lighting, signage, sidewalks, pedestrian safety, and Downtown Stafford’s reputation as a “speed trap.”

Parking is one of the biggest concerns for participants. Many employees and business owners park on the street in front of their stores, which blocks parking for clients and customers. Participants, on the whole, felt that there is just barely enough parking currently and certainly not enough parking available to allow for growth in Downtown.

Signage, lighting, sidewalks, and pedestrian safety were all concerns both for user-friendliness and for safety. Participants felt that better signage, lighting, and sidewalks would help improve the user-friendliness of Downtown, and would also improve safety for pedestrians.

The biggest concern for many groups regarded the police department and Strafford's reputation as a "speed trap." Business owners in particular felt that drivers are discouraged from driving through Downtown Strafford, and instead pass by on I-44 because Strafford has a reputation for strict speeding enforcement. The participants understood that safety is important, but felt that the police department uses ticketing as a major revenue-building tool, and this discourages people—whether commuters through Strafford, potential visitors, or residents—from driving to or through Downtown Strafford.

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

Some participants noted that apartments Downtown would be a good idea and suggested a variety of potential residents, focusing particularly on attracting those who work in Springfield but would find small-town living appealing. They suggested that with more residents Downtown, the district might begin to thrive in other ways.

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

The participants mentioned word-of-mouth, the high school, and the newsletter that comes from the City in their water bill as the major ways they get information about Downtown. They felt that that Downtown Strafford could do more to market itself to residents, to visitors within commuting range of Strafford, and to visitors tracing Route 66.

E. DOWNTOWN STRAFFORD: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

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

The participants suggested a variety of businesses for Downtown, focusing on independently owned specialty-type shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues, other than large chains. For retail, they suggested clothing, Route 66 souvenir shops, antique stores, and any other independent shop that a business owner might be interested in opening. For food, they suggested additional restaurants, including Chinese and Mexican cuisine, a restaurant with a by-the-glass liquor license, an ice cream shop, a coffee shop with wireless Internet access, and any option with outdoor seating. For entertainment, participants indicated that a variety of restaurants and shops would be a good start. They also suggested live music, a bowling alley, a small movie theater, a live theater, a farmer's market, and any option for teenagers.

They felt that the Downtown's purpose is not to compete with Wal-Mart and the malls in Springfield, Missouri; it is to offer a unique experience to customers, particularly visitors within commuting range and visitors tracing Route 66. The groups felt strongly that small business should be encouraged, and the City should find and offer incentives to building owners to fix up their buildings into usable spaces.

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

When asked about the look and feel of Downtown, the participants agreed that the City still has a lot of unrealized potential. They cited infrastructure as the most important aesthetic priority, including burying utility lines, improving drainage, improving sidewalks, improving signage, and repairing buildings. Other priorities included adding green space and planters, encouraging murals and other creative aesthetic improvements, giving building owners incentives to improve their buildings, filling the buildings with businesses, and making the Downtown reflect the historic aesthetic of old Route 66. Their suggestions all focused on giving Downtown a historic and cohesive look and feel while making it still feel safe and maintained.

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

The groups felt that all infrastructure and parking improvements were an immediate priority, but that attracting businesses, marketing those businesses, and becoming more business-friendly were also important.

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

The business owners felt that one of the most important priorities is for the City government to improve business-friendliness, to encourage new business by making the process of starting a business or acquiring a building transparent, communicative, and enjoyable. Another, equally important, priority is for the police department to encourage traffic through Downtown Strafford by focusing less on making it a "speed trap." Finally, business owners felt that the City could offer or make available incentives for building repair and new businesses.

There was a general consensus among business owners that they were more likely to make improvements to their buildings, buy into the Downtown revitalization, and be enthusiastic if they were allowed to participate in City government, whether directly or through a liaison within the City government.

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

Business owners displayed a generally mixed reaction for a special business district with an additional tax. Although mostly negative, several participants expressed a willingness to look at anything if it can be shown to aid the Downtown.

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

The participants mentioned a few downtowns whose mix of businesses or aesthetics they admired: Hollister, Missouri; Branson, Missouri; Hermann, Missouri; Fair Grove, Missouri; Hardy, Arkansas; Eureka Springs, Arkansas; San Antonio, Texas; and parts of Downtown St. Louis, Missouri.

F. KEY POINTS

Key points about the Strafford area:

- ◆ Strafford is a friendly small town with a good sense of community, an excellent K-12 education system, a good sense of history, and easy access to Springfield, Missouri.
- ◆ Strafford has a unique history—Route 66 runs directly through Strafford, the town has a strong transportation history, and it was on the Trail of Tears.
- ◆ Strafford is a “bedroom community” to Springfield, Missouri, which makes it a great place to raise a family because the community itself is so small, but the residents have such easy access to the diverse shopping and entertainment options in Springfield.
- ◆ Participants felt mixed about the direction in which Strafford is moving, citing the industrial park as a plus, but the lack of development Downtown and the lack of capitalizing on Route 66 as minuses.
- ◆ Residents shop at the grocery store and gas stations in Strafford, but for everything else, they go to Springfield, Missouri, for Wal-Mart, the mall, and a variety of shopping options.
- ◆ Restaurants in Strafford include mostly fast food and a few independently-owned options: Taco Bell, Subway, McDonald’s, a truck stop, pizza places, and Joe’s Diner.
- ◆ Residents regularly travel to Springfield, Missouri, to dine with their families and friends because Strafford simply does not have enough dining options and because Strafford’s restaurants are unable to get by-the-glass liquor licenses.
- ◆ The community would welcome a wider variety of restaurants including a Chinese restaurant, a Mexican restaurant, a higher-end bar, a coffee shop, any restaurant with outdoor seating, and restaurants with a by-the-glass liquor license.
- ◆ For recreation and entertainment, Strafford has two parks, softball fields, a student center for middle school-aged children, an animal park, and a number of activities at the high school; most people, however, travel to Springfield, Missouri, for movie theaters, shopping, restaurants, bowling alleys, and other entertainment options there.

Key points about Downtown Strafford in the present:

- ◆ The groups, overall, felt that there is a lot of unrealized potential for Downtown Strafford—adopting a Route 66 theme to draw tourists, adding more dining for both residents and tourists, adding some retail, improving parking, improving sidewalks, improving lighting, improving building façades, and increasing cooperation between building owners, business owners, City government, and the Police Department.

- ◆ The business owners cited low cost, tradition, and location as major reasons they located their businesses Downtown.
- ◆ The business owners indicated that new businesses might be attracted in the future if the City focuses on incentives, on marketing the Downtown with a focus on historic Route 66, and on becoming more user friendly and encouraging to potential business owners.
- ◆ Residents visit Downtown mostly for services, including car repair, the photo shop, the beauty shop, the pharmacy, and a diner; residents also come Downtown during the annual Route 66 Days festival.
- ◆ The participants had some major concerns about user-friendliness, including parking, lighting, signage, sidewalks, pedestrian safety, and Downtown Strafford's reputation as a "speed trap."
- ◆ Participants felt that there is just barely enough parking currently and not enough parking available to allow for growth Downtown.
- ◆ Participants felt that better signage, lighting, and sidewalks would help improve the user-friendliness of Downtown, and would also improve safety for pedestrians.
- ◆ Business owners in particular felt that drivers are discouraged from driving through Downtown Strafford, and instead use I-44, because Strafford has a reputation for being a speed trap.
- ◆ The participants felt that apartments Downtown would be a good idea, and suggested a variety of potential residents, focusing particularly on attracting those who work in Springfield but would find small-town living appealing.
- ◆ Residents get information about Downtown from word-of-mouth, the high school, and the newsletter that comes from the City in their water bill.
- ◆ Participants felt that that Downtown Strafford could do more to market itself to residents, to visitors within commuting range of Strafford, and to visitors from elsewhere who are tracing Route 66.

Key points about the future of Downtown Strafford:

- ◆ The participants suggested a variety of new businesses Downtown, focusing on independently owned specialty-type shops, restaurants, and entertainment rather than larger chains.
- ◆ For retail, they suggested clothing, Route 66 souvenir shops, antique stores, and any other independent shop that a business owner might be interested in opening.
- ◆ For food, they suggested additional restaurants, including Chinese and Mexican cuisine, any restaurant with a by-the-glass liquor license, an ice cream shop, a coffee shop with wireless Internet access, and any option with outdoor seating.

- ◆ For entertainment, the focus groups suggested live music, a bowling alley, a small movie theater, a live theater, a farmer's market, and any option for teenagers.
- ◆ Downtown's purpose should be to offer a unique experience to customers, particularly visitors within commuting range and visitors tracing Route 66.
- ◆ The groups felt strongly that small business should be encouraged, and the City should find and offer incentives to building owners to fix up their buildings into usable spaces.
- ◆ Aesthetic priorities included burying utility lines, improving drainage, improving sidewalks, improving signage, repairing buildings, adding green space and planters, encouraging murals and other creative aesthetic improvements, giving building owners incentives to improve their buildings, filling the buildings with businesses, and making the Downtown reflect the historic aesthetic of old Route 66.
- ◆ The groups felt that all infrastructure and parking improvements were an immediate priority, but that attracting businesses, marketing those businesses, and becoming more business-friendly were also important priorities for the City.
- ◆ The business owners felt that the City government should improve business-friendliness to encourage new business, should encourage the Police Department to change its focus away from being a "speed trap," and should offer or make available incentives for building repair and new businesses.
- ◆ The business owners unanimously felt that they would be more likely to make improvements to their buildings, buy into the Downtown revitalization, and be enthusiastic if they were allowed to participate in City government, whether directly or through a liaison within the City government.
- ◆ Business owners displayed a generally mixed reaction for a special business district with an additional tax. Although mostly negative, several participants expressed a willingness to look at anything if it can be shown to aid the Downtown.
- ◆ The participants mentioned a few downtowns whose mix of businesses or aesthetics they admired: Hollister, Missouri; Branson, Missouri; Hermann, Missouri; Fair Grove, Missouri; Hardy, Arkansas; Eureka Springs, Arkansas; San Antonio, Texas; and parts of Downtown St. Louis, Missouri.

SECTION II

SCHOOL BOARD AND ADMINISTRATORS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *What would somebody need to know if they were thinking of moving to Strafford?*

I would say it's a bedroom community of Springfield. People live here, but do most of their shopping in Springfield, because it's so close.

Like a lot of people, when you mention Strafford, they'll think good schools and good facilities, and we've seen a lot of businesses come and go Downtown, and if we can ever get something more established...

We're on Route 66.

We've seen a little growth with Camping World coming in, and we feel the grocery store's going to make it this time, I think. Rumors of other stuff coming in at some point. A Gander Mountain, a big retail, and we've always heard Sonic.

Is it Dollar General that's going by the grocery store?

Yes.

I was raised here, and I've seen it go from the tail end of being a farming community to the beginnings of being a bedroom community. That was the late 50's, early 60's. As it transitioned, women entered the workforce, you saw the retail purchasing, instead of in town, everyone goes to Springfield to work, and you saw that retail base move. Agriculture's basically zero here. And you've seen that Downtown decline from a farmer's exchange and two grocery stores and a bank, a carpet shop, service station, a couple other businesses there on Pine Street. And of course, now that we have had growth in housing here, and once the City got a sewer system in the 80's there was new development, that growth from Interstate 44 and businesses related to it...what I hope to see is retail recapturing some of the local market. One thing that'll come out of this DREAM process may be some market research that would tend to give potential investors some comfort that this is a risk they want to take. You don't see a lot of investment here because there's a great uncertainty about the market forces and whether you'll see any return. You're beginning to see that with Dollar General and others offering some services that haven't been offered here in 30 years.

Moderator: *Where else do people go to shop?*

Springfield.

Marshfield.

Branson.

Moderator: *In terms of dining or entertainment, where do people in Strafford like to go?*

We have one restaurant, and we've got a truck stop.

A pizza joint.

And McDonalds, and that's it.

Otherwise, Springfield.

Entertainment, the school play or the school luncheon. School is the big employer in Strafford.

Moderator: *How big is your school district?*

1200 kids.

Has the industrial district brought more people, the housing?

They just drive there and go home.

I don't know anyone who works in the industrial park.

There might be more than you realize.

Kraft.

Didn't we have something that made gaskets? Did that close?

They're still in business.

Moderator: *In terms of the Downtown, how do people use Downtown and how do they think of it?*

Beauty shop.

And pharmacy.

Services is what I think of. Cleaning and things like that.

Moderator: *Are there other things that used to be Downtown that people now go elsewhere for?*

Historically, in the Downtown strip, the historic retail trade was centered around farmer's exchange, two grocery outlets, a bank, a beauty shop, a café on the corner, a service station where the towing service is, that was a first-class auto repair place, and some come-and-go, intermittent retail stuff. Furniture and carpet and antiques and flea market. But the anchor was Baumgartner's store. And there was a feed store.

Now it's just propane, right?

I think our medical clinic does draw people to Strafford. They will come from other areas just to see those doctors.

Just about what we think of the Downtown, I think it's old. The buildings are old, the strip is old.

Some of them in disrepair.

However, it is better than it was 5 years ago.

_____ cleaned his up.

When you get one of the old ones in the middle that's so bad, you can fix up the one next to it, but...

Moderator: Is that a new City Hall building there?

Remodeled.

For all intents and purposes, you could call that a new facility. You can't really tell where the old part is.

The police station has moved. How long have they been there?

5, 6 years.

02 or 03. That was the bank, years ago.

Moderator: Are there special events or festivals Downtown?

Route 66 Days and the 4th of July parade.

And the school homecoming.

Yeah.

The biggest one is Route 66, though. It's a 2-day event this year.

Unless it rains.

And they'll probably have 100 outside vendors, and probably draw... some years are better than others.

Moderator: How do people get information about those kind of events?

The school is the only thing we've got now.

We don't have a newspaper.

We have some news people picked up and published by the Marshfield Mail, and the News Leader sometimes might actually print something, but right now, they ain't printing nothing. We used to have a lady here that wrote...Strafford used to have a weekly paper in the 90's, and she wrote for it, and when he folded, she wrote for the Marshfield Mail, and usually provided a whole page. I'm not sure what all happened there, but they no longer require her services. She would submit stuff to the Springfield News Leader, too, but...

Now, the reason the Marshfield gave her up, they were going to have someone else cover it. But they don't have the interest there.

Moderator: Is there local radio or a website?

There is one City Hall website which I go to.

There is another outlet. The City administrator produces a newsletter every month and sends it out with the water bills, and he attempts to be informative, but he's limited to two sides of a page, and he's not a reporter so he does what he thinks is needed, but that's limited to only those within the City limits. Our geographic school district size is 50-some square miles. I kind of view our trade area as our school district area. Because of the force of the centralized school system, there's a gravitational pull here, but the issue of communication is very underserved, and in today's climate, is print the answer?...it's a chicken and egg thing. There's not enough retail here to provide the advertising, and not enough circulation that would make the advertising effective, and print may not be the answer.

Moderator: Let's talk a little about the future of Downtown. What kinds of businesses might be a good fit for the Downtown area?

Eating establishment.

Back to the services, dry cleaning, restaurants, a sit-down, family restaurant. Something to draw people to that area. They're not just going to go Downtown only they're going to the pharmacy or beauty shop. You want something to draw them to that area if they're picking up their kids or dropping them off. It's going to be tied to services.

We used to have a barbecue place here that was known from all over. We were so excited to move here, because we'd get to eat at the premier barbecue place, and it was always busy.

I think a Chinese restaurant.

We did have one once.

Something not real expensive and kind of fast.

Moderator: The students today said that if they had a Chinese restaurant here, they'd eat there every day.

(side conversations, laughter.)

We have a good clinic and a good pharmacy, but we're in desperate need of a dentist. Maybe some other personal services might also fit. They don't generate sales tax, but I could envision income tax workers, insurance sales, there's a market for that...the problem with specialty retail...again, there's a traffic issue Downtown, you don't have parking lots for 100 vehicles, specialty retail, I really don't have a feel for what niches might succeed. We do have a sportswear vendor Downtown and one just a little west.

The one Downtown closed.

Oh, did it? There may be some specialty opportunities there. The other one's not Downtown, and they don't have a storefront presence.

(side discussions about the Downtown's boundaries)

I use that Quick Change all the time. My inspection, oil change.

I don't know whether you're looking for small retail entities, whether reproduction...the mailbox type...would fly or not. There's not enough to support it. You can't pay the rent on 9-cent photocopies, but that type of business.

But if you got something going where someone could run two or three errands at the same trip, that would be great.

I had high hopes for Strafford when gas prices were high.

My husband is a hunting and fishing man, but people on I-44 are on their way to Lake of the Ozarks or going home, but a fishing, hunting type store where you could quickly get your lures and your license. More like a man's type shop. We have a strong FFA program. We know a lot of people that hunt and fish.

I don't know what kind of turnover they have, but I don't know what kind of RV service they have. I don't know what kinds of services are needed for RV'ers, but I see folks in the grocery store. I don't know how often, though... I don't know how often we're drawing from the highway.

There's also a potential of a hardware, lawn, home, garden...that is another product line that is not available here in town, and the competition is in Marshfield or on the west side of Springfield.

I'm going to step-up Quick Change to do mechanic work. Do people just use dealerships?

Probably.

Quick Change will do some stuff, and A-1 Towing will do some stuff, but you do not have an appealing auto repair facility. By appealing, I mean, the place looks like they know what they're doing.

Fair Grove's got that Premier, and they're just packed.

(agreement.)

We do have a car sales place, used car sales.

Been in business for a while.

Moderator: Is there other dining or entertainment business you think would be a good fit for Downtown Strafford?

It'd be hard to compete with Springfield. You can be in Springfield in 15 minutes.

You can't compete with the 16 multiplex or the video store, or a dollar at the RedBox at McDonalds.

We probably don't need a pool hall.

(laughter.)

We used to have one.

The little teen center, is that still open?

Yeah, and it's doing a little better now. I think they're a little more strict.

I don't believe their hours are what they were. They were everyday after school, and I think they've reduced that to Wednesdays only.

How do they fund themselves?

It's a mission of the First Assembly of God Church. The youth pastor, that was his thing, and when he left, some of the momentum waned a little bit. Kid activities like that are a little difficult to manage at times, and need cash flow.

They were doing some live music, though.

Moderator: What about the look and feel of Downtown? What are the priorities there, in terms of improvements?

We've been talking about new drainage down there.

The City administrator has been very vocal about the aesthetic situation of burying underground utilities, improvement to streets, sidewalks, storm sewers, and we've talked about water supply, sewer capacity, natural gas. Once the aerial utility issue, then the aesthetics move to storefront appearance and streetscape, trees, benches, planters, bump-outs on the curb. There's a whole field of study called landscape architecture. Storefront improvement is needed.

Just like what they did there in _____'s, widening that out. If we could improve some of the intersections.

Traffic flow.

The Downtown has 80-foot right-of-ways. Washington's maybe about 65. There's room for improvement, though. It becomes a case of cost-benefit.

The storefronts, how a place looks. The thing should look clean from the road. The other thing is convenience, the ability to turn into the store. A lot of people, they come out to use the doctors or the banks out here, and they get scared off by the police. I know that's hard for people to realize, but when people get stopped for a turn signal violation, they don't live here, and they're not going to keep coming back.

Moderator: Is it known for being a speed trap?

Yeah.

The marketing approach, you want to make people, instead of driving home on 44, you want them to end up on old 66 in Strafford, and unless they're doing 100 miles an hour, unless they're posing a risk...the reputation and assumption is that it's a revenue generator, but you're deterring people from driving through town. Yeah, they shouldn't be speeding Downtown where kids are crossing the street, and nail someone speeding 60 miles and hour, but 40 on a 35—that's not necessarily a serious issue. You want that traffic coming through town, because you want them to stop and buy something.

Moderator: Thinking more broadly about Downtown, what do you see Downtown's identity as being? Service, dining, entertainment, retail . . . attracting visitors?

Mostly the local community and what you draw off of 44, but your local would be your bread and butter.

I think the bread and butter has to be local, but there's potential for some image type stuff, when you have historic Route 66 in your town, there's niche market for your tourist trade. Strafford was founded as a railroad depot town, so there's that kind of stuff. There is an animal park east of town that's attempting to rejuvenate itself and provide an entertainment venue. If we could parlay some of the other specialty stuff to that. Even if you have a bake shop, how do you draw people in?

People come to get to the ballpark.

A parking garage out there.

Some people are going to buy their gas here, look for places to eat. There will be people stopping for gas here before they get to Springfield. You've got to have something to draw those people once they get off.

That's right. They will stop for fuel, because people know to stop before they get to Springfield. There's also a motel here.

Can you capitalize Downtown business? A food venue? A family restaurant? If a family stops for gas, they may want to feed the kids.

Some of the ones that we've had here, the restaurants close at 6. By the time I get home from work and I want to eat, they close by supertime.

The number one thing would be a restaurant or something.

I hope what will come out of this is that, one of the key successes to Downtown growth is the startup person needs a whole lot of marketing help. I don't mean billboards, but I mean telling him how things work. How to optimize your exposure, your trade... Many times in this area, you'll have people who will risk capital to start a business, but they don't understand what it takes to build a business, and they'll operate it when they want to operate it. They'll open a café late because they have to take the kids to school, and close early so they can get home, and they really stifle the market, but there's really an opportunity if you have the right motivated entrepreneurs. I'd like to see all investment local. We can say we want an Applebee's, but we're not big enough. It needs to be, ideally, local capital investment. To do that, you have to get a return. Maybe some people need some help on how to envision that.

Moderator: Thinking about other downtowns, are there aspects that you'd like to see in Downtown Strafford?

The quaintness factor. Lighting, awnings, cleanup.

Moderator: Any particular towns come to town?

Lebanon.

I don't think there's a boarded-up storefront on Commercial Street in Lebanon.

I think we have a good economic group of people that live here, that... I've been to downtowns I *don't* like. I think our community overall, the economic status of people here is very wholesome, average, good, hardworking, value people. I think even running to the pharmacy or the Quick Change, it feels safe.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

SECTION III

ELECTED OFFICIALS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

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

It's been known, basically, as a bedroom community, which I think we're trying to change that image and bring more businesses and industry for employment for local people.

And retail.

Yeah. We've got a Dollar General just getting ready to open up.

People want to keep that small-town feel. They want to wave at the neighbors and know who the police are stopping.

I think that's a nice thing. I think when you come home out here and you know your neighbors, you're comfortable. And people look at the schools and churches here, and they also look at the crime, how easy access is to get back out into a major city, which we have several avenues out of here, I-44, 125, old Route 66... we have a great school, and people really, when they come out here and have kids, they like the schools.

(agreement.)

We don't want to get rid of the hometown thing, but we want to upgrade it to draw people, and that involves bringing in those businesses. We also strive to work on our sewer system. We just put in a new well for expansion on the south side. 4 years ago, we drilled a new well on the north side. We feel like our water supply is great, but the lines maybe aren't the best in the world, but we have an engineer who works with us. When we try to attract business, we can offer good water and sewer.

(agreement.)

Moderator: *Do people work in Springfield?*

Most people. There's few factories east of town, and this is a trucking hub of the US actually, because of its location.

There's a lot of people that work at trucking companies.

We have 6 trucking companies. Big ones, too. Roadway, RBX, Transland, some pretty good-sized companies. We have needs to upgrade infrastructure. The water system is from the 60's. There's some pipes that need to be upgraded to meet current codes.

Moderator: How is the population of Strafford?

It's growing.

It's probably unofficially around 2500.

Last census, 10 years ago, it was 1892. And we've put in more homes.

(agreement.)

The City limits keep getting closer together, Springfield and Strafford.

(agreement.)

The town services a lot of area. Northview to Division Street, all the way to 65 and bypass. Harter House in here drew a lot of people.

Moderator: Is that just groceries?

Yeah. Specializing in meat.

Which is expanding 8000 feet.

And when St. John's Clinic came in, they'd come out this way. You need to add more people when you talk about the service area, not to mention people off the Interstate. McDonald's draws a large crowd.

And TA, and Camping World.

Well, the other thing that used to draw people is to play softball at night at the softball complex.

It's still in operation.

Yeah.

And the animal park.

Moderator: Does that do good business?

It will start doing it again, since a major company took over. The previous owner, the founder made a good business out of it for 25 years, and then his widow sold it, and the people that bought it let it run down, and now this new outfit came in, so that's a good draw. All their promo material says "Exit 88 in Strafford."

It is a great resource to draw from, plus the people who travel back and forth on I-44 or Old 66.

A lot of people I work with use 66 to stay off 44.

There's a lot of traffic through here.

Moderator: Where do people do their retail shopping?

Dollar Station and Dollar General, which is opening soon. And there's Wal-Marts in Marshfield...

Right here on Pine Street, there is no retail. I mean, that little T-Shirt Shop that's up for sale.

The drugstore.

Yeah, we have one pharmacy.

A couple banks.

It's mainly service industries that tend to make it down here, and one of the most exciting things was the dog groomer. They do wonderful businesses. People don't have to go to Springfield, then, for services.

Moderator: What about dining?

Fast food.

Subway, Taco Bell... McDonald's.

A little café right down here.

And a greasy spoon.

(noise, unintelligible.)

People go to Springfield.

A good Chinese restaurant would be wonderful out here.

We had one out here. Mayfield's.

And that did well for years.

Moderator: The students made me promise to tell you that they really want a Chinese restaurant.

We had one for a while, and it was good. But the rent went up on them.

And that barbecue restaurant...

People used to travel for it.

I think their rent went up and they couldn't make it, so they left.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: What do people do for entertainment?

Softball for the kids, but school is the biggest source of entertainment.

There was a music jam that was really popular at the Senior Center, on Monday nights.

They still do it.

People used to do it when we did it outdoors.

Averages about 100 people.

When they had that down at Melton's, cops went nuts. It was packed.

We have, we just now got a park, and people are now able to take their kids there. We don't have any movie houses, game centers...there was an arcade for a while. We don't really have any entertainment for people. It's what they make of it.

There is a student center down on Pine that's run by one of the local churches, run after school.

Moderator: Do people hunt and fish?

A lot of people go hunting and fishing.

It would depend on the people. The younger set are more into their kids. Our family, we're camping people, and we go to the rivers. But other people like to travel, and they'll take a big trip. We've got some pretty good fishermen out here.

Some people play golf. They go up to Oscar Blue.

A golf course. People will travel for a good golf course, and it would be great to have one.

There was talk about doing it.

Even mini-golf would be great.

Yeah, that would be really cool for kids.

Stand-alone mini-golf would have a problem surviving unless it was tied into something.

Go-carts, arcade, batting cages, and mini-golf.

Yeah.

A skate park would go great out here right now.

Moderator: *Let's talk about the Downtown specifically. Do you think the Downtown's moving in a positive or negative direction?*

It's not moving in any direction.

It's kind of stale.

But it's better than it was. It's a slow process. We've moved our police department into a building, and they keep their property up, and the slummy houses Downtown are gone, and _____ did a facelift on her building, and that looks a lot better, and they put some flowers out. We keep it paved well. A-1 Towing cleaned up their area a little. A photo place is the newest place on Pine Street, and it's a good addition. I think there's been improvements to make it look better.

But people are waiting for somebody to take the lead and take a big step.

It's going to take a lot of money, and you don't have that person who wants to step up and take that risk.

In this town, I think getting marketing out...if you took a poll of everybody in Strafford, you'd find that many people still don't know that we have a grocery store.

We have a small library.

You know, the Marshfield Mail puts out a supplement every week, a full-page ad...

I don't even open mine.

I don't know what you do with yours, but I look at mine.

I understand. I know they advertise. But does that necessarily mean that people are reading it? I'm not saying they're not trying, but...

Moderator: *How do people use the Downtown?*

A certain percentage of people do, but if it wasn't for the pharmacy, we wouldn't have a Downtown. When there was talk about the pharmacy moving, it scared me.

They're real busy.

The only one in town.

Moderator: *Are there any other uses for the Downtown?*

The police bring in a lot of people.

Prostitutes.

Hands behind your back!

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

There's traffic in the early morning because of the little café here, and A-1 generates a lot of traffic, but it doesn't generate a lot of business for us, but that business shouldn't be here because it's ugly. He doesn't have parking, storage, and service.

That old building's been there forever, and it's been used forever as a garage and a service station.

We have a lot of service stations and a lot of gas tanks in the ground.

(side conversations.)

Route 66 is definitely an attraction, or it should be.

Moderator: Do you do anything to market Route 66?

Other than the Route 66 Days that we have in early September...that's really our big marketing thing.

That's a good idea, for people to pull off and take a photo.

A little museum or something.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Does Route 66 Days draw in a lot of people?

Yeah.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Is the Downtown user-friendly? Parking, business hours, lighting?

The café is open until 8.

The parking issue could be better, but it's adequate for what we have now. When the street is widened to its full 80-foot width, and the angle of parking is changed from 30 degrees...

Moderator: Do you think there's ample signage?

No. It needs to be improved. We need signs pointing to the shopping area, signs that say "Welcome to Strafford," "Route 66," "Main Street USA"...we need to do those things.

Moderator: What about lighting, sidewalks, curbs?

Sidewalks need to be redone.

Yeah.

And we need to put period lighting in.

Keep the kiddos safe.

There's kind of a main east-west travel street south of Downtown, where our big park is, and it needs sidewalks badly. It was narrow to begin with, when we took it over from the County, and it's too narrow to put sidewalks. We put a park out there, and it's a really nice park, water feature, walking trails, and the kids have to ride their bike on the road to get there.

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

Dentist.

Yeah, a dentist.

I'd like to see a Laundromat. I don't know about Downtown, but somewhere in town.

It's needed.

Yeah.

I would like to see a Wal-Mart here.

I would fight you tooth and nail on that.

A hardware store would be nice.

A hardware, small repair, utility, a place for a hammer and nails and a shovel or a spade or weekend home repair items.

It would be great Downtown.

I've been looking around Springfield, and I'd like to see a thrift store go in, where we could take our things and look for things. We like our garage sales out here, but the ones in Springfield, they have a big draw. I'd like to see something like that Downtown, and maybe a flea market or antique store. We had an antique store before.

And there's a lot of people who travel just for that.

Right.

I like the idea of a thrift store.

A flea market-slash-antique store-slash-thrift store.

Have you ever been to Hollister, Missouri? It's real neat, old buildings.

There's some talk with the Chamber of Commerce about coming up with an old train depot where ours was torn down, about making it a visitor's center. We do need some retail on the street. Restaurants come and go.

We need some good retail. But it's hard for mom-and-pop places to make it in a town like this. You've got your Wal-Marts that have everything.

And for 10 cents cheaper, people will drive 20 miles.

They used to do that years ago, before we had Harter House, and there was a Shop-Rite, and people would not patronize that store.

And we had Wilkenson's Grocery Downtown, and they specialized in meats.

Yeah.

Downtown is a hard thing. I agree with the antique thing, though.

A donut shop would be great. We had one for a while.

That was good, too.

I need that.

Yeah, you need a lot of that.

I'd like to see a little variety store, a little Ben Franklin store.

If you get a good sewing or craft store, people will travel for it. It's going to have to be a specialty thing.

We want them to come from Springfield out here.

If it's the right thing, they will. When I go to Wal-Mart, I ask for directions to somewhere, and they tell you to walk.

Wal-Mart was starting to investigate opening up the little Sam Walton type Wal-Marts, and I called them about that, and the girl was like, "Where do you people get this information?" They're investigating it, but all of a sudden, people are all calling.

You put a Wal-Mart in, you're running out every mom and dad.

If you've got any to begin with.

Trust me, Wal-Mart's not your friend.

In desperation for the sales tax dollar, I'd rather get it from a lot of little shops than one big Wal-Mart.

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

I'd like to see it like when you go to Eureka Springs, with some trees and...

Or like Hollister.

The old-fashioned look, but in good shape.

A pleasant place.

An old-fashioned ice cream place would be nice.

Move the ice cream place Downtown.

Yeah.

And Joe's.

Greasiest onion rings in the world.

We want to do period lighting down there, but that goes with the old-fashioned...that's what I'd like to see.

We need to put power lines underground and upgrade our water, sewer, and drainage.

Or a wind turbine to provide the electricity for all the Downtown businesses, and we could be green. Other people could visit us because we're the green town... and if we addressed parking. There needs to be some community parking.

A parking lot for the employees Downtown. I used to have 7 or 8 girls working for me, and we took up half the spaces.

That's because the pavement gets down here almost to Jefferson and then it chokes in. Also, a pocket park. I'm trying to convince the man that owns this big lot over here to allow the City to use it as a small park. The City wouldn't put any permanent structures, but maybe some benches and tables and a gazebo.

We have a lot of bikers come through.

Bicycles?

That's what I mean.

And that would provide a nice resting place for them.

Actually, we do have a lot of motorcyclists in this town, too.

(many people talking at once.)

It would be nice if the motorcyclists stopped off Downtown.

Moderator: One last question. Are there other small towns that you really like the look of, or you like the elements of?

Cuba is... I love that town, as I've seen it. They're a mural city. They have 21 or 22 murals in their town. I would like to see a mural Downtown, with the train and that sort of thing. And people actually travel the Interstate looking for murals. They take pictures. The forefathers of that town had some foresight, and believe it or not, they have a huge tourist trade there.

That's what we really need.

When you go back to St. Louis, you ought to get off the Interstate and take old 66 through Cuba.

Route 66 used to go through Cuba, and you had to stop at the stop sign there. Back when it was Route 66, man, they'd come right through our town. It's a neat thing, what they've done, that section is all murals. They had what's called the Wagon Wheel, and they've made it old and redone it.

And they've rehabbed the buildings.

Moderator: Anything else?

One other thing I was thinking about, it would be kind of neat, but a fruit market or a farmer's market...that would be nice Downtown.

That's fairly easy to organize.

That way, I could buy here rather than going to Springfield.

Look at the little girl who sits up here with the—

We need to move her Downtown.

She does very well.

But we can't give her a business license. But we have to come up with some ordinance for some kind of temporary...

(side conversations. Agreement that a farmer's market would be a great addition to Downtown.)

That would keep the country flavor Downtown. Pun intended.

(laughter.)

The farmer's market is doable right now. And there's a thrift store in Springfield, and that does a good business, and maybe they could open up one here.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

SECTION IV

BUSINESS OWNERS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

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

Really small.

Small town. That's what it is.

Small community that has a lot going for it... we have Route 66 and the railroad. It's been striving to grow, and it seems like there's some good events happening.

Moderator: *Is it headed in the right or wrong direction?*

I don't think it's headed in any direction.

(many people talking at once.)

One of the key elements of this program is we need to find the direction.

Moderator: *Where do people shop for everyday items?*

Wal-Mart.

Springfield.

(many people talking at once. Unintelligible.)

...Harter House...

...Super center...

Moderator: *How about dining and entertainment options?*

(many people talking at once.)

...we have fast food here...

...Truck Stop...

We have some entertainment. Council meetings.

(laughter.)

Moderator: *Where do you take people when they come in from out of town?*

Springfield.

Branson.

Fishing.

(agreement.)

Moderator: *Why did you all decide to put your businesses here?*

I was born here.

I was from out of state.

There's opportunity. You just have to look for it. Any small town, everybody's looking for some type of small business to come in. You look at other small towns, just look at them. How they've been able to get businesses, I don't know. Warrensburg. I can't explain why we aren't able to get businesses and keep them.

(agreement.)

We're a little closer to go to Springfield than other towns, and that kind of hurts us. We don't have places that have been able to do it. Anybody that has any properties hasn't developed them... (unintelligible.)...we got another dollar store going in. When we get one thing, we get two. Some communities can support that.

Moderator: *Why did you decide to start a business here?*

We grew up here.

We built the studio about 10 years ago. We thought about Springfield, but we want to be here. We draw about half our business not from Strafford, from Springfield.

My business is from here.

Mine is, too. 80-20, maybe.

Mine was all from here, because it's a car wash. But I closed it.

Moderator: *How user friendly is Downtown?*

Not at all.

No.

Well, they're very friendly.

The people are friendly. But there's other issues going on.

I hear people say they never go to Downtown.

(agreement.)

People don't go Downtown because they have nerves about...we have a very aggressive police department here. You get tickets for everything. Never a warning.

(agreement.)

I've lost customers because of that.

It's abominable.

(agreement.)

I've had customers take the Interstate to avoid going through Strafford because of the police ticketing.

They're not just enforcing the law. They're aggressively trying to write tickets to make salaries. They're just the worst I've ever seen in the world.

(agreement. Many people talking at once. Side conversations agreeing that the police department is too aggressive.)

...I avoid driving through Strafford every chance I get...

...It's beyond just enforcing the law...

...Biggest speed trap in the area...

...And people don't get tickets anywhere else, but Strafford is known for being hugely aggressive...

...We have the best funded police department in the State...

...People avoid our businesses because they avoid driving through town...

...We're famous for it...

...I think we need to be focused more on protecting the community than building revenue...

...My business has a hard time on court days on Friday...

...I want them to do their job, but I don't want them to run people out of our businesses...

...And the courtroom is run like a typical small-town courtroom, so you can't defend yourself against traffic tickets...

Moderator: *Other than the police, how user friendly is Downtown?*

Parking's a problem.

Yeah, parking's difficult.

(agreement.)

Even when we have Route 66 Days, I don't know... I know, all they'd have to do is...

(many people talking at once.)

You could park a lot of people in that area there. My business has to be open even though Main Street is closed, and we park along the edge, and you can still get out down both ways. You can park a lot of cars.

There's a parking issue. There's only 42 parking places up and down Main Street. That's not that much of a problem, but for all of us that work down there, we take up 8 parking spots. I park people behind my business as much as possible to keep the spots out front open... I mean, it gets busy. You have a court day down there, and that's really busy.

(agreement.)

Especially our elderly. We have a lot of elderly that can't get in and out.

This place has gotten so busy, and you can't see when you back out, so you might run someone over.

I want to go back to the police department. We have respectable, well-trained officers, but they should be refocused to protect the community rather than to make revenues.

(agreement. Many side conversations complaining about the police department.)

Moderator: *Can people find what they need Downtown?*

(Side conversations. Unintelligible. Many people talking at once.)

...Saturdays used to be busy in the 70's and 80's...

...When the bank moved, it changed shopping habits...

If we didn't have the police department right Downtown—

It would change things.

I wouldn't mind having them across the street for safety.

(more side conversations about the police department.)

...They don't do anything to draw or attract business here. A new person has to jump through a lot of hurdles to start a business, and they'll give you a speeding ticket on the way out. When I bought a new building, we didn't have plumbing, but we got a water bill. There was no water. That's the kind of craziness. If I were running the City, and I would never do it, I would aggressively go after businesses and tell them that this is a great location. We've got I-44, historical access, the train—we have great things going for us. But there's no way anyone's really going after businesses to bring them to town. It's as if we don't really care for outsiders. You can't have that kind of attitude. It would help everybody's businesses.

(agreement. Many people talking at once.)

...You're going to lose some business, but you're drawing more people to town...

...We have to be aggressively giving them incentives. Tax breaks.

I thought we're doing that.

No, we're—

(many people talking at once. Unintelligible.)

...We have a City Hall that doesn't give straight answers...

...They're not business-friendly...

...We have to get the City to change their attitude to bring things here.

I'm talking more than I wanted to, but I'm connected with a lot of businesses, and I have a building, and I talked to people about coming to Strafford, and they said, "I understand that's a very difficult place to do business, and plus, you have the police."

A couple of big changes recently have also had to jump through hoops, because City Hall wasn't cooperative.

Is it true that you have to have a certain population for chains to come in?

Yeah.

(many people agreeing.)

They also measure traffic.

There's a little local traffic on these roads.

(side conversations about how many cars go by Strafford each day.)

You can't run for City Council if you don't live here. But some business owners have buildings here and businesses here, but they can't run for City Council.

(agreement.)

It's almost like they resent that you have your business here.

The ultimate result is that we're not business-hungry in this town, and it's because we don't have businessmen on the Council.

If I hadn't just bought my shop when I bought it...I'm not seeing people taking pride in what they have. I manage to make mine look halfway decent. It looks dowdy. I wouldn't want to put a business here if I drove around.

I find it difficult when a guy gets started and he gets momentum and then he gets shot down and cited by the City Inspector. Why would a person want to pursue that?

(many people talking at once, agreeing.)

Does anyone have any positive comments about Strafford?

Yeah. We have an industrial park going in.

If they've got money that they can spend for Downtown, they could make it nice. I walk underneath the power lines, and that is a detractor. I never really thought about it because the whole town was that way. A small town without a lot of money, then, but now we've got an opportunity to do something. You can make it look nicer, but I don't know how you're going to put more businesses down there.

There are ways to do it, though. You could move the police department somewhere else. That whole side could be developed. Also, on the other side, sidewalks...

Sidewalks would be wonderful.

They'd be great. I bought three street lights myself, and the City hasn't put them up yet.

(many people talking at once.)

This is the kind of stuff...

They said I had no electricity to my building. They're lying. Of course I do.

We need drainage. We have huge pools every time it rains.

We've got water problems and parking problems and eyesores that have been there since the 70's.

We need a new focus. We need to focus on having a town with two front streets.

And we used to. Route 66 was there.

The Chamber is basically going to re-identify some of it, but I'd like to see the entire operation focus on the two front streets. That way, we'd cut in half the speeding tickets.

Moderator: How do you communicate with your customers?

We tell them.

We don't have one news media. I use direct mail.

I like our newsletter. I think our newsletter is terrific. It's in our water bills.

(side conversations, many people talking at once.)

...I don't know if people read it...

Some of the positive things. This town has great history. It was part of the Trail of Tears. We had a great railroad depot. It's been a transportation hub throughout its history. And Route 66. Not many towns in America can say that. We have historical background, we have had excellent schools, we have good people in town...like _____ is inferring, we have a government that, because they're not business owners, and that's one statute they say, but businesspeople can't be on the City Council, so they don't understand business people's problems. The upsides are great schools, great location, great history...

There are possibilities.

You don't have to live in Springfield, but you can have the convenience. That can be a plus rather than a negative. But it's only a plus if we have the retail and services and restaurants, and the support from the government to allow those businesses to come and stay. We have good people and good talent in town, but a lot of people get discouraged. I moved here from California—I grew up here, moved to California, and came back—but that didn't go so well. I had high hopes of doing something in town, but was so discouraged by government and... I've got a building sitting empty, but I honestly don't care in some ways.

But then you let them win. Don't let them win!

They just keep stomping your fingers every time you get to the top of the ladder.

(many people talking at once, agreeing that City Council should have businesspeople on it.)

We also don't have any housing.

If you have a City Council meeting to ask for rezoning, you'll have 1500 people show up screaming and hollering. And most of them don't even own their homes.

Now, there's been 150 acres zoned for an industrial park, and that's one of the biggest pluses that's happened. If we can welcome that...

(many people talking at once.)

It's a shame that it took 20 years to zone for that.

One of the primary problems we have in this city is that we don't have enough tax base. It's single-family dwellings. But you've got to have an industrial base here. We had to go for a tax increase for our fire department. It took me 4 years to try to put a bill through congress to allow businesspeople to have a part in City government. It's just ridiculous.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: I'd like to ask you a little about the future of Downtown.

We need streets, sidewalks, storefronts, trees, streetlights, signs that stick out, awnings. I saw a town in Minnesota, and it blew my socks off. I missed the turn because this town looked like they scrubbed it with a toothbrush. Not a big town, but it was beautiful.

It would be nice if Downtown was clean, quaint, reflected our history, and had little Downtown businesses.

I have cleaned more dirt and leaves out of this Main Street...

Branson is beautiful.

(many people talking at once about how beautiful Branson is.)

I think it would be nice to have some apartments above the businesses too.

It's not legal in this City.

Maybe we need to change that.

And we need parking. We ain't got any parking for it.

(side conversations.)

I don't know how you would do that.

(many people talking at once.)

...the look of it. Little antique stores, little tea shops, draw people. Springfield is close enough, we have here in our market, 450,000 people within one hour of Strafford. That's not small. If we had a Downtown with small little shops and little restaurants, cafés, coffee shops, card shops, ice cream stores, clothing stores...we could be successful. We have a DMA of 450,000, and within the throw of our television and radio, we have 600,000 people. So if you wanted to put

an ad on the radio, you could reach 600,000 people to come to your car lot. But now, they're going to get a ticket, and there's no place to shop, and they can't park and they can't eat. The government has to be business-friendly, but they don't understand it and they discourage it, and they need to invest in sidewalks, streetlights, trees, planters, drainage, parking. Infrastructure. We should have signage that says "Welcome to historic Strafford."

We could easily spend money to make our Downtown look like Eureka Springs or Branson, but we have more. We have the original stores and Route 66. We need to promote that. We all get shot at as soon as we start something.

(many people agreeing.)

Why don't we have the City decorated all around Route 66. That should be our draw.

(agreement.)

It is the biggest thing we have going.

It's a worldwide draw.

I was at Steak & Shake, and there were people from Holland who had flown their cars over to drive Route 66. Paul McCartney drove down Route 66 last year.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: What types of businesses do you need Downtown?

Coffee shop.

Little quaint shops.

We need a really nice restaurant. Ambiance.

You're not going to get a chain restaurant.

According to City Hall, there are enough people, if there were food sold, you could get a liquor license.

We were going to get something here Downtown, but he went just across the County line and opened his restaurant because he couldn't get a liquor license.

I was told that, yes you could.

(many people talking at once.)

I think there's an interest in putting a restaurant Downtown, with wine and beer in it.

Moderator: *Tell me about your parks and recreation and how that can be improved.*

Signage would be nice.

We have one usable park and one kind of usable park.

The new one's nice.

They ought to put a pavilion in.

People don't even know it exists.

Why can't they do anything to improve the one on the north side? Why does it have to look like weeds?

(many people talking at once.)

Trash cans are overflowing.

They don't tend to it.

Moderator: *How do parks fit into a new Downtown?*

There's no place.

Pocket parks, maybe?

Green space.

Planters.

(many people talking at once.)

...Should be more involved with business owners and the Chamber rather than the Parks Department.

I could see a cute little sitting spot.

But you could put little shops in those places.

I appreciate the benches, but you know what? We need business. We need, you know, frankly...I'd buy _____'s lot from him, and I'd put narrow, shotgun-style buildings that you could use for two retail spots. Between the police department and...

No, we're talking about a different spot. Just for a little grassy area.

(many people talking at once.)

...I think the building needs a facelift...

...The kids vandalize it...

The student center is a babysitting place. They let them run loose.

They scrape my paint off my vehicle.

It wasn't like that when the first young man started it, but they need someone who's going to discipline these kids. I don't like the skateboards and I don't like the language.

They don't need to be Downtown.

When they first opened, it was terrific. But they need to clean up after themselves.

She made a good point. It doesn't need to be on the Main Street.

Put it by the school.

We don't have any public trash cans up and down the street.

Moderator: What entertainment do you need?

Student center.

We need a little theater.

I don't think people would support it.

We could do it.

Every time they have something in our musical arts building, it's just a treat to watch the kids perform. You could have people like that come by and do something like that in Strafford. The school is entertainment.

It's one of the best auditoriums in the State, at the school.

Some of the little buildings could support a little stage and having people come and play Friday and Saturday nights.

You could get a lot of pickers and singers.

(agreement.)

I'd love to have a little theater, and we could do second-run, \$2 things. It's not a big deal to put in a movie theater. And you could do it digitally now, and you receive the signal from the studio, but...

That would be fantastic. I'd go.

Yeah.

And there's room Downtown for it.

That's something that would bring people down, and then they'd have to go eat. It's a spiral. If they come down to see a movie. They run their errands and they have something to eat. They all feed each other, and the more we have, the better everyone does.

Moderator: What's the highest priority for the City?

Get the City to cooperate.

Yes.

And we've got assets, all of these assets, and we need better management of our assets, and that has to be done with more effective people in City government. They've got to be focused.

Are you having a group with City government?

Moderator: Yes.

I bet they believe they're friendly and they're helpful.

They know they're not friendly. And that's because they're not knowledgeable.

I think you need to get rid of those fire poles.

Power lines, sidewalks, gutters...get it looking good.

Yeah, get it looking better.

Trash cans.

One thing at a time.

Making it easy to do business will attract businesses. Is the point to bring more businesses down here?

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Would you be willing to support a special business district with extra sales tax for Downtown?

No.

Dollar General has a special district like that. I don't believe in those things. It's like welfare for certain types of businesses. If we could share it, we could all put into that pool, then yes.

If you're just doing Downtown, you're not going to collect a lot of taxes. There aren't many tax-collecting businesses down here.

The TIF program, if we hadn't had it, the supermarket wouldn't have happened. And it went into effect, and it worked. So that worked then. However,--

I'm not opposed to trying anything. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. But—

But it's nice to be able to cut it off if it doesn't function.

There may be a way that would be good for us.

I'm not opposed to it. I like taxes. But who's going to administer these taxes?

No matter what they do, the fact is, we need somebody that works for City government that is business-friendly that is a liaison between business and government. Right now, we have bureaucrats, and there is no incentive for anyone to come to town, and they will do everything they can to keep you from opening your doors.

(many people talking at once.)

Let's say I met a restaurant owner who wanted to move to Strafford. He will run up against the City Inspector, who will have no creative ideas about how to make it work for him, and I like him, but...

(side conversations.)

...The thing is, on my building, the building inspector was insisting that we bring an engineer in from Kansas City, because he wanted to check the roof that got put on when he was out of town. It took 3 months for us to get the inspector to find a guy, and finally, he looked at it, and all it took was him going up and looking at it, and they were able to do it because somebody had a positive idea about how to make it work. We don't have anybody in town that works with new people coming to town. We also ought to have tax incentives. We should have interest-free loans, maybe, for instance for your business coming in or for fixing up a building. Other cities do this. Let her redo the face of her building and make it attractive. They do everything they can to keep us from opening business here. We need a liaison in City government to help business owners.

We at one point moved toward that, and it's changed again. We went full circle. Until we get that struggle out of the City government, we're not going to move forward.

Interest-free loans, grants...

I would like to see a City employee that worked to bring businesses here and worked with the businesses to make sure things run smoothly. They can't tell you how to open a business here.

And they're hateful about it.

You spend money, and lots of time, and then you find out that person didn't even have the authority.

(side conversations about how discouraged new business owners have been trying to open their businesses. Many people talking at once.)

...People come to town with ideas and get discouraged and leave...

...It is not impossible to create a lot of attention in this town. I did a news conference today, and I had all the major TV and radio stations come to the press conference. If we could get people on the same page, we could create the hubbub. Route 66 Days draws several thousand people a year, and we can market ourselves. We have media and we're close enough, but we have to have cooperation up the line. I'm ready to get reengaged again if we turn some of this around.

If you draw a little attention, it goes a long way. The marketing has done leaps and bounds for my business. A lot of people don't know what we have to offer, but the free press draws attention, and you do get people here.

And you know, people in Springfield, they've got the mall, but they love to go to quaint little towns nearby. We could be that. I would if I lived in Springfield. I used to live in a big town, and I drove out to a little town to try their restaurants and shops. That's what we could be. We're close enough that it's not a long drive, and even if gas prices got bad, they'd come to see us before they'd drive to Branson. Galloway. Galloway Village, that was an abandoned town that some antique people and a couple little restaurants moved into, and it's a destination.

Route 66 could do that. We could take it and run with it. But we don't. If someone tried to make a display for the City, they'd pitch a fit because you couldn't get the right permits.

And you'd get a speeding ticket pulling into town.

Our custard shop down in Nixa...you might never have been there, but that started out, it was on C Highway, and last year's event, they were drawing 4000 people for a one-night event. They get bands to come in and play, and they sell a lot of ice cream, and the pharmacy's open that day, and people are walking around. So many people want to come, all these car clubs, and it's not big enough to accommodate all those people.

Strafford is a car town. There's wagons in the picture. We're a connecting point by wheel. The Downtown should be themed about transportation, cars, Route 66.

And old car clubs, they're actively looking for a place to go. All Nixa's got is ice cream. But we have Route 66.

Springfield keeps the cars in the fairgrounds. But if we had people coming in and we told them to cruise responsibly and encouraged it. Just one event... this town would be overloaded.

You'd be giving them all a bunch of tickets, and they'd be gone in 5 minutes.

Listen to the excitement that's right here. This can be done.

Moderator: Anything else?

Did we mention the cops?

(laughter.)

We've got to find a reason for people to stop. We've got the traffic.

I get customers because of my billboard. I had a customer from Iowa, and he was looking for a product, and his kid was graduating from SMS, and he said we were the only place carrying that within 60 miles. He looked it up online. He came in and got 32 boxes. He called all his friends from Iowa to come down and buy them. I haven't seen him since, but he found the product he was looking for here.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

SECTION V

CITY STAFF DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: How would you describe Strafford?

Speed trap.

(laughter.)

Redneck truck stop. I'm not from here, so I could only describe it from an outside point of view.

If I was trying to get someone to come here, I'd say we're rich in history—the railroad, Route 66, the Trail of Tears. Those are the only real claims to fame as far as tourists.

(microphone interference)...your potential here for drawing people as tourists is good if we had an infrastructure that encouraged tourists. Strafford doesn't have very many old structures that could be renovated. Strafford's got a lot of potential as a bedroom community, and it has an awful lot of potential if it could be done in the correct manner.

Can the infrastructure support apartments?

It could, by and large. Our sewage all goes to Springfield...

Moderator: Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?

Right.

They're working on the infrastructure, and to support the police side, I feel very safe here. I believe the citizens have educated themselves to support the police department, the fire department, the City management, in bettering the infrastructure and preparing for growth.

(phone rings, side phone conversation)

I think things are moving in the right direction.

I'd say our education system is prestigious. We're credited with distinction, we have awesome teachers, and it's a big draw for people to move here.

Moderator: What are the main everyday shopping areas?

Springfield.

I think it depends on what they're trying to buy. We do grocery shopping here at Harter House, but we don't have a store like Wal-Mart or Target to get other items.

So a lot of people go to Springfield or Marshfield.

Moderator: What about dining and entertainment?

What's that?

Springfield.

Springfield.

Branson.

Moderator: Where do you take people when they come from out of town?

Springfield.

Branson.

There used to be a really good cafeteria-style restaurant here. The truck stop...(microphone interference, unintelligible)...if you have a cafeteria, it would draw people. That's one thing Strafford could have.

Moderator: Let's focus on the Downtown area. Is that headed in the right or wrong direction?

I think it's kind of stalled out.

In the 50's.

I've lived here for nine years, and I seldom utilize Downtown. There's not that much available.

I think it's your typical Mayberry. It's a collection of friends that stay down here and work down here, and very close-knit. For people to move here and become part of that, it's not going to happen. The arms aren't welcoming.

In the twelve years I've worked here, the Downtown area... (chairs shuffling, noise, unintelligible)... café was really the one thing that went in. It's been kind of stale there.

This is my perception, and I don't know if it's true, but there's a few individuals who own the vast majority of this Downtown who don't want progress and aren't interested in giving up, selling, or doing anything with their properties to allow Strafford to improve.

I agree. I think you're exactly right. I think it's a huge amount of money they want for those buildings.

True. And on the interstate, too.

That ties the City Administration's hands. It ties your hands. You've got to work for your money here. Being on an Interstate, where do you go?

Back in the late 80's, people said, "might as well face the music, Springfield is close enough."

(agreement.)

...the point is, if you have things in town to draw people in...we're right here on the Interstate. If you've got good places to eat, and you've got good shops like in Hollister, a lot of Downtowns are dying because there's no traffic, but we're historic, we've got the interstate, and we just need some businesses that will make a leap...we've got 3 or 4 property owners that don't want to upgrade, but it will change...there is some potential for that old building down here. There's some things that can happen. It's going to take some input from the outside.

Moderator: As far as infrastructure, how is parking, business hours, navigation?

Not enough parking.

For current traffic?

For growth.

It depends on the day.

Court days.

(many people agreeing.)

I don't think the infrastructure's adequate for what we have now.

If they're going to redo this town and they're going to make it antiquated and unify it back into the 60's, extend it. It's hidden from Route 66 and from 125. You have the new bank and the Come and Go, and you have on the other side a used car lot. If those people could let go of some of that land and allow the business owners to bring it out to where it's appealing to the eye from the main roads. Otherwise, don't blink, because you'll miss it. If you get to the building that's been knocked down in the 50's and the rafters are still there, you've missed it.

I'm not from Strafford. I moved from Springfield in 85. I would never have chosen to live in this town, and I don't—I live out in the County—but I moved here for the schools. I don't care about the history—I care about the taxpayers now. I've made it a point not to become friends with a lot of people. It's a conscious decision that I make. That's why I don't know the people's names.

The roads were built back in horse and buggy days, and they put the sidewalks in before they had building codes, and everything's just so...the road is wide. It's just not adequate for parking on both sides, though. There's not enough room for cars on both sides. The sidewalks have been improved some on the south side and the north side, but there's no curb there to block the cars. The infrastructure's not really good for adding more traffic than we have now. We've increased traffic about tenfold Downtown in the last 10 years, and I don't think it's people visiting businesses, but it's people skipping over the highway.

Those aren't tourists. Those are locals.

We're so physically limited by the highways and the railroad track. The school can't even expand. The businesses probably are facing the same dilemma.

(papers shuffling. Noise, unintelligible...)... there's a railroad out here, and it takes an act of Congress to delay a train.

(agreement.)

...the railroad doesn't want a crossing here. They don't want to have the one we have.

Moderator: *What other fire and law enforcement challenges does the current Downtown present?*

I'm trying to think... with Downtown, I'm not going to give away some of our tactics, but none of these buildings are worth a firefighter getting hurt over, especially the ones that are empty. We work with the police department so well.

(agreement.)

...I don't think we're going to have issue. The railroad crossing is a concern, and that's why we have police on either side of the railroad crossing, and even our volunteers can get there quickly because of that. We're still looking to expand. Our firefighters are living in a modular now. They have to run across the street to get to the station.

We considered housing, which side of the railroad track you want to be on.

One property owner has had some concerns with the City. He was going to donate land to us for the station, but first we needed to run a sewage line, and another land owner was talking about donating land on the south side of the tracks, and we're still trying to figure out how much land we're really talking about.

I would think the police station would be in the same situation. You can't grow. Where do you park?

Exactly.

As an investor, I'll tell you, I will not invest in any restaurant in Strafford until restaurants can sell liquor by the drink. That's where people are going into Springfield.

The ordinances in place don't allow for it.

My point is, what if I buy that place over there?

The State's going to license you, though.

That's by-the-drink? Not by the bottle?

Yeah.

This is the first I've heard of that. That makes a big difference.

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

Word of mouth.

We have access to a newspaper.

(many people talking at once.)

Through the school. When I went to school, I found out more than I know now.

City Administrator's newsletter.

City's got a website.

But how many people look at it?

And the newsletter. But I'm as bad as everyone else.

Only people in the City get that, but I live out in the country. We're losing communication.

Moderator: What about festivals?

Flyer on the window.

If you establish things, like Route 66 Days, then people know about it.

Signs on the phone poles.

A marquee would be a great way to get word about concerts and things happening at the school, but we don't have the means.

Moderator: What would be a good way to reach people?

A bullhorn.

We all know the problem. We don't know the solution.

Every time there's an election, I'll get on there...to me, I'd say 80% of the people watch Channel 3. Things may or may not be of interest to you, but you'd want the major news media to have information.

I don't even think the newspaper prints the results of our elections.

We get our information because of the call-in for the elections.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: *The City's working on a Strategic Plan for Downtown. So let's think about the future of Downtown. What types of businesses would you like to see Downtown?*

Restaurant.

Restaurant.

Yeah.

Outdoor restaurant.

A Chinese restaurant.

Yeah, Chinese.

Dine-in restaurants.

Mexican.

Something with like an outdoor restaurant.

An ice cream parlor.

I wouldn't mind seeing it go retro. Have a flower shop that sells potted plants. I'm thinking old Branson. That's what I'm thinking. And is it Hollister?

Yeah.

Have a restaurant, have some shops, to draw people in. Draw people in for various different things. An antique flair, like the depot had. I see old depots in Texas, and they're very nostalgic. If people are comfortable in their surroundings, they're going to want to come back.

You're also going to have to have a place for them to stay.

Bed and breakfast.

More than the Super 8.

I think one of our best assets right now is Joe's Diner. It has a great reputation in Springfield even.

But you're back to an old family that doesn't want to invest.

That's the perfect place, though. If you remodeled that into an old Route 66 diner, and make it seen from 44, that would be a big draw.

(agreement.)

Moderator: What other types of places?

Clothes.

Ooh, yeah.

Many larger cities sit on the older version of themselves. Can't you just do an elevated street? Stilts?

(laughter.)

Route 66 is like an old-time built up boardwalk, and you could paint murals on the buildings, and make it like you're on old Route 66.

And have a place for them to park and stop.

Most of the out-of-towners we get are either Route 66 tourists, or we get people looking for family in old cemeteries.

We get a lot for the animal park.

Really? How do they stay open?

They're busy.

Moderator: What's the local view on the animal park?

It's there.

It could be great, but somebody needs to sink money into it. It changes hands too much.

And once you've been once, why go back?

The owners from the lake had plans for a ferris wheel, a couple amusement rides, a golf course.

They're gone.

I've been in there twice.

It used to be neat, but they got rid of a lot of animals.

The owner died.

The school used to use it as a fundraiser, too.

This whole area's just circling the drain. Even Springfield is. Strafford used to be a suburb of Springfield, which was a thriving city, but now it's moving south. I think this whole area missed the boat. We have issues with getting away from Downtown. I keep saying "apartments, apartments." We have people who want to move here, but they can't find a place to live. There's just not a place to live.

Moderator: What would you say about parks and recreation?

Do we have them?

We have a park.

But where's the communication? I don't know where the park is.

There's two.

Wait, you've got one north here, but the apartments are right there. I don't want to play in that spot.

(agreement.)

Do you have parking?

Yeah.

(many people talking at once.)

That brings up the point of entertainment. We've been looking for a place to relocate the Museum of the Ozarks. There's talk about Strafford, and it would draw people from all over the world, and we've done better than we have ever before. But you've got to be able to get land and zoning and parking. So many things could be coupled in, too—food, entertainment, so on. You've got something that's visible. You can have a win-win situation, but you've got to invest some money. Springfield gives tax breaks to businesses that want to come in.

I think Strafford does that.

Strafford does a little, but not much. Just saying that there are people that look at Strafford.

If I was driving down the interstate, especially in the fall and spring when the kids are on the field at the high school, this is a hometown view. But what's going to get you to turn off the Interstate? There's land east of the motel that you could do stuff with.

We were going to try to use some TIF money to open that up, but the board didn't agree.

The bank building is vacant, and it's another very high-priced item.

This bank's vacant?

Yeah.

One thing that gets people out here is the softball parks. It's outside city limits. It's been offered to the City, but the City's reneged on that.

We get Springfieldians out here for that.

But then you have the failure to want it.

Moderator: Why didn't they want this?

Because they sell alcohol out there. And you've got to cross the Interstate to get there.

We sell liquor. We just don't let anyone drink it.

The parks have a splash park, walking trails...

Really?

It's a concrete pad that sprays water.

Kids love it.

We're missing out.

(many people talking at once.)

People will say they can't afford to expand because they can't afford the water or the police protection or whatever. That was the excuse.

You have to invest in sewer and water, though.

We've got three separate sections of the town, and they all have their problems, just like any town. The park sits by those apartments.

And they're old row apartments. Lower-income.

Moderator: What are the desirable parts of town?

The country.

Your Downtown area is a desirable area if you could pry it loose from some of those old families. You could bring it all the way to the school. These old houses, some of them are in good shape but some aren't, but if there's development here, that could revitalize this town. I'd like to see it happen in my lifetime. 40 years from now, this is going to look a lot different.

Maybe. People said that 40 years ago.

We're actually seeing some of that old-time property open up with the industrial park.

The one that the roof fell in on, the fire department was approached about if that would be a good old-time station. It would be gorgeous. But on this side is a parking lot of cars that aren't running and on this side is a building that fell down during World War II. Why would you want to invest in architectural beauty when its surrounded by things like that. It's very stymied growth. I get very frustrated.

Our hands have been tied. There's certain things we can and cannot do.

There's certain things the fire department can do, though. We can revisit fire codes.

It's come a long way, but we've got a lot further to go.

Moderator: What type of entertainment options would be good?

Be able to buy a drink.

A movie theater.

Yeah, that would be great.

I think bowling alleys do well in Marshfield. If you had things for kids, they might stay out of trouble and stay here, too. I know they built that kids center, but do they have anything to do there?

We're looking to invest, and I talked about opening up a Wii bowling alley.

What?

Wii is a computerized game, but it's just like bowling.

Really?

I try and be creative with things. We can't afford a whole bowling alley, but we could buy something small and put something in it. It's just difficult.

Moderator: How would you envision the look and feel of Downtown?

Retro.

Yeah.

With more green way, though.

No cars. I mean, walking.

Could you imagine this strip with no traffic? A walking plaza. Like in downtown Paris, where you have the outdoor cafés and restaurants and salons, the starving artists would have an area to display. Not just on Route 66 Days, but make it...have that huge arena with different things in it. What a draw. I guess you call that a mall, don't you?

(laughter. Many people agreeing.)

If people come in for one thing, they'll spend time and money here doing other things. If we had a museum here, like that Museum of the Ozarks... if we started planning now, working toward this... it will go. Downtown can't help itself. We're too close to Springfield.

I think park benches would be good.

I think if you got an airport in here, you'd...

(many people talking at once. Phones ringing.)

Moderator: What type of green space would you like to see?

Green space-wise, on the southwest part of town, they're doing not a terrarium, but like a greenhouse. A botanical garden type of thing would be great.

And you could have events in there, too.

We don't need a huge area for it. But it would be nice. They've got water park, water garden. Make it a draw to bring people in.

I agree. When I was in flight, we'd go to airports to fuel.

Moderator: What do you think should be the highest priority for the City?

Infrastructure.

Probably.

Is City Council going to listen to you?

Moderator: I don't know.

If you made Downtown a walking area, you wouldn't have to fix the streets. A fountain, some benches.

I like those little pocket park things. An old building's been torn down, so you put in a little park.

(side conversations.)

We have that now with that spot between the café and the police station, but it's ugly all the time. You could put a gazebo, a water fountain, a little trail...something.

But that actually belongs to the police station, doesn't it?

It belongs to the contractor.

But you could put some tables and chairs out there, make it look more inviting.

But she doesn't get enough business Downtown to do that.

This one town I'm thinking of, they painted a mural on a building.

If you had enough room to put in a parking lot and close these streets, you could do the same thing they do in Branson. They've got a trolley. And people come just to ride the trolley...after we dress it up, of course.

I just went to San Antonio, Texas.

I love that place.

They have running water all over the place, and that always makes things better. It gives a soothing sound to the area.

There's an outdoor theater, a river walk...

And you can get shot there.

(laughter.)

We've got so much history, that if we could get a good genealogy thing...

Just hang out at the beauty shop for half an hour to get a pulse of the City... the citizens who could make change, the complainers...

When they had that music thing once a week in the summer, those things were really crowded. If you closed off the center of the City, and you had a gazebo and bands, adults or school bands, people could stroll and listen to music.

That's a good draw.

What would a farmer's market do?

Yeah.

They have something once a month, at the animal park, I think. They started that. I believe it's the third Saturday of each month.

Fair Grove does it every week, and they get a good crowd. This is outdoors, so we could close down a street and do it.

Do I have the authority to shut down a street?

You'd have enough room in a parking lot to put a little farmer's market. We do have the room. We just need people to start it.

I know the mayor wants to capitalize on the railroad, and I don't want anything of the history to be lost. I like building a replica of the depot. It would be ignorant not to capitalize on 66. That draws people already, and we don't even have anything other than the road, but I don't want to lose any of the other history.

Why don't you invest in statues of the Trail of Tears, and...I was born and raised in the oldest establishment west of the Missouri River, and they kept every single bit of history, and what they lost, they had statues of it, and people would park to read the statues, and there'd be a restaurant next to it, and it just spread.

History is something that people can be really passionate about, and they will drive halfway across the country for it.

Route 66 goes from here to California.

Strafford is very rich in history, and there's several of us who have accumulated it over the years. The old trail is still there.

You could do tours at _____'s Place.

Yeah. He could retire on that.

There's so much history. Strafford hasn't lost its history, and some of the things will curl your hair.

Gangsters that spent the night here.

When I first moved to Springfield, I drove to Boliver to see the bullet lodged in a door where Bonnie and Clyde shot.

Have you been up to _____'s? It's very cool.

We have something that used to be a brothel once.

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

You talked about communication, and there's a Springfield tourist magazine about the area. If we developed something like that, we could get to people that way.

Put them on the Internet. But you've got to develop them first.

That's the theme we're headed toward. Develop our infrastructure around the history, use these old buildings...

(agreement.)

There's just a wealth of history here.

I didn't know the Trail of Tears went through Strafford until I was at that doctor's office, and he had all that information about it.

Just west of town here, there's teepees down here. If you look real close, look at the mounds...generations of Indians stayed in this area years and years ago. I've got one of the old territorial homes that my grandparents had.

_____ should definitely be on a committee.

Moderator: What's the number one priority?

An airport, but that may be a bygone era.

I think the buildings need more appeal. They all need a facelift. This building's nice, but the buildings in general. If we could do some of incentive for the people who own the buildings. Even Downtown Springfield, they made the streets narrow, and the businesspeople went along with it. The building owners here don't see any plus for them. They could raise the rent if it was more appealing, and then attract people.

One of the things the City's in negotiation with now, there's overhead lines here—to bury the lines, to do something with the sewer, and do serpentine areas with plantings. That'd be the perfect time to do that, while it's torn up anyway.

I go to the library in Downtown Springfield just because it's pleasant.

Just don't go there at night.

You'll get shot.

(phone ringing.)

Coming from a little City, just like Strafford, I saw the potential in the Downtown, and they had a defense depot and the railroad, but they made the mistake of making a piece of property on the other side of the City brand new, and they called it Old Lathrop, and it was so sad.

That's where I've got to give the board credit. They kept City Hall and the police Downtown.

But the investors are going to pour their money in the outside. And all the property values here are going to fall. So instead of coming up with a marginal profit, they'll hang on to it until it's not worth a dime.

Moderator: *What other communities would you most like Strafford to resemble? Other downtowns?*

Eureka Springs.

Branson.

Hollister.

There's an area in St. Louis that's new but it's old. It's real nostalgic. For some reason, we like old things. If you could get that feel and look across to people.

That's why so many people like to go to Europe. Because of the oldness of everything.

Another thing we used to have that we don't have any more, we had a Laundromat. Now I have to take my big blankets to Springfield.

The one thing that needs to be changed is the attitude of those who can make the changes, whether it be the City Council, the alderman, or the building owners. Without them, you're spinning your wheels.

(side conversations.)

When one property gets better, then others might be inspired. And the board is trying, I think.

Well, we could just design City Hall to look like a train depot.

(laughter.)

The fire department is working on the infrastructure for the fire station and the living quarters, and building a community storm shelter in one of our buildings. Can we afford it? Probably not. But if it's a collective interest, it could be achieved.

Moderator: *Is there anything we missed?*

(side conversations.)

Moderator: *Thank you very much.*

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

SECTION VI

CITY RESIDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Tell me a little about your community. Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?*

It's not going in any direction.

I don't think so.

It hasn't for a long time.

It hasn't changed in 30 years.

The biggest changes are with the school. They've made a lot of positive changes. But now they're getting stuck. The town's got to make one big move.

Moderator: *Do you think it's a good or bad thing that it's stagnating?*

It's a good thing.

There's not the infrastructure here in town that keeps people from going to Springfield. I try to shop here, but I can't.

Make it more pleasing, where you can walk the sidewalks and buy cute little things here.

I don't understand—I've heard at least two people say they moved here because it was smaller and quieter and they liked it, but then they want to change everything. I'm for cautious progress, but not outrageous progress. Why move here if you don't like it? We just had a planning and zoning issue about the new business park, and I was against it. I live across from it. A lot of people have just bought their homes there. I think progress is great, and I do think the Downtown is very ugly, but why not keep the businesses where they already are, rather than moving them where the houses are?

I just think about growing up. Hollister, Missouri was right outside of Branson, and there was a little themed Downtown, and every time I've had to go to Hollister, the nice little storefronts and shops, and it was theme-related.

I lived in Hollister in 69 and 70, and you could walk. You could go Downtown and you could walk out of the door of one business into the next, and it was a little shopping center like an Old English village.

Yeah, I loved to go.

We went when I was a kid.

I'd like to see it stay modernized but with a country effect. I'm from a small town... I think we need to stay a little modern and country.

Yeah.

Especially with Route 66 Days and stuff like that.

I think as far as progress goes, I moved here because it is quiet, and I came from a big city, and that's what I wanted to move away, but I think we need to make the town self-sufficient as far as being able to shop here, and not having to drive to Springfield. Keep our dollars local.

Moderator: Where do you do your shopping?

No one comes to do regular shopping here.

East Springfield does. I've got friends in big homes there. There are people who are drawn to Harter House.

Harter House is a big draw.

They have a really good meat market.

It is fabulous.

There's people from the industrial park who come out here to eat lunch.

I used to live 8 miles east, and I used to drive in for the grocery store.

The northeast corner of Springfield doesn't have anything.

They do have the Super center now.

If you can park.

And if you can walk.

I think if we could offer more, we might be able to draw more of those folks out here.

I think Dollar General may help with that a little.

You know what? When I did my walk-around this morning, I was walking in the street, because there's no good sidewalks. I walked from here to Madison, and there's no sidewalks.

I agree.

That's a problem with the way Stafford was designed.

And on the police station side, and by the banks, there's no sidewalks.

(many people agreeing.)

Besides living here, I also own Pine Street Studio, and probably half or over a third of my business comes from Springfield and Nixa and Ozark. A lot of them come in and ask me where to go eat lunch.

Moderator: *So they come specifically for your shop?*

Yeah, and they wonder if there's a place to eat. We advertise to them. But it's usually senior portraits. We end up walking in the middle of the street because there's no sidewalks. A few key things are missing. Restaurants and shops.

I grew up in a small town in Kansas, and we could go anywhere in our town and get anything we needed. That's what I like about an old, quaint, quiet town. You don't have to leave if you don't want.

I grew up in a smaller town than Stafford, and we had a Downtown area, and now it's B&Bs and tea shops and coffee shops and antique stores, and they've done all the streets really nice. It's 2 hours south of Minneapolis, and people come on bus tours for the day. It's kind of like Hollister.

I love going there, because there's all kinds of shops. This side of Thayer.

Thayer?

Yeah.

Hardy?

Hardville?

Moderator: *What about dining and entertainment options? Where do you take out-of-town visitors?*

Springfield.

Marshfield.

I'd take them to Joe's.

But it's a conscious effort.

(many people talking at once.)

Is that really entertainment?

No, dining.

There's no entertainment in Strafford unless there's a game or a festival.

I always just stay at home. We just order from the pizza place. If there were places that you could carry out, that would be wonderful. I have a lot of company, a house full of people. We go to Springfield, but home entertainment is a big deal.

Even if there was a place here, getting from a parking space to the restaurant, you don't have a sidewalk. For the elderly and wheelchairs, too.

There is one kind of.

Yeah.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Are there other recreational things to do?

Softball fields.

The park.

The senior center has the music jam.

Exotic animal paradise.

School activities are a huge driving force for the town. Joe's stays open for them.

They're pretty limited.

I think the animal park has changed hands a few times.

I think they have mini-golf and go-carts and paddle-boats.

My grandchildren love it.

(side conversations, unintelligible.)

I don't know if that's a draw.

What killed them is when Branson started doing the Trail of Lights. Branson and Ozark got Applebee's, they got places to go.

They have nice dining.

The school functions are important to the local residents because lots of—basketball games and football games—the local residents really go out for that, people who have kids and grandkids in the school system.

I wish they'd get the word out better for people who don't have children there. I heard from a girlfriend in Springfield that there was this donkey event, and it was just hilarious. I wish I'd heard about it. I would have loved it.

They did have signs up at the grocery store.

There's one thing that has not been mentioned. We don't have a local newspaper. If you want news about Strafford, you have to take the *Marshfield Mail*, and I grew up in that area, and Marshfield and Strafford were great rivals of each other.

I think its Fair Grove now.

There's no news media that goes out from here.

Moderator: Let's bring it back to the Downtown. Specifically, do you think it's moving in the right or wrong direction?

Wrong. It's getting older and sorrier.

To me, Strafford has a lot of historical things. Route 66, the Frisco, the Trail of Tears...there used to be a depot here. Also, we used to be in Ripley's because our Main Street has buildings that open on two streets. That's four things that this town should be able to draw on. Every town has something they've accomplished to make their town better. Why can't we?

Aesthetically, the power lines. My father's always talked about getting those buried. It's just an eyesore. You could slap a coat of paint on, but the buildings are dilapidated. It looks like crap. The history is pretty significant, and if we could redo the architecture and make it more attractive...

How many owners are there?

I think there's a lot.

There's one person that owns quite a bit of it.

Well, it seems that we need some cooperation there.

How do you make them do it.

They're in another meeting.

Oh, shoot, then I should've played ignorant and ended up there.

You're business. You should be in the other one.

Am I in the wrong room?

Come join us.

When people ask where my business is, I tell them "We're in the new building on Pine Street."

The only thing I don't like about Downtown is the Carlyle. It's tacky, to me.

That's less tacky than the empty buildings that look terrible.

The owners, when they don't want to do anything...

(many people talking at once.)

I've driven a lot of Route 66 between here and Arizona, and it takes you to all the Downtowns, and there's always a used car lot and a cemetery and a church, but here you drive through without realizing you passed through.

Do you remember Callan's? That was the neatest thing about this town when I moved here.

(many people talking at once.)

I think of what Callan's used to look like years ago.

Oh, that is so vintage.

The first Callan's.

The fire department burned it because they couldn't sell it.

Oh, yeah. It was awesome. That was the original Callan's.

It's not far away to go back to something like the old Callan's.

Yes, that would be a very fun thing.

I think the amount of cars on the car lot, if it was paved...

If it was cleaned up, maybe.

If you could put some flower pots and make it like a parking lot.

Moderator: Is it just industrial-looking?

No, it's an eyesore.

They do the mechanic work on the street.

I think the attitude in Strafford is, uh... it's laid back. No one wants it to be like Ozark or Nixa. We want it to be like Galloway or Hollister.

I get in trouble every year for not mowing my field, because I live on Old 66, but these businesspeople are allowed to work on cars out in the street and keep their stuff not good. I don't think it's fair.

What do we do about somebody who owns a major portion of these storefronts. That may be the crux of the problem. I don't know who it is.

I would tell you, but I would get in trouble.

This first garage, they've really cleaned up.

Maybe you can put pressure on them to do it.

Moderator: What are the major reasons you visit Downtown? How often do you visit? Is there stuff you used to do Downtown that you now do elsewhere?

As a kid, there was an arcade, and that was fun. That has been gone for quite a while. What was really neat is when they had that antique store, with a lot of the old pictures and stuff, and that's all been redone now.

The business that I go into is just the pharmacy.

We used to go to the old grocery store.

Yeah.

There used to be a donut shop down there.

It was an auto parts store, too.

I use Strafford here. Gas, medications, the library, the Harter House. I go to Wal-Mart if I can't get something there. I'm looking forward to Dollar General. I use every business here. I bank here. I go to McDonald's. I use every business here I can.

I do too, and it helps to be reminded in the monthly water bill newsletter. I really like to get that thing, and it reminds us all to do whatever we can here.

Joe's. When I first came to Strafford, I went to Joe's. It's something you don't get elsewhere.

Greasy onion rings.

If there's not a school event, it'd be Joe's.

I'd like to see another nice restaurant.

There's not a lot of places that will keep people Downtown.

You can go to the pharmacy or get a haircut.

We'll ride our bikes up to new Callan's.

I use the pharmacy. I bank here. I really don't feel that the food choices...it's not that great. I use the grocery store. But that's about all I do. But this town does not have a Laundromat.

They used to.

They didn't get enough business.

They had a really nice one, but I heard that them and the owner got into a big brouhaha. Even a small Laundromat for those that live in apartments, that would draw some. An old five-and-dime would be an awesome draw.

Yeah.

Old-fashioned.

Salem has one.

Branson does too.

It brings back all kinds of memories. Have a soda fountain.

If you get them to come to the five-and-dime, then they go to lunch.

If we had more to offer, we could do it.

There's just nowhere to go.

We're too close to Springfield.

If we had unique businesses.

There's plenty of storefront.

I'd like to see a Chinese restaurant or a Mexican restaurant.

Moderator: How user friendly is Downtown? Business hours, parking, navigation?

Parking's not good.

I can't even get a parking spot sometimes.

Traffic flow, there is no traffic flow for Downtown.

The parking cuts off.

People park where they want to park, and they find out they're parking on a sidewalk, and they're blocking the intersection. You can't see around the corner.

Being as I work for the City, it would flow a lot better if it was just one-way. The way the parking goes, you've got to come down this way to park on that side of the street, and you get a guy backing out, and they take out the whole road.

But it killed Downtown Springfield to do that.

But here it might not be that bad.

I'm from a small town, and it killed all the businesses.

Springfield went out. It was a disaster. It was so sad, on the one hand, and on the other hand, I hardly had to do anything to promote the mall because no one was going Downtown anymore. The one-way streets. And they did try this outdoor mall thing. You have to be real careful about cutting traffic.

Moderator: And sidewalks?

Well, there is a sidewalk in front of the drugstore, and that's pretty much it. A little bit up by the photo shop.

No curbs.

The bumpers are up against...if you want...I parked up that way, but if I wanted to walk in front of the cars, you couldn't get through there. There's really no sidewalk, actually.

There's a sidewalk on the south side.

Seems to me that the street's too narrow.

Yeah.

Some of its just gravel.

It's hard to visualize because there's a ditch. There's no underground storm water.

All that water sits on the surface.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Do you think it's easy to find things Downtown?

There's not anything to find.

I always get a phone call for people to find my house from Callan's.

Anyone that stops from out of town is going to McDonald's or Taco Bell. They're not looking for a Downtown. That's the disadvantage of being on the Interstate.

Moderator: Do you think the town does a good job of funneling people Downtown?

No.

I think it'd be easy to find from Springfield.

It could be done.

I've had people stop and ask me how to get to the softball park.

Just keep going.

Look for the big lights.

There's just nothing to find.

There's nobody coming here.

(many people talking at once.)

When Granddaddy's was here...

...they used to come for that.

It's gone.

The signs on the Interstate just list the fast food. Not the Downtown restaurants.

If there were shops, I have a bunch of relatives who would drop money at coffee shops or candy shops.

When there was an antique store and we were doing photography, sometimes the parents would go there.

Why did they go out of business?

Health.

Yeah, that was health reasons.

(side conversations.)

They used to have a mural on the side of the building.

I remember that!

The Springfield newspaper published a story about that.

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

Water bill.

Yeah. I literally read it cover to cover.

I do too.

I know it's strange to look forward to your water bill, but it's really exciting. He's so excited.

It's a little newsletter with the water bill, and it's awesome.

An online newsletter would be really good.

Yeah.

The City website is never up-to-date.

And neither is the school.

(agreement.)

You've got to pay somebody to do that.

Somebody who already works here should update that.

The *Marshfield Mail* sometimes has stuff about Strafford.

The school paper would do a lot of local events. Do they still?

They still have it.

Maybe they could print more copies and leave it at local businesses.

They narrowed it down when I was in high school.

And truthfully, the *Marshfield Mail* this week had only one article about Strafford, and it wasn't flattering. If Strafford's on the news, somebody got killed, or there was a fight.

Drive-bys.

The police department, that is the most impressive thing about the town. Look at all the police cars. 6 cars. It's pretty amazing.

One thing about Downtown, I think it's the wrong place for the police department. It's taking up two big spots. It's good for now, but eventually, they need to move out.

The funny thing is, you're talking about drawing people Downtown, and when I was a kid, everything was Downtown. Two grocery stores, the post office, the bank...you could walk to everything.

(agreement.)

When they started spreading out, that's when we started going to Springfield to do stuff.

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

Embrace the mom and pop. Marshfield and Springfield have Wal-Mart. It's the perfect opportunity for us to advertise to mom and pop stores in Marshfield and Springfield, that this is small enough.

An auto parts store.

A hardware store.

I think a five-and-dime would work out here.

And a motel.

Connect the motel to the Downtown.

Soup and sandwich.

Coffee shop.

Coffee would be great.

Chinese or Mexican restaurant.

Yeah.

There must be some kind of a formula of residents to shops to restaurants.

A pool hall or arcade.

You need something for the kids.

They go to town and cause trouble because there's nothing to do here.

I was going to say that, I asked, when I had my hair done by the car wash, they do great hair, but I was wondering about how their business was, and it's so volatile right now, and they said they're busier than ever. It is priced and it's easy-in, I know there's not much parking...they can only have 5 or 6 people in there at a time. But the price, people come out here... Springfield prices for all of that stuff are like \$100. It's \$11 here! They get a lot of business from Springfield.

I don't doubt that. I still think we need a Laundromat.

It's crazy, isn't it? You can't find a decent one unless you drive to South Springfield.

(agreement.)

You could have a Laundromat and some video games and some couches and TVs.

And the one that I went to with my daughter, they had a snack shop, and you could buy coffee or a sandwich.

If we've got one main businessperson who needs to clean up their act, so that people who do want to have a coffee shop or a sandwich shop...people should drive through and feel like, "Oh, Strafford's where I want to go." Other places are so traffic-strewn. But now, everything looks just run-down. It is sad.

Yeah.

(agreement.)

There's no way to get anything done.

When we moved here, Downtown didn't bother me at all. I've been all over the world, and I'm from New Mexico, but I never noticed the lines until the other day.

I don't focus on them.

I don't like seeing all the lines. I don't feel there's enough streetlight.

We can't decorate at Christmas. It's really hard to make it beautiful.

I'm not big on tearing down old buildings. It really irritates me. But I don't know if any of those buildings are salvageable.

(agreement.)

I was talking about a little clothes shop or something, and that building is sound. And it's a historical building.

One of the things that's hugely popular in other downtowns is to have businesses downstairs and apartments upstairs.

We ought to find the people, some of the buildings, start fining them for not cleaning up.

But they don't have the money. There hasn't been a lot of industry here.

But you still have to be a responsible business owner.

It doesn't take much to take your trash out or to put a coat of paint.

If I did own a building, I'd do a lot of things to it. But he's got everything he owns for sale.

But the ones that do own it need to clean it up.

Yeah.

I mean, money talks. If he don't want to spend the money on it, you can't fine him.

They can fine me for not mowing my weeds. Why can't they fine him for his ugly building.

(many people talking at once.)

We need to pass an ordinance.

There is one.

Then we need to enforce it.

Moderator: Is there recreation that would be nice Downtown?

We need a nice sit-down area.

You know what would be awesome? My brother and my sister-in-law live in a small town in Iowa, but they got a one-room theater. I think that would keep a lot of people here. If you could go watch a movie, that would keep people here.

And a park. A place to go sit.

When they used to have the jam in front of the gas station, they did bluegrass, and if there was a pavilion or a central gathering area...

Yeah.

And even a place to watch the children.

A public sitting area between restaurants where people could sit outside.

We talked about flower pots and benches and trees in one of the other committees. Light poles. People could come in and sit and visit.

We go out to Fellows Lake and sit on the edge of the car.

My grandkids live on this side of town, and when I want to take my grandkids to the park, there's always a train.

There is a park on this side of town.

What about the school park?

The school doesn't want you to use it.

If there was a walking trail, that would be great.

Where this archway is, they should put picnic benches. Clean it up. I would eat there all the time.

Oh, yeah.

(agreement.)

So, we need to have something unique, like an outdoor theater.

You can do things outside.

They do that in Springfield.

That's what draws people to Seymour.

Moderator: Of all the potential improvements, what's the highest priority?

Sidewalks.

And lines.

A general cleanup.

More than any businesses, it's just getting it to look better.

The businesses would respond.

If the parking was organized, and you had sidewalks, the businesses would come.

Lines and sidewalks.

And maybe some signage on the Interstate that says that Strafford is a Route 66 town.

I'm going to go way out. I would like to see Downtown, we have Pine Street, and I would like to see that to be the park area, completely canopy, and that street closed off to traffic so where you could go through and walk, like in Hollister. You could walk through and do your shopping, if there were shops there, and you could have that convenience there for walking, but it would have to be enclosed.

How would the handicappers get to my door?

Well, you might not have to worry about that, because maybe there'd be ample parking off the side.

Where?

A farmer's market or something every weekend?

Something like that. Something there to where you could sit out there, under cover, and eat a sandwich, drink your coffee, or just sit there.

Moderator: What other Downtowns would you most like Strafford to resemble?

Hardy, Arkansas.

That's on 63 Highway?

It's awesome. It had every shop you could think of. And the street was no wider than 2 tables put together, and they were packed, and they had festivals. They stay busy all the time.

Every little town in Arkansas, with a courthouse in the center of the Square.

Van Buren, Arkansas, has a street that's mostly antiques.

I took a picture in Branson of the downtown, just a corner, and that's what I brought back.

You remember *The Wonder Years*? Their downtown? That's how I envision.

Have you guys been to Hermann? They don't have the courthouse, but they've got a really neat, non-traditional downtown. That's got antiques, candy shops...

It's also very historic.

It would also be nice to have a road from 125 to Pine Street.

Well, I have to tell people how to get to my store, because they don't know where to turn.

If we just had some sort of signage.

Signage that said "This is the main street" or "Historic Downtown."

Take a big sign and put all the businesses on it.

Yeah.

I thought those wooden signs looked really nice.

(many people talking at once.)

All this costs money. There's a million steps you've got to do.

That's one thing about restaurants. I can't afford to eat out right now.

That's right.

And my kids can't afford it.

That's the good thing about Harter House. We'll do a steak on the grill. Harter House is a godsend.

People can't afford to eat out.

But a nice restaurant would draw people off the highway or the people who live on the outside of town. If you live on the north side of Strafford... you can only eat at Joe's once a month.

That's the type of thing, it's a quaint...people talk about it.

An ice cream store.

If Joe's had some outdoor benches...

They're the only ones who have tried to get people to come. The car show, and a movie night.

Yeah.

(side conversations.)

Strafford has no nightlife. No bar...

We don't need a bar. We don't want people drinking.

They're going to drink no matter what.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: Thank you very much.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

SECTION VII

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: Tell me a little about Strafford. What's it like to grow up here?

It's quiet, and everybody knows a lot of people. A lot of people enjoy some of the history and areas, but our generation doesn't notice it, or what we do notice, it could be better...

(many people talking at once.)

Everyone knows everyone.

No secrets.

(laughter.)

We don't have much to do here.

If you're a kid.

Yeah.

You could shop at Harter House.

We have a Dollar Tree.

It's super small. It's like 40 feet.

The gas station and the diner are the two hangout spots.

We have two pizza places, two dollar stores, two truck stops, two banks.

Most people don't realize they drove through Strafford when they did.

The good thing is the industrial park, because the school gets a lot of tax money.

Moderator: How many kids are in your high school?

Like 400, maybe?

300, maybe.

We're really tiny.

Moderator: How many people live in Strafford?

2000 something?

4000 something?

What does that stupid sign say?

I think Strafford's a good place to grow up, though. It might be small and boring and insignificant to some people, but we have a good school and a nice small town feel.

The community actually cares about everybody, which is really nice.

A lot of people think we don't know about the outside world, but we do.

Everybody in school gets along.

(agreement.)

If you have a big school, you can't have that one-on-one feel, and some students get left behind.

The name of our town is actually misspelled. The guy who named it wanted to call it Stratford.

Fun fact. Strafford spelled backwards is Dr. of Farts.

(laughter.)

Matt Blunt is from here.

But he never comes to anything.

He's probably pretty busy.

Not so much anymore.

(laughter.)

The high school burned down. It used to be two stories.

It was 1912.

It was not 1912. My mom was in school when it burned down.

Moderator: Do you see any positive changes going on?

_____ 's park over there.

It's right in the middle of the neighborhood.

There's that new strip.

Oh, and the library.

Yeah, the library.

The car wash places. We got that new car wash. That created competition for our other car wash.

By the liquor store?

No, the other one.

The bad thing is, all these are independently owned, so there could be 15 pizza places.

We don't want to eat just pizza.

I also noticed how they're filling in all the potholes.

Yeah, over by Callan's, the gas station, they filled in the potholes.

The sign says Conoco's. "Callan's" is the subtitle.

Moderator: Where do you guys go for fun?

Go to Springfield.

Some people go to the student center.

That's more middle school.

The library.

The older people, they get bored here, because we like to do different things.

Once you get your license, you're not in Strafford much anymore.

(agreement.)

We like to go rent movies, but they don't have that many movies.

We have a very good band, football team, and theater programs.

(side conversations.)

What else is there?

Our restaurant, that little one, it's changed 6 times over like 6 months. It was a barbecue place, and then a café.

And then it changed again.

We've got two salons, too.

We've got two of everything.

Pretty much, we just go to each other's houses, because there's nothing to do.

Moderator: When you go out to eat with your parents, where do you go?

McDonald's or Joe's Diner.

Springfield.

Joe's Diner is worth the wait.

Our Subway's in a truck stop.

So's Taco Bell or Country Kitchen.

If someone would open up a Chinese restaurant, that would make so much money.

(unanimous, enthusiastic agreement about a Chinese restaurant.)

Wal-Mart in Springfield.

...We need some tourists.

We have one stoplight.

It's fun to give people directions. Go through the stoplight. Which one? The only one.

Some kids make fake money.

That was stupid.

It was the big talk of the town.

It took like two hours for them to figure it out.

It lasted for a while.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: You go out of town to shop?

Yeah.

We go to Harter House, but...

We have a pharmacy.

We have a doctor's office.

Yeah.

We don't have any clothing stores.

We've got one.

There's a printing shop.

Yeah.

(many people talking at once.)

A lot of small, family-owned businesses. It's just word of mouth. No one advertises.

And then you go there, and they've got like 4 shirts.

Since all the people that own these businesses live here, it's kind of hard for them to pay for advertising. Everyone goes to Springfield.

We've got 3 signs on the highway.

Camping World!

Oh, yeah. They're not even in Strafford.

There's not really much to do.

Driving's a big thing here.

You don't get in trouble for cruising in Strafford. All the cops are on the highway.

We do need more sidewalks. A lot of kids are walking, and it's dangerous.

(many people talking at once.)

I think we need, I mean, I know a lot of people come through Strafford because of old Route 66, and I think we need to spruce that up. It would make Strafford more lively. It's basically our first main street. If we spruced up Route 66, that would be great.

I like the old buildings that are still, you know, in one piece. I kind of like those. It's an old town, and it has history. But as far as the cracks in the roads and the telephone pole...

I think the buildings are a little creepy.

Moderator: Is what you're talking about Downtown Strafford?

Yeah.

Yeah, it's like right there.

(many people talking at once.)

Pine Street's our main street.

We need some movies. Something to do, not just for us, but for the whole family.

Chinese food.

Yeah.

You can't make people start a business.

There's an old hotel that caved in, and there's vines all over it, and it looks really tacky.

And that little towing place, I think we should at least build a shiny wall so it's shiny, not rusted-out cars.

Just paint it white.

But it gives it character. The viney building?

No, not that viney building. The other one. The one that might fall down.

(laughter.)

We don't have a Square.

We need a circle.

We don't even have a line in the middle of the road.

Marshfield's maybe only a little bigger.

We don't even have a Square. We have a line.

We could have a circle with a fountain.

Celebrating Route 66?

(laughter.)

We just need money.

I've got 5 dollars.

I was thinking, a fountain or something, so when people are traveling Route 66 so that they're not just like, "This is a historic road? Are you serious?"

This was the main road that got you out to California, and there's only one tiny sign.

I found out only a year ago that this was Route 66.

And isn't this also the Trail of Tears?

Yeah.

It was I-44.

The cops hate us, by the way.

Yeah. We need better police.

They're not like bad. They're just doing their job.

When I drive home from work going 35 in a 30, they check me for drugs.

It's ridiculous.

(many people talking at once.)

The animal park is still open.

But they don't have exotic animals.

They've got regular animals.

They could paint stripes on a horse.

We still look like we did in the 1950's.

The old people like that.

But I want Wi-Fi!

We got it last summer.

We didn't.

But we do have Wi-Fi.

Moderator: So, do you guys or your parents go Downtown?

City Hall to pay off tickets.

A lot of the seniors go to Pine Street Studio to take pictures.

There's a dog groomer.

The pharmacy and stuff like that.

When our parades were going on, there was a big puddle of water so no one can walk there, and it's kind of bad.

We need a new drainage system. Something.

We have a back alley, and I don't know if we can drive on it. It's just kind of there. It's kind of scary.

(many people talking at once.)

It has houses on it, though.

Moderator: How are business hours Downtown?

They all close down.

We had an antique store.

The pawn shop.

Um, the beauty salon has been there a long time.

And the pharmacy.

If the business has deep roots, it's fine, but if not...

Like, more people go to Callan's than the Come and Go, because we know them. We support them.

We need a hardware store.

We have a hardware store. You know where the stoplight is?

(laughter.)

We have like a Route 66 place, to get shirts and stuff, and there's another place.

Route 66 sports.

Yeah.

We do have that stuff?

Moderator: Do you have any visitors? Is there enough signage?

Whenever people come to fill gas.

When people ask for stuff like Wal-Mart or Starbucks, we have to send them to Springfield.

They're always on their way to Branson.

You can't get that stuff unless you have enough people, but you need to get stuff to get the people.

(many people talking at once.)

I think we need a Chinese restaurant.

They would be so rich.

They'd be like billionaires.

That would be a fun hangout.

What's in that white shed-ish building over by Callan's?

That used to be a meth house.

(laughter.)

I think it's a flower store.

A barbecue place?

Maybe we should all go knock on that door.

Moderator: *Let's talk about businesses you'd like to see in town, that you think wouldn't go out of business.*

A community center, like with a pool or a workout place.

We have that splash park.

More food.

I don't know about putting it Downtown, though.

More food places. You can't go anywhere to eat. Taco Bell, McDonald's.

When Springfield's only 10 minutes away, it's hard to want to eat here.

We're so historic that we don't update anything. The places we like, like the barbecue place and the farm place, they shut down.

We do have our own fuel resource, though.

It's hard to fit anything else Downtown. It already seems really crowded.

I think we need to spread things out a little bit.

You can see all of Downtown all at once.

I think we need Internet cafés and stuff.

A little coffee shop.

The thing is, getting people to come here, because it's so small, and they don't see how it could be good. They just see it now.

It's so boring here, people say.

We need a movie theater.

A drive-in, maybe.

That would be awesome.

That would be historic, too.

There's one in Seymour.

And one in Aurora.

Yeah, a drive-in.

That would be awesome.

I don't want to see a Wal-Mart here, because that would suffocate out anything we had here.

(many people talking at once.)

If you took out some of these old buildings...

As much as we want to have a lot of stuff we can do, we don't want to see our town become a Springfield.

We like it small. We just want to see a little variety. Instead of four gas stations, something else.

Chinese food.

Mexican food would be nice.

Yeah, Mexican would be great.

(many people talking at once.)

We just need a variety. We have subs and pizza and fast food. That's it.

No one likes to go to the truck stop, because it's kind of dirty sometimes.

It's a lot better than it used to be.

Just don't roll around on the floor there.

Moderator: What about the look of Downtown? How would you change it?

It needs to be updated.

Some shade trees.

Some Dogwoods. The state tree.

It needs to be brighter. There's a lot of dark colors.

Flowers.

Paint, and trees. Our trees are all pine, just pine, pine, pine, pine, pine.

Trees between the railroad tracks and—

Shade trees by the railroad tracks.

It just looks so run down.

Something just to brighten it up.

It was poorly built and painted.

The paint's all chipping off.

Do bright colors.

It makes it looks like a meth place right now.

(many people talking at once.)

You hear on the news, meth.

It's the truckers going through the truck stop, and they bust them in Strafford or Marshfield.

People say, "Well, we don't want to send our kids to a place with all these drugs."

We have a great school system here, too.

Our school is a great school in my opinion. We have a lot to offer.

Moderator: Is there a drug problem at the school?

Yes, of course.

There's a lot of ignorance.

It's just not as big as people make it sound.

There's a lot of alcohol.

It's pretty bad, but...

It's kind of like, who you elect...

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Since you're all finishing up with high school, are you going to stay here or come back?

College.

I'm staying here.

I'll go to college in Springfield but live at home. But most of my time will be spent in Springfield.

I'd love to stay here. I'd love to have my kids go to school here.

It's a good school.

It's good for learning, because—

We all sound *so* intelligent now.

(laughter.)

Here, teachers know their students. They know you from elementary to high school.

And they remember your family. I always get, "Were you related to ____?" Yeah. They remember your brothers and your parents. They actually care, and they took time to get to know people.

They care about your grades. They come to you and make you work hard.

(agreement.)

Moderator: *In general, people aren't dying to get out of here?*

People want to get out of Strafford for college, but people come back.

Moderator: *You think you could stay here and work in Springfield?*

Yeah.

You can't rely on Strafford for jobs. But maybe if we open up some variety, our kids will want to hang out here.

A club. We need some liquor, too. I mean, for when we're older.

(laughter.)

A small bar here. It's not that bad. Just a little place, with wings, just a little bar. A sandwich shop. I think that would create a good discussion, people come in, hang out, watch the game. I think that would be great.

You keep saying sports bar...a lot of us here are under 21.

Maybe, our first thing would be a community place. Bars might be down the road.

But when we get older.

We *need* a Chinese restaurant.

That's on the top of the list.

Mexican.

To add new places, you need to get rid of some old places, but...

The old hotel with the cave is like *fffff*... I think we should have like a park, but we also have things...we were the first town to have a building with 2 front doors. We're not just a town. We're *Strafford*. Make it look friendly, make it not all antiquish and dustish.

What is *that*? I mean, it's an old garage door.

Moderator: Thank you very much for coming.