

DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION &
ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE FOR
MISSOURI

December 2011

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

FINAL RESULTS

California, Missouri



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted four focus groups in California, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the California community with respect to the Downtown area. The four groups included the following: 1) Downtown business owners, 2) Elected officials and key City staff, 3) long-term residents, and 4) newer residents.

This report summarizes groups' responses to the questions included in the discussion guides used in the focus groups. Attached are the complete transcripts of the four meetings.

A. QUESTIONS POSED TO DOWNTOWN BUSINESS GROUPS

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

General Questions about California

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 California 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, etc.? Who would be the target for that housing; students, elderly, etc.?
08. How do you communicate information to your customers about what's going on Downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation) or with your own business? What is communication like between business (or business groups) and the City's administrator and elected officials?

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

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

B. QUESTIONS POSED TO GENERAL GROUPS

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

General Questions about California

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 California?

Downtown Specific Questions

05. Generally speaking, would you say that Downtown California 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 California? Is there anything that you used to do Downtown but now do elsewhere or vice versa? Why?
07. How user-friendly is Downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they're looking for?
08. How do local residents and visitors get information about what's going on Downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation)?
09. Is there any residential living in Downtown? Is there a demand or need for more housing Downtown? What kind of housing – rental, condominiums, single family housing, etc.? Who would be the target for that housing; students, elderly, etc.?

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

10. As you know, the City is in the process of developing a master plan for Downtown California. 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 California to resemble?

C. THE CALIFORNIA 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 California as a friendly and welcoming small town with a strong sense of history, a good school system, and a great community. California is the county seat of Moniteau County and is within a 20-minute drive of Jefferson City, Missouri, giving residents easy access to the amenities of the larger nearby town. It is also in close proximity to Columbia and the Lake of the Ozarks. The participants described California as a “bedroom community” to Jefferson City, explaining that approximately 40% of California residents work in Jefferson City.

Participants were generally ambivalent about the direction in which California is moving, but on the whole, felt that California is moving in the right direction. The town has renovated the Downtown Square and the courthouse through the California Progress Incorporated (CPI) group, beautifying the Downtown considerably. A portion of Downtown that the residents refer to as “uptown” has also been beautified. Some participants were discouraged that there are still problems with empty and poorly maintained buildings Downtown, and also that Downtown has very little retail. According to those participants, these are areas California needs to address moving forward. Another significant issue regarding the California area as a whole is the renovation of Highway 50. Though the “old” Highway 50 routed traffic through Downtown California, the recently completed four-lane highway bypasses California. Participants saw this as a new, unique challenge.

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

California residents are able to do basic shopping in California, such as groceries and hardware store items, but also do much of their shopping in Jefferson City or Columbia. Because many residents work in Jefferson City and because of the proximity and selection there, residents often shop there for clothing, shoes, specialty groceries, and other items that are unavailable in California or for which California does not provide much variety.

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

There are a number of restaurants in California, including a few independently owned options and a several fast food restaurants. The participants overall felt that a little more variety in dining options would be welcome if California could support that variety. They especially felt that California lacks a “nice” place for a sit-down dinner and drinks. Many visit Jefferson City or Columbia for a wider variety, or they combine dining with shopping trips to these areas.

For recreation and entertainment, California has excellent parks, a swimming pool, and high school sports. California also has a newly renovated live theatre Downtown which puts on monthly performances throughout the year. The participants also cited a few Downtown events, including the Ham and Turkey Festival, but felt that entertainment—particularly for children,

teenagers, and young professionals—is lacking in California. Most residents go to Jefferson City or Columbia for entertainment because they have movie theaters, dining options, events, and a variety of shopping to entertain people.

D. DOWNTOWN CALIFORNIA: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT

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

The groups felt positive, overall, about the direction of Downtown California—most participants saw it moving in a positive direction, while a few saw it as moving in “no direction” because of a lack of new businesses Downtown and a number of still-vacant buildings. Most were positive about the efforts to beautify Downtown around the courthouse, explaining that the streets, sidewalks, courthouse, and landscaping, have all been improved. Participants also felt that the restoration of the historic theater and the events the theater puts on are significant steps in the right direction. Still, the participants saw room for improvement.

Priorities for helping Downtown California move further in the right direction included adding more retail and entertainment, filling empty storefronts, repairing old buildings, improving the streets and sidewalks, improving business hours, solving parking issues and increasing the number of special events Downtown.

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 the beauty, the historic architecture, and tradition as reasons for locating their businesses Downtown. The participants indicated, in different points in the discussion, that new businesses might be interested in locating Downtown in the future if the City focuses on attracting a higher number of businesses to the area, particularly retail and entertainment, creating a “destination.”

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

Participants cited a number of reasons that they visit Downtown, including the courthouse, City Hall, insurance agents, attorneys, the post office, theatre events, and the Ham and Turkey festival. They visit Downtown regularly because it is a business hub for the town, but do not necessarily shop or dine Downtown very often.

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' concerns about user-friendliness included parking, signage, streets, and sidewalks. Some expressed concern about limited business hours if Downtown seeks to attract more retail. Parking was a concern for the participants, though many believed that there is currently ample parking Downtown. While the parking is just enough for the current needs of the population, if Downtown were to attract more businesses additional parking would be necessary.

Some suggested more angled parking and one-way streets as an option, and others suggested tearing down one or two buildings that are beyond repair to create parking lots. Some participants also suggested that parking was a problem of “perception.” The groups explained that many people perceive parking to be a problem if they cannot find a parking spot directly in front of the store they wish to visit. If all of the storefronts were populated with shops and businesses, the walk from parking spot to business might seem shorter.

Signage is also a significant problem, according to the participants. The signage on the new Highway 50 makes it very difficult for a visitor to find Downtown California, and signage within the town to help people find various attractions is lacking. The groups suggested improving signage both outside of town on the highways and in town on local streets.

The condition of some of the streets and sidewalks was also a concern, particularly in areas which have not yet been renovated. The groups suggested that people would be much more willing to walk around Downtown if the sidewalks, curbs, and streets were level and attractive.

Retail business hours in California, according to the participants, might be an impediment to attracting more retail businesses, especially regarding evenings and weekends. Current business hours, typically 8 or 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., would make it difficult for people who have jobs with a weekday schedule to shop in Downtown California. Participants felt that if Downtown is to attract more retail and entertainment, business hours should be extended, perhaps staying open later one night a week or expanding weekend hours on one weekend day.

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 the newspaper and word-of-mouth as ways they get information about Downtown business and events. Some noted that businesses and special events are advertised on regional radio stations in order to attract visitors from Jefferson City and other surrounding towns.

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

There is some residential living in Downtown California, primarily rentals. Some suggested that there would be a demand for nicer loft-style or condo-style housing targeted to young singles and young couples. Participants also felt that the community might welcome nicer residential spaces if there were more retail, dining, and entertainment Downtown.

E. DOWNTOWN CALIFORNIA: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As you know, the City is in the process of developing a master plan for Downtown California. 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 new Downtown businesses, focusing on a mix of retail— independently owned specialty-type shops, restaurants, and entertainment, rather than large chains. Some participants suggested that some sort of anchor would draw people Downtown from surrounding towns, such as a movie theater, a medical center, a community college, or a satellite campus of a university. Participants in more than one group suggested a winery as a way to bring people into town.

For retail and food, participants suggested clothing stores, a shoe store, a bookstore, a coffee shop, a drugstore, a restaurant suitable for business lunches, a “nice” restaurant for casual but refined evening dining with alcohol, a fine dining destination to draw people from neighboring communities, and any other type of specialty shop or restaurant. Participants suggested that retail should focus on drawing in people from neighboring communities to make Downtown a destination.

For entertainment, the focus groups felt that a variety of restaurants and shops with extended business hours would be a good start. They also suggested more special events on the courthouse lawn and in the Square, particularly during the summer—concerts, flea markets, festivals, a farmer’s market and other outdoor events to draw people Downtown. Some also suggested that more entertainment for teenagers and young professionals would act as a draw for Downtown.

Many participants felt that the Downtown’s purpose is not to compete with large chain stores in Jefferson City and Columbia but rather to offer a unique experience to customers and provide options in niche markets for both residents and visitors from surrounding areas. To this end, many participants felt strongly that small business should be supported and that the City should find ways to attract retail and to encourage building owners to renovate their buildings into usable retail and office spaces.

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

When asked about the look and feel of Downtown, many participants had very positive comments about the historic look of Downtown and expressed a desire to preserve that aesthetic. Priorities for improvement included building renovation and occupancy, streets and sidewalks, and landscaping.

Building repair and occupancy were of the highest priority. Helping building owners repair their buildings and bringing business in to occupy empty, renovated buildings would help Downtown feel bustling, populated, and aesthetically pleasing. They particularly expressed that renovating (or tearing down, if necessary) the old hospital would improve Downtown tremendously. A few participants suggested that zoning ordinances to enforce certain codes would be necessary, but cautioned that the City should proceed carefully and not discourage potential investors of Downtown buildings.

Participants also expressed concern over the condition of some of the streets, curbs, and sidewalks. They felt it should be a priority to improve these in order to make Downtown more user-friendly.

Finally, participants suggested concrete planters, hanging baskets, and other greenery. They felt these would improve the aesthetics of Downtown and make people want to come Downtown more often.

Overall, participants agreed that Downtown should have a cohesive, historic look, and that all of the improvements should focus on creating a unique destination.

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

The groups identified as the highest priorities (1) building repair and renovation and (2) attracting retail businesses, entertainment and dining both to Downtown and to the area of California right off of the new Highway 50.

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

The business owners generally supported the concept of a special business district that would encompass other retail in California (including "strip malls") but were not in favor a special business district for Downtown. They suggested that the larger fast food chains would not suffer from additional sales taxes, which could help fund the revitalization of the town as a whole, including Downtown.

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

The participants cited several downtowns as models regarding the aesthetics and the mix of businesses, including Sedalia, Missouri; Jefferson City, Missouri; St. Charles, Missouri; and Hermann, Missouri. The participants also mentioned Downtowns in other states (though not specifically by name). All of the downtowns they cited have a cohesive look and feel and a mix of businesses that make them destinations for visitors and local residents.

F. KEY POINTS

Key points about the California area:

- ◆ California, the county seat of Moniteau County, is a friendly and welcoming small town with a strong sense of history, a good school system and a great community.
- ◆ California is within a 20-minute drive of Jefferson City, Missouri, and is a "bedroom community" to Jefferson City; approximately 40% of California residents work in Jefferson City.

- ◆ California is also within close proximity of Columbia and the Lake of the Ozarks.
- ◆ Participants felt that California is moving slowly in the right direction because of beautification efforts, but can still identify a few problems that need addressing, including building repair and maintenance and a lack of businesses Downtown.
- ◆ The old Highway 50 routed traffic through Downtown California, but the recently renovated four-lane highway bypasses California, which creates a new challenge in getting passersby to stop in Downtown California.
- ◆ While residents do some everyday shopping in California, many residents do a majority of their shopping in Jefferson City and Columbia because of variety, convenience, and proximity to their workplaces.
- ◆ There are some fast-food and casual dining options in California, but residents also go to Jefferson City and Columbia to dine out, particularly for more upscale dining.
- ◆ For recreation and entertainment, California has excellent parks, a swimming pool, high school sports, a few local festivals or events, and live community theatre performances throughout the year.
- ◆ Participants felt that entertainment—particularly for children, teenagers, and young professionals—is lacking in California; most go to Jefferson City or Columbia for entertainment.

Key points about Downtown California in the present:

- ◆ The groups felt generally positive about the direction of Downtown California—most participants saw it moving in a positive direction because of beautification efforts around the courthouse and the renovation of the historic theatre.
- ◆ Some participants saw Downtown California as moving in “no direction” because of a lack of new businesses Downtown and a number of still-vacant buildings.
- ◆ Priorities for helping Downtown California move further in the right direction included adding more retail and entertainment, filling empty storefronts, repairing old buildings, improving business hours, solving some of the parking issues, and increasing the number of special events Downtown.
- ◆ Business owners cited the beauty, historic architecture, and tradition as reasons for locating their businesses Downtown.
- ◆ Business owners indicated that new businesses might be interested in locating Downtown in the future if the City focuses on attracting a higher number of businesses in the area, particularly retail and entertainment, creating a “destination.”

- ◆ The groups mentioned a number of reasons that they visit Downtown, including the courthouse, City Hall, insurance agents, attorneys, the post office, theatre events, and the Ham and Turkey festival.
- ◆ Residents visit Downtown regularly, because it is a business hub for the town, but do not necessarily shop or dine Downtown very often.
- ◆ Participants' concerns about user-friendliness included parking, signage, streets, and sidewalks; some expressed concern about limited business hours as an impediment to attracting more retail.
- ◆ Though there is currently ample parking Downtown, it might not be enough if new businesses were to locate in the area; participants suggested more angled parking or building a parking lot, and also suggested that people would not mind walking a few blocks if Downtown were densely populated with shops and businesses.
- ◆ The signage on the new Highway 50 makes it extremely difficult for a visitor to find Downtown California, and signage within the town to help people find various attractions is lacking.
- ◆ The condition of some of the streets and sidewalks was also a concern, particularly in areas which have not yet been renovated.
- ◆ The retail business hours in California, typically 8 or 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., would be a problem if there were more retail businesses and would make it difficult for people who work a regular weekday schedule to shop in California.
- ◆ Residents get information about Downtown businesses and events from the newspaper and word-of-mouth; businesses and special event groups advertise on regional radio to draw in people from surrounding areas.
- ◆ There are currently apartments in Downtown California, and there may be a demand for nicer apartments if there were more retail and entertainment Downtown.

Key points about the future of Downtown California:

- ◆ The participants suggested a variety of new businesses Downtown, focusing on a mix of retail: independently owned specialty-type shops, restaurants, and entertainment, rather than large chains.
- ◆ An anchor would draw people Downtown from surrounding towns, such as a winery, a movie theater, a medical center, a community college, or a satellite campus of a university; multiple groups suggested a winery as a way to bring people into town.
- ◆ For retail and food, they suggested clothing stores, a shoe store, a bookstore, a coffee shop, a drugstore, a nice restaurant for a business lunch, a nice restaurant for casual but refined evening dining with alcohol, a fine dining destination to draw people from neighboring communities, and any other type of specialty shop or restaurant.

- ◆ For entertainment, participants suggested more special events on the courthouse lawn and in the Square, particularly during the summer—concerts, flea markets, festivals, a farmer’s market, and other outdoor events to draw people Downtown.
- ◆ Participants believed that residents would particularly welcome more entertainment for teenagers and young professionals.
- ◆ Retail and entertainment should focus both on drawing in people from neighboring communities as well as meeting the needs of California residents.
- ◆ Downtown’s purpose, for many participants, is not to compete with large chain stores in Jefferson City or Columbia but rather to offer a unique experience to customers and to provide options in niche markets for both residents and visitors from surrounding areas.
- ◆ Small business should be encouraged, and the City should find ways to attract retail and encourage building owners to renovate their buildings into usable retail and office spaces.
- ◆ Residents feel very positive about the historic look of Downtown and expressed a desire to preserve that aesthetic.
- ◆ Priorities for further aesthetic improvement are building renovation and occupancy, streets and sidewalks, and landscaping.
- ◆ Building repair and occupancy were of the highest priority, and suggestions to facilitate this included renovating the old hospital and instituting zoning ordinances.
- ◆ Improving the condition of some of the streets, curbs, and sidewalks should be a priority in order to make Downtown more user-friendly.
- ◆ Regarding green space, the community would welcome concrete planters, hanging baskets, and other greenery to improve the aesthetics of Downtown.
- ◆ The groups identified as the highest priorities (1) building repair and renovation and (2) attracting retail shops, entertainment, and dining both to Downtown and to the area of California right off of the new Highway 50.
- ◆ The business owners were in favor of a special business district that would encompass other areas in California (including the “strip malls”) but did not support one for only Downtown.
- ◆ Participants mentioned other downtowns as models regarding the aesthetics and the mix of businesses, including Sedalia, Missouri; Jefferson City, Missouri; St. Charles, Missouri; and Hermann, Missouri.
- ◆ Other downtown areas cited by participants were those that have a cohesive look and feel and a mix of businesses that makes them destinations for residents and visitors.

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SECTION II

DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT: DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS

Moderator: Tell me a little about California.

I've been here 10 years, and I've found it to be welcoming and accepting, because I joined a church right away and connected right away. I've lived in both cities and small towns, and I'm more comfortable now. It's not too large, but we're so close to Columbia, the Lake, Kansas City, St. Louis. We have good educational system, and a marvelous volunteer corps... a lot of money behind community betterment projects. There's a lot of heart and hard work and good people here.

Low crime rate, lots of history, central location, good enough climate...

Low taxes.

Yeah, low taxes. Big enough to have retail and we need to protect that. That's the plus. The smokehouse is a good deal. The Cargill plant, we've got some industry here.

Moderator: Do people work in California?

The state's a huge employer.

A reasonably large percentage leaves town for work.

I think that's one thing that's nice about the town. They do have that ability to go outside the community. The state capital is now just about 15 or 20 minutes away.

They just redid the road.

You haven't asked for challenges yet, but highway 50 is a new situation for us.

It's only been open for 3 weeks.

It now bypasses our City. Highway 50 doesn't go through our town anymore.

I know it's already affecting businesses.

Overall, the community in the long run will benefit, but if you happen to be a business owner that's down 30%, you're feeling the downside to this change. We're trying to mitigate this downside as best we can as a community. I do think the stable manufacturing base; it's not big, but with us and Cargill and... the two main manufacturing employer. Other communities are really battered by the downturn...

Moderator: How many employees do you have?

We have about 300-400, and Cargill is about twice that.

And the Smokehouse is a destination. We get people from all over.

I saw a group from Phoenix, Atlanta, and South Carolina, that came to Columbia and then came to Smokehouse.

It's a factory/country store, a museum, a visitor's center, a sandwich shop.

The ham in our Ham and Turkey festival that draws tens of thousands of people.

And the Downtown area, which is historic and cool. But you have to deal with 50. There's some businesses that aren't going to make it. And that's because of the highway, mostly the restaurant-type businesses. I heard a waitress complain that nobody was in all day.

I think another thing that's important is that we have real access through town, which could be extremely beneficial for new business.

Moderator: Where do people do most of their retail shopping?

I'm going to guess that most people go out of town.

Particularly for clothing, and even more and more for food as grocery options become more limited, compared to your Hy-Vee...

We're a small-town grocery store. It's basically what it is. I know both of them have tried the deli-type thing, and we don't have the traffic to support that. A lot of people are going out of town.

(agreement.)

For furniture, for clothes.

There's great crafts in this town... woodworking, and that type of stuff. But if you have to get big-ticket items like furniture and appliances, you go out of town. We have some furniture and clothing.

We buy our groceries locally, and we make a concerted effort to do that, and it seems like the business at Cal's is swift, but I can't say for sure. I know people say, "I'm going to drop by Wal-Mart at the Capitol on the way home from work."

That's a drawback for people working at the Capitol.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Mostly, Jeff City is where people go?

People sometimes go to Sedalia, but mostly the Columbia and Jefferson City area. Maybe the outlet malls at the Lake.

One of our other amenities is a very nice public park here. Proctor Park. And a newly renovated community theatre.

Moderator: What about dining? Are there enough restaurants in town?

A lot of people leave, but they put in some restaurants that are really good. There's a new one in the Courthouse Square, Derringer's, that's excellent. And Z's Diner is pretty good, and Burgher Haus.

There's options here in town, but in as much as people generally eat out, you tend to leave town just to have the variety of options.

And a change of scenery.

(agreement. One person talking, unintelligible...)

It's not the best place for date night.

I long for a supper club or steakhouse or something nice.

Moderator: What about recreation and entertainment options?

The community theatre just recently completed its first season, and some social events have come up from that... we have the Ham and Turkey Festival and various church and community functions. I know even raising a young daughter, I felt, "We've got the park and the Dollar Store, but..." for young families especially, I don't think there are a lot of options. We do have some rec leagues and school participation in sports and everything. There are options, but we could use some more, particularly for youth.

I would classify it as a very typical small community. You're not going to find a lot to do with small kids, but we are fairly close to those activities. Teenagers can go to a lot of activities in Columbia, Jeff City, the Lake of the Ozarks, Sedalia.

The upside is you have all those things, but the downside is that you have to leave for them. There's no need for a movie theater in town.

But they don't have a 3-D movie theater in Jeff City, and we have a facility that would be perfect. That would keep the kids in town.

And it would draw kids to town.

The closest 3-D theater is in Columbia, an hour away.

I did go see *Avatar* in Columbia.

It's the future. That's a thought that I had.

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

I think Derringer is... I'm glad to hear something coming back down there. I think it's kind of stagnant.

It's treading water.

It's holding its own but it's not going anywhere.

It's hard to get people off the beaten path and down there. When we had the Mexican restaurants down there, you could get a margarita...

...or 2.

We have 2 banks down there.

I assume you realize that Downtown includes the county seat.

Highly historic.

(Questions about what the boundaries of Downtown are. Discussion of the map of Downtown.)

The Endor Pool is being renovated, and that's a great asset.

You don't see a community this size have anything like that.

I think it's encompassed in the DREAM Downtown district.

Right next to the elementary and middle school.

There's businesses up along this street, too. If you want to be proactive... I think stagnant is a very good word.

There's a wonderful shop, Patricia Kay Interiors, a lovely stop, and we can't get people directed to it. I know she has clientele that she works with regularly, but it's got a lot of potential, and getting people there is a challenge.

Some of the blocks have been renovated, and they're quite nice, and others are not quite so nice. And one of them collapsed.

Moderator: *A building?*

Yeah. We have people in town that are hoarders. There's at least 4 or 5 residences that are filled with junk, and one in Downtown that collapsed and the City had to buy it back. It's a mess.

My wife and I drive around town quite often, because we're bored, and we're boring people, and it is kind of shocking to see some of the buildings that _____ is talking about. I don't mean to run it down... I've been here 24 years, and I thought "what a goldmine." My wife's friend, the director of development for Missouri, came from St. Louis said, "You've got so much potential in this town. You should get things going."

There's a house that's one of the nicest homes in town, and now it's filled with junk. You can't get people to fix things up when the house next to them is falling down. We need zoning ordinances.

We have no zoning ordinances in California, and we need them.

There's a strong independent streak here.

It's a fine line, but there's got to be something.

I moved here on purpose from Dallas, and I don't like the z-word, but you've got to have an ordinance that keeps people from taking residences and turning them into dumps.

We have less of that than some communities... some communities have entire towns that are a like that.

The old gift shop, the gutters have been hanging down on that house for a long time. Things like that. We've got a lot of potential, but I don't know... maybe there could be a plan of action to get people motivated.

This DREAM model has been used enough that there's some idea of how it will play into our community.

Cape Girardeau was a DREAM City, and they have a blight ordinance. If we could... our strengths, we have history. We have the oldest courthouse west of the Mississippi, and then our county fair is the oldest west of the Mississippi, so we have a lot of potential to tie ourselves to a unique theme.

Moderator: Why did you choose to locate your business or buy property Downtown?

The courthouse.

(laughter.)

We loved the City when we came through in 2002... the lack of crime, the history, the home we bought. We couldn't find anything like that in Dallas. A good place to ease toward retirement.

I did because of the courthouse, too, but also because it was going to be a viable area. The courthouse will always be there.

I will say that we do have some blight, and it's reasonably limited, but had CPI not come by in 1990, this town would've been a lot like other towns of the same size. There was a lot of concrete poured and historical buildings restored...

(agreement.)

Where the railroad was just a mess, and that effort really kept the town from falling into more serious disrepair.

Even when the town was shut down commercially, but the bank bought and renovated it...

(noise, unintelligible... one person talking softly.)

...easy to raise money within the community...

We renovated the library, the historical society building, and the theater. Anything else?

I don't know about Smithburg Park.

And the railroad.

...beautification...

Moderator: What do hear from customers and clients about the user-friendliness of Downtown? How is parking? Is there enough?

No.

Part of it's parallel and part of it's slant-in, and they should all be slant-in.

Moderator: It should all be angled?

(unanimous agreement.)

They're all wide enough.

Around the Square, but what about High Street?

Probably not High Street. Maybe one side of the street. But around the Square.

On court days, there are five times the number of people there, and we all want to park as close as we can to businesses. The workers take all the spots around the courthouse, and the court people have to find parking, and there's just not enough.

I assume it would be a problem for businesses down there.

Yes.

For theater performances, that's a concern. They have to walk a block or so in most cases.

Moderator: Is there going to be enough parking if you switch to angled parking?

It may not solve it, but it would help a lot.

Some of the buildings that are falling in, I think they're potential for parking lots. Level the building and do a parking lot.

A lot can be fixed, though.

Moderator: How are business hours?

Good, I think.

Yeah, I think so.

Coming from a small town, which I did, they're not convenient. It was the town that the area collapsed into. I'm from western Kansas, and they had a lot less people, and the little towns have all died. They all collapsed into my hometown, because we had a hospital and a college. What they do have is a medical center. If we get something here that none of these other little towns have... we have an abandoned hospital that will take way too much money to fix up for anything... it's too far gone... it closed because of that wooden floor. There's a double problem there. You've got an abandoned 20,000-foot thing, and there is no medical. If we had the medical. Sooner or later, one of these towns in this area will win and the rest will lose. You'll have these centers that develop, and the rest will die. I don't know if it'll be us or Tipton, but somebody's going to die. If we could keep the retail, we're okay, and if we could somehow get a medical facility... a small full-scale hospital would be nice.

Our problem is to get into close proximity into pretty good medical care...

(agreement.)

We're reasonably close to good medical care.

Moderator: Does anyone live Downtown?

There's some real potential for more.

I don't know if the old hospital could be renovated for residential...

That's a lot of money.

(agreement that renovating the hospital would be cost-prohibitive.)

The ones that are down there are primarily low-rent, but there are some nicer ones above businesses.

Ours are empty. They're old apartments, but they're abandoned.

_____ and _____ are putting in a gorgeous one in their building for rental.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

We have gymnastics, Tae Kwon Do, and yoga above our business.

We have a new jail coming.

(laughter.)

Are you sure?

It's planned.

That's one of the things we've talked about, is we have to maximize that area for parking, because that will add to the need for parking. We have to do angled parking along the side. Commerce Bank has a parking lot over there, and that would have to be utilized, or they'd park along the courthouse.

We have 9-1-1 service, and not all communities do. That's a feature.

I kind of envision us as being somewhat of a bedroom community, with our access to Jeff City. I hope we're going to look even more attractive to people who want more of a small-town lifestyle.

Moderator: Let's talk about the future of Downtown. If you were going to create a master plan, what kinds of businesses would you like to see Downtown?

We have a shortage of gift shops. More restaurants and gathering places.

I'd like to see Downtown have a wine-shop-bistro kind of place. An upscale bar and bistro kind of place that would be open later in the evening.

I've been here 24 years, and I've heard that a restaurant in California that serves alcohol isn't going to make it.

I haven't seen any yet that have made it.

I've heard that over and over and over again, but I've talked to people and talked to groups, and that's what everybody says we need.

Is it just the older population that's resisting it?

People drive to Jefferson City and frequent those establishments.

I'm trying to think through this. Willie's was here the longest. It seems that rather than being a restaurant that serves alcohol, it becomes a bar that serves food. It drives off your restaurant patrons.

That's why I was thinking winery rather than a bar.

I'll throw it back over here, but Grapevine Restaurant in Village Green, that was a nice restaurant. I think it went out shortly before I moved here. It was good food, steaks and everything, and they did serve alcohol... it was a restaurant that served alcohol.

Derringer's has done something a little different. Their restaurant is smoke-free. If I can get a drink and eat... if I can have a drink with dinner, that's good. The people who say that are saying it about smoky bars.

Like the bowling alley.

I think we also got to realize that restaurants are *businesses*. You've got to work hard; keep going... most of the ones in Jeff City couldn't make it just on the people from Jeff City. We've got to do a better job of bringing in people from Jamestown and Boonville. We go to Boonville to go to a restaurant, but get them to come here, too. It's a tough business. _____ works his tail off.

(agreement.)

Everything else has come and gone. It takes a lot of work.

We don't have restaurants that serve alcohol, but I think there's a place for it. We're not a Puritan community.

Moderator: Could the town support a fine dining restaurant?

It would have to be a destination.

There's plenty of fine dining down at the Lake.

It comes back to proximity. Even back to the gift shop idea, I thought that area would be dynamite for like a Eureka Springs, where they've got the whole Downtown area, and they're not 30 minutes from Jefferson City or 45 minutes from Columbia.

I think proximity hurts us. I'm not saying we should go "woe is me," but...

Moderator: Do you see your town becoming a visitor destination? Or do you think it needs to cater to residents?

I think it should have outside appeal.

I think the cheapest and best way is if you had the 3-D theater and a branch campus of a junior college here... it would be nice if they had some sort of... maybe get it in to where the hospital is. They'd bring money with them. You've got burgers already, and the history. Bring in stuff that causes people to want to come here. Get Missouri State to put in a branch campus.

We tried to do that a few years back...

We go to Minnesota every year, and they do a study to show what percent of their linemen are going to be retiring each year, and different communities applied to set up linemen schools. A school for a specific task.

You could keep some of the kids here if there was a quality Ju-Co here, and you could get kids to come in.

I've given away a scholarship to this high school for years, and we used to sit down with them, and I made it a point to ask what their goal was after college, and only 1 out of 20 wanted to come back. The rest wanted out. That's kind of shocking. If you keep 2 or 3 of them here, and get some other ones in, who knows?

It builds on itself. The little school in Fort Hayes, it's grown by a couple thousand because they do high-tech stuff.

With the technology... where's the nearest school for that...?

Mizzou.

(laughter.)

Moderator: Okay, gift shops, restaurants, what else?

Coffee shops and bookstores and all that spring up where there's already population. You don't build a bakery to bring people. You put it where the people are.

If you had a Ju-Co or a 3-D movie theater or a hospital, you could have a bakery and all kinds of other things around it.

Moderator: Let's assume you got more population. How would you want your Downtown to look?

Cleaner.

We need a blight ordinance. It needs to be cleaned up.

Somewhat cohesive.

We're talking the whole area, right? There's some neat buildings. They're incredible. I'd hate to see them torn down. If it's possible to renovate them, do it. I'm all for tearing down the hospital,

and then you have a square block to put some things in, but there's some great buildings that could be utilized.

Bustling and lively and cohesive. You wouldn't necessarily have to require them to have certain facades or curbs, but maybe try to have a cohesive historic look.

Maybe have tax credits for renovations.
Yeah.

They are kind of hard to comply with...

Get the place qualified as some kind of national historic... but I don't want someone coming in telling me what I can and can't do. And the tax credits do that.

Moderator: Do you want a cohesive look?

We always refer to it is as historic Downtown.

The Square Downtown would look nice cohesive, but does it have to with this area up here? No. And it could be somewhat cohesive, but it wouldn't have to be as uniform as the Square.

It would be really cool if they took the streets down, Oak Street and High Street, back down to where it was. It has about 5 feet of asphalt on there. There needs to be some street work through town. Oak Street used to be at least 2 feet lower than where it is now. If there's bricks, take it down to the bricks. The bricks look beautiful. If they were still okay, that would be great.

Moderator: What about sidewalks and lighting?

I think it's great right now.

They might look funny after you fix everything else up, but they look good now.

Some of the brick pavers need to be leveled.

It's a lot better now than it used to be. Somebody's done something to them in the last month or so.

If we're dreaming, signage, if we could have wonderful signage directing people to our attractions.

People have to have reason to go down there.

You have to know to find California now. It's got the worst signage in the world.

There's nothing right now. We've got to do something.

We do have several accesses, and that's nice.

We just need signage.

Moderator: What about beautification with green space and landscaping?

Like High Street in Jeff City, they have hanging baskets. That's quite nice. This building maintains a nice green space, and there's Smithburg Park.

We talked about the lighting, that's a natural thing, if we have poles, we can have hanging baskets and light them for Christmas. Just having the poles there lends themselves to more enhancements.

Moderator: What's the most important improvement?

Fix up the buildings.

And occupy them.

I think about 30% are unused.

I think. Are most of these occupied?

Not on the west side.

The old grocery store is totally unoccupied.

A Mexican restaurant would be great.

Do you get your town in good shape to attract others, but also to make yourself attractive to businesses and industry? Or do you attract businesses and industry first, and then attract others? I guess you have to do both. I'm just trying to figure out how you actually spur businesses to revitalize buildings.

Give tax abatements to those areas, and maybe put out a joint City-County thing out on 50 along the highway, stuff like Burger King and a motel, and tax them at the normal or higher rate, and then give an abatement to older areas.

Moderator: Would a special business district in town work with an extra tax?

You'd have to have some retail along 50. And there isn't any.

One thing we haven't talked about is the economy of our City. I don't know how many people are in poverty or middle income... you can do surveys to see what we do have... I'm trying to think about the money we have in our community.

30-35% of people in the school are on the free lunch program.

We're talking about expanding the food pantry operation, and we'd be subsidizing almost the entire county for food. I'm throwing that out there for consideration... I don't know if the money's here to support some of these things.

Like we talked earlier, we have to have them draw from outside. We don't think we can be self-supportive.

The Downtown lacks a brand or a theme. The businesses down there don't feed on each other. Optometry doesn't feed evening restaurants or that sort of thing.

We have a bank and a barbershop and offices, and a few shops, and a flea market.

That may be what we have to look at as a community, as far as the tax that's going to go to that Downtown area. We have to have a plan.

I think we're lacking... we've got to have something to draw people in, to support the tax, to support investors. I think something that's really lacking is another industry. We've got a lot of inexpensive land, great highway access, great railroad access...

Everybody wants to attract something like that.

(many people talking at once.)

All of the universities are trying to have satellite...

There is a lot of competition.

We do have a regional economic development group, in addition to CPI and the community development group.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

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SECTION III

DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT: ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS AND KEY CITY STAFF

Moderator: Tell me a little about your community.

Great City, great school system, very friendly place to live.

Recreation facilities.

Most of us have lived here our entire lives.

Nobody else wants us.

(laughter.)

We're the county seat. We have lots of residents who commute to Jefferson City for employment.

Location's a good deal, too. Jeff City, Columbia, Lake of the Ozarks... right in the center of the state.

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

Both.

I think predominantly in the right direction.

More right than left.

(laughter.)

I think we're moving in the right direction. Our schools are growing and keeping current buildings and curriculum. We have a lot of offer that Jeff City couldn't.

The new highway's moved a lot of traffic out of town, which has an effect on businesses. But that promotes something in the future, too.

We have a brand new City Hall. As far as general appearance, we have an organization, California Progress, that's helped provide us with a library, a museum, a refurbished theater, and I think that this City also has one of the best park services anywhere.

Moderator: Where do people do their everyday shopping?

I'd say it's pretty split. People that commute to Jeff shop in Jeff, and people who are in town shop more local.

Especially clothes and that type of thing. If you want to buy a pair of shoes, you can't in town.

Orscheln's.

But you've got people who work and shop in Jeff City. We need more to shop here.

I think more than 40% of our working population goes to Jeff City to work.

Moderator: In terms of dining and entertainment, do you go elsewhere or stay here?

Both.

Unfortunately, if I were going to take someone around, I'd go out of town.

People want to go out of town to get away. They go out of town, the majority. They're going out for a good meal.

I ate Downtown Friday night, and it was darn good.

We have some pretty decent restaurants here.

People go to Columbia and Jeff City, though. We should advertise ourselves.

Moderator: Let's talk about the Downtown area.

(side conversation about the boundaries of Downtown.)

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

Some of both.

I think we've got good infrastructure, but there are ways that we could improve the streets, the curbs, the guttering.

The traditional retail stores that we all grew up knowing to be Downtown are all basically gone. What we have as far as retail places are primarily on the highway. We have a lot of service type businesses, office type businesses, a few specialty businesses, but one thing that's happened is that the basic retail businesses have all moved out of our Downtown areas during our lifetimes.

Even drugstores.

The only thing that hasn't moved is the barbershops. Everything else is professional. The traditional business is gone.

Moderator: Why do people come Downtown, other than these reasons?

Courthouse.

Post office.

Sheriff's office.

We do have the public library here as well.

Moderator: Are there things other than retail that people would still like to see Downtown that used to be there?

A good restaurant.

But one just opened up.

Several years ago, there was a store in every place Downtown. There was groceries, drugstores, clothing.

Butcher shop.

Laundromat.

There was appliance stores.

Car deal.

Meat market.

You really have to work to buy anything now.

Moderator: How user-friendly is Downtown? How easy is it to find your way Downtown?

I think people that live here can find it, but it's difficult to give directions to people.

I think we need signage on the new highway. The old highway intersects with our Downtown, but the new highway bypasses it.

Moderator: Are there directions to Downtown from elsewhere?

There's no signage.

There's signs directing to the courthouse, but not many.

We need signs for the theater and the schools and the swimming pools. I went to Columbia the other day, and they had a sign that was different that showed how to get places.

We have one historical oddity. The main street is High Street. The main street that's in the uptown is Oak Street, which is one block off. Instead of making this a straight shot, we got one block off. You have to go a block off, because things aren't lined up in a predictable manner.

It would be nice to have a sign on that corner, too.

(agreement.)

Some people are just generally confused about City Hall and the Courthouse.

Another point of interest is the railroad tracks... we have railroad facilities. It doesn't stop here, but there's always a possibility.

Kind of a pain in my ass, now that you mention it.

(laughter.)

I'm on the wrong side of the tracks.

Moderator: What about business hours? Are they convenient?

For what's there, they are. There's not much there.

It's quiet Downtown after about 8:00.

The only business-business is Sweet's Hardware.

And he closes at 6.

You've got a title company and stuff like that.

But I mean retail.

(side conversations about the DREAM project scope.)

If I was going to tell you what I'd like to see, I'd like to see clothing, buy a pair of shoes, a place to get your jewelry cleaned. A dry cleaner's.

Moderator: One other question I have is parking. Is it convenient?

No.

If we have court, especially.

(agreement.)

It used to all be angled parking on both sides.

Make them one-way streets and angled parking. If you want to park in the bank and walk, you can find a place, but it's not convenient.

If there's a special event, there's not enough parking, like a court day.

Food pantry day.

You know, I don't have people that complain about it, even on jury days. We're a little spoiled, because we don't want to walk at all. We're not accustomed to walking like they do in the City.

If 3 businesses opened, parking would be a problem, in my opinion.

(unintelligible talking... agreement.)

Moderator: In terms of residential living, is there much of that in Downtown California?

Quite a bit, yes. I would say, of the available second-story areas, probably a fourth are presently occupied.

Moderator: Rentals?

Yes.

I think that the DREAM area encompasses a residential area over by the school, as well.

Moderator: Do you think there's a market for more or different housing in the DREAM area?

I think if you're going to make the DREAM area truly work, you're going to have to get in some middle-class housing. Not just low-income. Some people that want to get away from big yards, maybe some luxury apartments.

California got all kinds of low housing.

If you're going to make that area work, you're going to have to change the clientele.

This is digressing, but as far as assets we have, we've got the basic layout that was done back in the 1900's, and we've got a large inventory of original structures, both business establishments and nice older homes that are in between the two traditional business districts. We have a Courthouse Square historic district, and it does not include the traditional Downtown. I think it needs to be amended or expanded. That type of thing hasn't been done in the traditional uptown district.

CPI did a facelift on it 15 or 20 years ago, but it's ready for a facelift again.

Moderator: What sorts of housing would you like to see Downtown?

I guess I don't know the difference between a loft and single-family, but more of that.

Duplex type stuff, maybe.

Apartments and lofts and small housing areas... made for husband and wife or a single person. It's very difficult to raise families in apartments and small living quarters.

Too bad we can't redo some of that old hospital. What kind of potential would it have?

That would take a lot of dollars.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Let's talk a little about how people get information about what's going on Downtown. How do people get that information?

Local newspaper would be number 1. We don't really have a dedicated website or community calendar. The Chamber of Commerce might have one.

That Missouri magazine advertised the Ham and Turkey Festival.

I think we could do much better.

A lot of word-of-mouth and the paper.

We advertise the festival on the radio and the newspaper. But it's just tradition.

(many people talking at once about the boundaries of the DREAM district.)

The Fairgrounds is just outside the district, I think.

We do a newsletter.

Newspaper, radio...

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

Well, if the swimming pool is in it, I'd like to see like a workout center. Exercise. Sauna, steam rooms...

Like a YMCA type thing.

Any type of retail business. Shoes, clothes.

It pretty much has to be a specialty shop to survive Downtown.

An antique store...

I've got a question. I've been reading a lot of things about the new highway, that you're going to see a Downtown for 4 to 6 years, but then it could bounce back. Do you think new retail would come back into Downtown or would it be closer to the highway?

I think we need a banquet area, for a wedding reception or wedding rehearsal or conference.

Some place to hold meetings and banquets.

All those people leave town right now.

Some guys looking to have a meeting, and they're going elsewhere. California Progress even meets out of town. We have the Senior Center, but you can't have alcohol in there.

Moderator: What about dining and entertainment?

We don't have anywhere to eat lunch in the older part of town.

I think a wine... a place that serves wine and you could go have a light meal... people go all over to have wine and cheese, and whatever retail you have could be mom and pop type operations.

We're starting on the theater's second season. Musical groups, types of entertainment like that, generally once a month. There's a lot of potential there for making that a focal point for Downtown. A performance there goes very well with having a place to eat. There's a lot of potential.

I think if you have an activity every weekend, it would really drive the Downtown.

You get back to parking, though.

You park 2 blocks away at Wal-Mart.

But for older people, that's a deterrent in the winter and in bad weather. People talk about fear of falling on the curbs and sidewalks.

I think there's room for parking down there, between the Bixler building and the Kyle building. That could be adaptable. I think there's ways to address parking. And sidewalks and curbs.

We might have to lose a building or two down there for additional parking.

Do angled parking on both sides of the street, and make it one-way.

You'd have to have people to police it, making it one-way.

On the north side of the theater, if that's going to be the primary engine for Downtown, there's no sidewalk there, there's an open ditch. If both of those are fixed, there will be another way to get into the theater.

There's some issues that need to be fixed.

We still have to get them there. We're so far from the highway, that we need to get signage and get people into Downtown.

Moderator: What about parks and recreation? Is there room or a need for integrating parks somehow Downtown?

We do have a sales tax for parks that does not have a sunset clause, so it would be a good idea.

The City Park is in the area, too.

Smithburg.

Those are parks, but they're not recreational. They're more leisure.

We have a very traditional courthouse Square. The courthouse, built in 1868, has a large lawn with trees and benches. It's certainly a nice place.

If you drive by 10 times on the weekend, 4 out of 10 times, you'll see people looking at the names on the brick pavers over there.

We've got some nice green space, but we could use some more.

Face. Lift.

The roughest side of the courthouse Square is the one with the bar and restaurant. The sidewalks are cracked and the pavement is rough. The other 3 sides are fine, but the businesses are on the worst side.

Beautiful buildings, and they should go back to the historically correct...

The courthouse itself and everything out a half block in all directions...

There's a lot of things to facelift.

A lot of those buildings have steps to get up, and they're not very good.

There is a shoe repair place Downtown, and that's good. But that sidewalk... some of the sidewalks are okay, but all the sidewalks could be improved. Make it picturesque.

There's a water drainage issue in what we call Downtown more than what we call uptown.

Moderator: Are there other things about the look and feel of Downtown that you'd want to make key priorities? Other than streets, sidewalks, building faces, and green space?

I don't know about our storm drainage, but the ditches... (unintelligible.)

I think if you're wanting to have people stroll Downtown, you're going to have to have benches and trees, and you'll want it to be nice, clean... so people aren't afraid to go Downtown.

We have period lights in place, through the whole DREAM area, but kind of like uptown Jefferson City does... they keep it up, there's crosswalks, its handicapped accessible.

Another thing too, everything here happens on a Friday or Saturday, but Columbia every Thursday has a section of town shut down and they do entertainment.

(phone call interrupts...)

I think we need to have that picturesque thing on Oak and High Street and all around the Courthouse. Make it strollable.

And higher-income people need to live in some of those apartments.

When you start to clean it up and make it a destination, they'll come.

There might be some businesses...

You've got High Country apartments working with the City, and they've got issues.

It's just blighted.

(many people agreeing.)

I know that takes it out of residential housing, but that's a good place to have something associated with art and wine and cheese... you could have a facility for watching the show before or after, to have a reception maybe.

When we first got the lot down there, more people said they want to see outdoor movies on the side of a building. Now me, I wouldn't do that, but people seem to want it.

They do it in Jeff City. It's huge.

I think the bottom line on the potential has to do with a unique, historical nature of the businesses, buildings, courthouse, houses, governmental buildings. That's where I see the attraction.

You also have some really nice churches.

You'd be surprised how many people come to the courthouse just to look at it.

Moderator: Are there other downtowns that you'd like to see California mimic in one way or the other?

I was in a small town in Tennessee, and I took pictures of it. They sent their traffic through the downtown. They made it a destination. Everything from a gazebo on the courthouse square to little restaurants tucked into the buildings. Their town wasn't any different than ours.

Like Hermann.

But Hermann has something else going. That town in Tennessee, they had antiques and weddings on the Square and bands that would perform in the gazebo, and a very good steakhouse there that was known throughout a couple counties.

Boonville has done very well with their refurbished buildings, that old hotel down there...

I don't know if you've been to downtown Sedalia in the last couple years, but I was very impressed with what they've done.

The pool we have here is an economic engine if we could get it utilized more. Hiring a person to run this. That brings people to town.

The swim leagues.

It's an indoor pool, so it could be utilized in fall and winter, and people would want to eat, maybe shop, maybe buy fuel... that's another engine to bring people in.

California is a bedroom community to Jefferson City, and I have to agree with that statement. We're going to have target little places to eat, little nooks and crannies, and cater to people that are in California. Z Diner has people coming in from Jefferson City. They cater to the bedroom community. We're not going to have an outlet down there... you have to cater to something small. Keep the people wanting to come here and bring their friends from Jefferson City. I like to go to Tipton or somewhere else...

(side conversations... many people agreeing.)

We have a lot of things going for us in California. We just need to improve on it.

Jeff City just lost one of their prominent jewelry stores within the last year, Kaiser's. Times are different.

Moderator: Any other cities?

I love Jeff City's planters. Those big concrete planters, and then they hang them. They have somebody contracted to maintain them. It makes it look lived-in and attractive.

It looks like someone cares.

Trees are hard to grow.

We tried them, and I think we'll probably abandon them. They were wonderful when they were planted.

They grow up and grow old. Like children.

Moderator: Anything else you'd like to suggest?

I think we need to annex to the new highway.

I know in some of the other DREAM communities, they had entrances to the downtown made to help draw attention to it, and I think that would be a good idea.

Washington has done some remarkable things.

I think it would be nice to see a farmer's market.

Washington did that, didn't they?

That would be viable for somewhere in or around there. Get people into town.

Washington uses theirs for a farmer's market and a banquet center.

They have a flea market out in the parking lot on the way to St. Louis... in Wentzville. That is huge. It's like a Wal-Mart parking lot full of stuff on Sunday. They have hundreds of vendors. They had, it was flea market, it was farmer's market, it was... there was just everything there. We spent the biggest part of that day just walking through it.

When this all started, it wasn't as big a thing as it is today, but we need to incorporate the new highway 50. We have nothing out there. We need to have a "Welcome to California" and dress it up, to give somebody the thought to come by.

There's no "California" on 50 at all. It's just "Business 50."

I have talked to MODOT about these issues, and MODOT would like us to give them a letter about what we want as necessary signage.

One of those signs that shows eateries and motels...

They're going to have someone come to California and tell the businesspeople how it happens, and we can make one group invent that wheel.

It needs to be done.

(agreement.)

It needs to be done on every entrance to town.

In the last 2 weeks, I've had 3 people ask about their way around, and they couldn't find it. They missed California. They ended up in Tipton.

(agreement.)

We need to do a wayfaring study.

(agreement.)

I know the Highway 50 is a little outside of our box, but we can go outside of it a little bit.

The signage is going to be necessary Downtown, too.

Yeah.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Thank you very much.

SECTION IV

DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT: LONG-TERM RESIDENTS

Moderator: Tell me a little about your community.

I think it's a very strong religious community.

Very friendly. Receptive.

A go-out-and-get-it community. We've made the community a better place. The ability to take one of those initiatives and implement the plans...

Very family-oriented.

Hard-working.

Lots of volunteers.

Moderator: How has it changed over the years?

Tremendous changes since 27 years ago. They have, one group in particular, California Progress, has really turned a lot of the Downtown area, remodeled it, refurbished it, gone a long way, but even individuals have cleaned up their property tremendously.

We're very agriculturally based, a farm community...

You mentioned California Progress. I'd like to see the enthusiasm that we had going when that thing was going. A lot of people were happy about it.

I think generosity has made these things possible, both monetary and volunteering support to those efforts.

I might add that generosity has gone on for years. They just finished the performing arts center.

As far as changes, our demographics have changed quite a bit. Population has gotten older.

Moderator: Do younger people stay here?

We don't have a lot of industry that would hold the students here. Maybe 20% stay. 80% leave. Is that...?

If they stay, most of them work in Jeff.

We define ourselves as a bedroom community as opposed to an industrial or retail center.

I have no idea how many work in Jeff.

Or Columbia or Tipton. They go all directions.

A few years ago, I was in a meeting of some sort, and about 60% left every day, and it might be a little less now, because a lot of manufacturing jobs are offshore instead of in Jeff City. They're concerned now... (unintelligible.)

For a town our size, we have a library, a swimming pool, parks, school system, they're unique to a town this size, when you compare it to the surrounding communities of similar size.

I think we're really lucky to have the stable employment situation we have with Cargill, Burger's, and Arkansas Valley Feathers, which employs people up and down the line. We do have Hispanics that have come in to work, but there is a level of management, too.

275 to 350 at Burger's.

Cargill runs 400?

5 to 550, not counting a 190-some growers...

How many employees does the school have?

(discussion about how many employees each company might have. Many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Let's talk about shopping. Do people stay here to shop, or go out of town?

Depends on what you're shopping for. Grocery store, we've got 2. Clothing stores, you're going to go to Jeff.

That's one of the downsides of a bedroom community. People that leave and return, sometimes shopping follows that same pattern.

(agreement.)

Moderator: Does everybody do their groceries in town?

We do.

Mostly.

Most anything you need, you can get right here. There are probably some things you can't get here, but...

You can just about find anything.

(agreement.)

We used to have clothing and shoes, and we don't anymore.

I go to the outlet mall out there for shoes and clothes.

They get people from out of town come in.

And that's in California.

You'd be surprised.

(many people talking at once.)

One thing that we're deficient in is we lost our machinery place, and we're one of the only place in this area that doesn't have machinery. We have hardware, but as far as machinery...

(agreement.)

We're one of the few communities that has three car dealers. You don't have to go to Sedalia or Jeff City.

And those are good car dealerships.

Very successful dealerships, too. That's the reason they survived.

Moderator: Is there enough dining in town?

If you're hungry...

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

We do have physicians and insurance companies and banks. I think we're pretty self-sufficient for a small City.

You can have lunch in town, but not dinner.

We're really good on fast food.

(many people talking at once, unintelligible.)

I wish we had a nice sit-down atmosphere place to have dinner, and they've said that for years, but every time it's tried, it's never been successful. It's a question in my mind whether this community would support that kind of restaurant.

I think there's just too many options at Jeff, Columbia, and the Lake. People just want to get away to eat.

(unintelligible...) ... advertising, get all the bugs worked out... they seemed to go by the idea that you make a big grand opening...

Moderator: What about entertainment? Is there entertainment in town?

Not regular entertainment. The historic theatre once a month.

A lot of people sure support our school system and its sports and music activities. That's entertainment.

The nutrition center gets a crowd for their dances and things.

I don't think we have anything for the younger generation, other than sporting events, for kids and young adults.

Moderator: What about families?

I mentioned earlier about religion, and church programs take up a lot of activities.

Kids seem to like the racetrack in the summer.

Moderator: Let's focus on Downtown. Do you think Downtown is moving in a positive or negative direction?

This used to be uptown and downtown, but now since the shopping center out west has opened, Downtown, I call around the Courthouse Square. What are the boundaries?

Moderator: I'm not sure. What do you consider Downtown?

The Square. The railroad came through and created uptown. The shopping center created a third district on Highway 50. Now the highway bypass is a big unknown.

Still see certain businesses Downtown, revitalizing the front and fixing up their property. One of the buildings was torn down. There's activity going on, both positive and negative.

There's plenty of room for improvement.

I think sometimes in a small community like this, it's hard to... think of St. Louis or Kansas City. It's easy to define Downtown. Here, for me, there's... (background microphone noise, unintelligible.)

I know with CPI, with that initiative, we were thinking along the highway and Oak Street and the Square. Our concept was a much broader concept of what the town needed.

Moderator: Do you see positive or negative changes?

I think it's a mix. A lot of it's at a standstill, though.

A lot of other small towns have more retail businesses around the Square, and we have more professional businesses, but not retail to bring people down there.

If you think, all of those businesses are on the Square...But because of the new highway... (unintelligible.)

I saw the map at the other DREAM meeting, and it included uptown. And we have more retail down here.

And I agree that I would like to see the attitude when CPI was organized, the enthusiasm... I think the interest has slipped a little and needs to be revitalized.

To go back to your earlier question, I think generally, we have fewer empty deteriorating buildings than we have in the past. Some are restoring them. And there are fewer empty buildings.

We need to get more people, especially younger people, involved. It's been the very same leaders all this time, and no one else is picking up the slack. CPI has done so much more than anybody ever expected them to do in revitalizing, and they're still at it. The theater project, it's the same people working there day in and day out and supporting them monetarily. We need to get more people involved so no one gets burned out.

Moderator: How do you use your Downtown?

I go there every day.

(laughter.)

If you look at the traffic, it's the courthouse. There's quite a bit of traffic, but it's not retail.

Moderator: Is there any retail at all?

A restaurant.

A tanning place.

2 banks.

An eye doctor.

(many people talking at once.)

Shoe repair.

There does seem to be a lot of activity. Not like New York City... a lot of activity is seeing someone cross the street.

Moderator: What did you used to be able to do Downtown?

Shoe stores.

Shoes, a new suit, anything you needed.

Depends on how far back you go.

(laughter.)

Remember the drugstore?

There's a barbershop down there.

Moderator: If we talked about how user-friendly Downtown is, let's talk about parking. Is there enough?

I think so. There is now, but if you have a situation where you developed a couple retail stores, no, there would not be enough parking. That's probably one of the things that caused it... the shopping center mentality where you drive into a huge lot and the stores are all there.

And we have the restored theatre, and we only have 10 events a year, but when we have that, and the Eagles across the street has a benefit or something, and both parties converge between 5:30 and 7:30, it's very congested. People are parking a long ways away. And in the winter, with snow and rain, it's very inconvenient. Now, _____ is going to have a parking lot between two buildings down there. I don't know how many spaces, but there will be additional parking.

Some of the side streets, the curbs are bad and it makes you leery to park there.

There is another space, but parking between two buildings, you could do it.

Moderator: How are business hours?

I think we've adapted.

One store here, Patty Kay's Gifts, she tried staying open the night the theater was having activity, and she got some traffic through there, but only to eyeball. But maybe people will come back at a later time. She tried that several times. She usually closes at 5.

And the new restaurant will stay open later.

Yeah, until 10:30.

There's no place to eat after the theatre. If you don't eat before you go, you can't eat after.

Moderator: What about signage. Is it easy to find Downtown?

I almost drove by California today!

(laughter.)

I think that's going to be changing. I think we're going to have to address where California is on the new 50. I've driven by it myself.

I see that as a major issue. The Highway 50 business needs to say California. A big sign. And the various food places need to be out there, too, so people know they can turn off.

... one of the things that can be acted on is signage.

We need signage to get people to the courthouse or the museum or the theater or the library. Not only on the highway, but once we get into the community. So people don't have to get out of the car and ask to find their way to something.

Moderator: Do people live Downtown?

There are a few apartments down there.

And there's housing around Downtown.

If we take that broader definition, there's several apartments on Oak Street.

Moderator: Would there be interest in more housing Downtown?

I doubt it.

There's one being built.

I think it's all used up.

Moderator: Let's look to the future of Downtown California. Do you envision your City as a place for visitors or a place for residents?

I think there ought to be more signage, an invitation for people driving by to stop in. The more we can attract to the City, the better it will be.

I think there needs to be a big sign a mile from each intersection telling people what's at each turnoff. Get the fast food places to pay for them and put their information on there.

They have signs for motels and hotels and restaurants, but do they have signs for churches and theaters and stuff?

They have one that says "local attractions."

"Places of interest," that sort of thing.

I don't think they have anything beyond restaurants, service stations, and hotels on the highway signs, but I couldn't agree more about putting up additional signs putting up other assets.

Maybe the City could work with the state.

Do we want people to stop or people to move? I want people to move to California. If I had a strategic plan, I would ask how we get people to move to the community. There was a place in Colorado that tried to get retirees to move to their community. Get your infrastructure and your parks, and get people to say, "This is a community I'd like to live in." Our schools are a big asset, but we could add to it. I like the concept of moving as opposed to stopping.

I think stopping has to come before moving. I think the thing we need more than anything right now is a major destination type intersection out on 50. We're getting more truck traffic, and there's no place to park your truck. A truck stop would be great. I think a major intersection would give us sales tax revenue. Stores, food service, a truck stop, that sort of thing. Taco Bell and that type of stuff. From there, then people would come into town. I think this could be a real asset to bring activity in.

There are no truck stops anywhere on the way to Kansas City.

That's what I mean.

Since the CPI days, _____ was the inspiration for CPI, and I don't think we could do now what we did, because I don't think we have the City fathers.

That's where the enthusiasm comes in. And the other thing... a lot more money goes to Jeff City and Columbia than back into California. Medical is all in Jeff City, shopping centers, big box stores, entertainment, food service... If we just get each family in town to spend \$50 more here a month here rather than out of town, it would make a big difference. Just one more tank of gas here instead of somewhere else, or one grocery trip. I think a lot of folks don't realize what they're doing when they spend money filling gas in Jeff rather than here. Those are the kind of things we could promote.

I think this discussion of how to adapt to the new highway, that's a key thing to be address. Boonville had a few entrepreneurs that moved their business closer to the highway, and when they finally figured out how to relate to the highway, they made some progress.

Signage, development...

And then you've got a magnet that will pull California out this way.

(agreement.)

When we're traveling and see the words "historic district" on the highway, we want to drive in and see it.

We talk about the same people doing the same thing, and 20 years ago, they were talking about how do we rejuvenate our community. Those were older people, but that group was saying, "that's just a bunch of young people." I have more confidence. We do have a group of young people that want to do this. I know there are some groups... the theater board, for example. We've got 3 or 4 young ones, and I'm quite impressed at the young people on the committees.

Those young ones are the ones coming up with the ideas, and old folks are saying, "well, I don't know." We shouldn't say, "Those young people, they're just not interested." Maybe they need for us to stand back and get out of the way.

I wasn't knocking the younger people. I can think of a dozen or so who are, for us, quite young. They're really gung-ho and doing a good job. Do you think they're afraid they're butting in on something that other people have done?

They just need to be invited. They'll take part.

There are some young people in this community who are outstanding.

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

Gas station.

We used to have one down there.

Casey's out on the highway closed, but this one has thrived. I think we could add one on Highway 87.

They're getting ready to build a new jail on the town Square, so that's coming up.

(noise, unintelligible...)

I'm hoping that we can make it look like the façade that will blend in the Downtown historical area, so it won't look like a box. I'd turn to _____ and ask what kind of money he'd loan me. If somebody's got an idea, that's great, but I don't know if I'd loan the money for a retail store.

It's difficult to say what kind of business you'd want right now. There is an economic development group, isn't there?

County. Yeah.

Is it very active?

I think they meet regularly.

There was a board from the City that was very active 20 years ago, and several of us were on that board, and we acquired some businesses, and that was a plus. If we'd have an active economic development group, we might be better able to tell you what kinds of businesses we'd like to see Downtown... to tear down buildings and put up new ones. I'm not sure if that's how you'd want to go, but that's an option. There's businesses that would fit in an office building or a building Downtown that we may not know about.

Whenever I was on there, we had 2 businesses that moved to California, and the lack of a 4-lane highway was the liability. They wanted to be closer to 70. Maybe the 4-lane highway would be an asset to bringing in industry. We have a lot of room in our industrial park, plus the smaller one. About 29 acres that borders old Highway 50 that would be good... we need the support structure, but it is a place where we could certainly expand.

Another place that might be an opportunity is where they put the new well.

Moderator: *Specifically Downtown, are there businesses that you think could be supported?*

A unique restaurant.

A nice antique shop.

A combination coffee shop and tea room.

Bookstore.

Used bookstore.

I see Downtown as being the entire retail community. I think it would be hard to develop just the Square "Downtown," but I think it's going to have to encompass the surrounding area. Give people a chance to come through town. It's going to have to be a convenient intersection to bring them Downtown... (mumbling, unintelligible.) We've got a lot of good, hard-working people, but there's also a lot of absentee ownership... there are convenience stores and food service people that are owned elsewhere. They're benefiting, but they won't support the community. We need to have City fathers who live here and care about the place... this is the real issue we're battling.

Moderator: *Is there anything you'd change about the way Downtown looks?*

It looks pretty good. Historical preservation and restoration, an awful lot of that needs to be done. We haven't mentioned that the festival brings a lot of people in as well.

City's that have planters and hanging baskets, something that makes you say, "oh, I must be Downtown," or "this is somewhere I want to be."

The renovations that have been done are very nice.

Moderator: *Have you been to other downtowns that you'd like to see California emulate?*

We've been checking out some of the DREAM cities.

Did you see anything that really jumped out at you?

I can't tell you right now.

What are some of the others?

Hannibal and Sedalia...

I think most properties in town are well-maintained, but I think we have some ordinances on the books that can take care of a few properties that are being neglected or are junky. I think the ordinances are already in place, a select few, but it only takes one.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

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SECTION V

DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT: NEWER RESIDENTS

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

I would say that we are a small, rural community with a very good high school, several churches. We're close to Columbia and Jeff City. We've got a 4-lane highway now. We're centrally located to a lot of shopping, sports, the Lake...

It's a diversified community as far as employment. State workers, farmers, the smokehouse, Cargill, and a lot of small businesses.

But it stays rural. It is a rural community.

We liked it when we saw it because it's a small town but everything we need is here. Groceries, medicine... we don't need to go to Jeff City to go get what we need. It's large enough but small enough.

It has a wonderful spirit of volunteerism. Many organizations like Kiwanis and Lions and other groups like that. Cost-wise, it's not as costly as Columbia or Jeff City. We've seen a 4 or 5-fold spike since Katrina of economically challenged people.

As a car deal manager, one of the very few GMs that ever lived in California... most of the others lived to Jeff City. The number one thing I like is that it's a comfortable place to live and a good place to raise kids. The high school provides all the opportunities for college, and the class size is perfect, and they feel secure and safe.

My wife and I moved here. I practice law, and I practice school law, and this seemed like a good alternative to Jefferson City. A high quality school and a low cost of living where we could purchase a little land.

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

I don't think it's going in a direction. I think it's a matter of reacting to situations. We remember revitalized downtowns, and we don't have them, but you're here. In that sense, we're moving in the right direction. We can put as many businesses as we want Downtown, but unless people support them, they're gone. The hardware store and the little drugstore where the kids went after school... anyway, that's gone. Ben Franklin's gone.

The shoe store.

There's no way on earth anyone can compete with buy one get one less at Payless in Jeff City. The new 4-lane is a plus but also a minus.

But people can also get from Jeff City can get here easier.

When we found California Manufacturing, you go in there, and when we found that place, they got name brand shoes, very good quality... we're big believers in supporting the community. You might have to pay a little bit more for hardware, but by the time you pay for gas, it works out. I heard that people don't like to support local business because people don't want to see someone succeed more financially than they do, which I think is ridiculous. I can't believe people even think that way. It brings tax revenue. You can't buy a dress or a suit in this town, but we should be self-sufficient. In that way, we're going in the wrong direction.

I don't know how cognizant people would be of this fact, but according to one of our judges in town, our county has the lowest crime rate for teenagers per capita in Missouri. We have problems like anyone else, but there are a good number of influences that feed into that good resolve. It's something to be thankful for.

The school plays a major role there. There's enough to do at that school that parents will never see their kids.

(laughter.)

Even young people are very busy, and kudos to the school system. I think it would be nice if we had a place for some of the young people to hang out.

Haven't we tried that?

I will say how many churches have added gyms and fellowship halls that accommodate youngsters to play basketball together.

I grew up in Versailles, and I understand the struggles of a small community. Then I moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, and I knew I wanted to go back to a small town. I grew up coming to California, and I always admired the historic buildings, and I watched Versailles go through the same thing. I was part of a focus group there, and it's a struggle to find specialty businesses, but they can pull tourist-type people. It's very hard to provide everyday things like shoes and pet stores, but to focus on more tourist-type businesses. I think California's a natural with the beautiful businesses.

Moderator: What dining and entertainment options are there for you?

I take people out in California. There's enough restaurants to feed the entire town, whether you want a diner or a burger or fast food. We've tried fancy restaurants and they've lasted a little while, but if you want fancy, you go to Columbia or St. Louis or Kansas City. As far as a nice place for family, though...

They opened Derringer's Downtown, and it's really nice.

Yes. It's nice. We used to go to the Mexican restaurant, because you could get dinner and a cocktail...now we have Derringer's back, which has steak, pasta, and pizza right next to the bar. But they have not advertised that they're even open, but they're open 4-9, and they do a nice dinner. I think opening the Finke has started some entertainment in the town, and the Mexican restaurant would be nice so you could go to dinner and a show. Maybe we need a couple fancier restaurants.

There's a lack of promotion in the newspaper. It lacks promoting California.

If only people from California go to these places, they won't make it, but if people come from elsewhere...

Moderator: Thinking of Downtown in particular, why do people come Downtown?

The bank.

The courthouse, the VFW meeting, get a haircut.

Only men's haircuts.

The Ham and Turkey festival and the theater.

Casey's is the closest place to get out and get something...

Remember when Novak's station was located Downtown.

A quick-shop would be nice.

They've tried groceries and clothing stores Downtown. Creative Awards is the only one that's lasted.

And they're a real specialty business.

Instead of going to Jeff to get awards and trophies... we do support that around here. A lot of organizations, we make sure we go there for our stuff.

From a retail standpoint, the Internet is... you can order online and have stuff shipped. It's hurt the small towns.

But it's hurt the big towns as well.

Some of those businesses in town may be dealing over the Internet, though.

I know there was a music shop where the bakery was for a little while, next to Central Bank, and there was an antique shop in there... but the music shop had a good Internet business, and they still couldn't make it.

When we moved here the 2nd time, and our kids were older in the school, I think Californians are very trusting. People would show up and just drop their kids off, and they'd never met us before. It was very interesting. I come from an even smaller town in Southeast Missouri. It was very interesting. You send out invitations to 20 people, and 27 kids show up, and the parents drive away. And we're outside the City limits. I thought that was interesting. That says something about the culture of the people here.

One of the metaphors I've heard, people often say that California is a town in a bubble. Elements of Mayberry, locked into the old days of the 50's, and that trust thing is an interesting element. It assumes that there is a core thing to trust, like the Golden Rule. Almost like you have to pass some kind of test before you live here.

That has eased up, but that is definitely California, Missouri. My wife lived here one year and swore she'd never set foot here again, and I drug her back here, and it was a whole different thing. For my first 5 years, anyone over 50 knew me as _____'s boy, and we've gotten away from that direction where everyone knows everyone. If you want a really cold town, go to Jefferson City.

I've lived in St. Louis, and we didn't do that there.

If you grow up in a small town, you do trust everybody. When I lived in the big City and Columbia, I locked everything. I didn't do that in Versailles. You can't trust, and I was unaware of that before. To me, I think it's cool.

It's a real charm, a real draw for me.

To me, I think the people in California have been open and friendly and welcoming. Much more than Versailles.

Thinking as an optimist, I think California's doing pretty good for a smaller town. Even though there are some empty buildings, there are much worse out there, because of the jobs that moved away. Thank goodness there are some large employers here.

I was on my way through Oklahoma, and my wife wanted to stop, and we got off the interstate, and once we got Downtown in this town, there were art galleries and antique shops and things like that. It was really neat. She went window shopping, and it was way off the highway, but they were doing quite well.

People are looking for destinations for day trips and things like that. And maybe if there were lofts Downtown and it felt more alive, people would be drawn there, and restaurants and specialty shops...

When you go to Hermann, you go because of the wineries, but they support all the other businesses. The hospital that's for sale, you could make it a winery and bed and breakfast. Then you could have other businesses they could walk to, to restaurants, to a bar, to Burgher Haus, to specialty shops. We need to have little stores do well, and to do that, we need a winery or something that would draw people.

Moderator: How user-friendly is Downtown? How easy is it to find and get around if you're not familiar with the area?

Yeah, it's easy to find.

The town is hard to find, though. There's been multiple occasions where people are showing up late for court because they've passed the area. Some signage, some interesting signage, would add to the charm and help people find it.

I concur.

I know the sign, it's a great sign showing the courthouse on the old 50, but I never see it.

It's down.

I never saw it when it was up.

As I was swimming, I was talking to 3 people from Jeff City, and all 3 had missed California.

I have not noticed any reduction in traffic on Buchanan.

Oh, I have. I'm so happy.

Maybe the big trucks.

I work in Sedalia. I have not been on the new super-duper highway. I go out like I always did, so I can go to work... I did the new way once, and it added 5 miles to my trip. I've noticed a bunch more cars up there... we need some signs out west and out east. Luckily I know where the turnoff is.

Signs help. However, I thought when they used the California state example of the signs, I thought we could do better.

I know the City said they're not going to move the brick ones, but what about that one sign out by the wood place.

The palm trees?

Yeah.

It doesn't capture what's here.

It's terrible.

The brick ones, if we could build new brick ones... there used to be one south and one north.

I think if it was informative and aesthetically nice and had a beckoning subliminal invitation to it... if we could do 3 in 1.

Needs to show more of the Mayberry side of it than the palm tree side of it.

It wasn't as bad as Lamont.

Rascal Flatts has a song called Mayberry.

(discussion about the definitions of “uptown” and “downtown” and boundaries of the DREAM district.)

And that’s another thought... Amtrak used to stop out here and they don’t anymore. The train should still stop. Then people from KC, Jeff City, St. Louis, could come out. There’d be a little hotel, antique shops, restaurants, art museums...

Moderator: What about parking? Is there enough, and is it convenient?

There’s plenty of parking.

You get more people and it might be a problem.

We park parallel instead of angling in.

Sometimes when the Finke Theater’s operating, there’s a parking challenge.

But you’ve got the Commerce parking lot and the Eagles.

Where they tore that building down, wasn’t that going to be a lot?

The farthest in one direction that anyone will ever park is 3 blocks. I think if you’re going to have a parking problem, it’s when there’s a parade or a festival or a football game. The whole town is there. So, I mean, when you take 4500 people and you put their cars there...

For football, there’s no way to get more parking in that area.

Those are the... from a guy driving in looking for a parking spot every day, you can find one.

Moderator: How are business hours? Are they convenient?

I think so.

I’m going to expand on a previous point, but we’ve got a strong City government, and they work very well with the residents of the City, and I think that gives a lot of the residents security to know that they’ve got electric and street and whatever’s needed.

(agreement.)

Business hours... I don’t really think there are any businesses besides Derringers that stays open past 5 or 6. It’s like a ghost town at 8. It’s desolate.

You’re Downtown. There haven’t been any businesses down there...

We don't have any businesses, so who cares what the hours are. We don't really have... what do you want open later? The barbershop?

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

Hecht's is gone. And the horse and the window and the big drawing thing. You can't even see in those buildings anymore.

Is that where the feather factory is?

Until there's an anchor down there, it seems like it's going to be contagious.

But where is there a place? I walk down there quite a bit. Once you build the new jail... you've got the restaurant, the bar, the tanning place, the two banks, the courthouse... there's only one or two places that even look like a shop.

I think there's a vacant lot behind the courthouse for the jail, but they're rehabbing the area on the east side. But like Hermann, they take houses and turn them into stores.

Old Town St. Charles does a good job of that.

The eye doctor has the entire block. There's room for 4 stores in that building. And the VFW is not going to be there that much longer. We've sold our half of the building, and there's room for 4 stores in that area.

Can you imagine the challenge of a retailer going in an area like that? There would have to be some sort of incentives.

I think that's where your DREAM money comes in, to help these people build and remodel these places. And maybe the City needs a tax incentive.

(agreement.)

As a City, you've got to let it be known that we're looking for retailers and we're giving a tax break.

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

I serve on the fair board, and we have a wonderful fair here, and we do advertising on the radio and the newspaper here.

When we moved here, it was the California Democrat, and that's how we learned.

And the big Ham and Turkey festival...

How do you tell people in Jeff City?

That's how they found out. They saw the pig and Turkey...

They were sitting next to someone from California.

Channel 8 promotes, and 12, and 17...

Channel 13 will go out of its way not to talk about California.

(agreement.)

But 17 actually mentions us... but people find out, it's that Mayberry thing.

The grapevine.

But people from the outside...

They don't know about as much as we'd like them to know.

But there's tradition, and it's in the word of mouth, but you can always improve, and that will ebb and flow...

Do we put our festivals on the Internet?

The fair is.

We need to expand to the County, not just California. We know what's going on in Tipton and Jamestown, and they know what's going on here. I don't consider them outsiders.

One needs to look at the Chamber website, because everybody deals with the Internet.

I'm from Western New York, and I was looking for a place near Jeff City, and I didn't know a lot about California from the Internet. And I wasn't all that impressed after coming in from the east.

Those corridors are so important for first impressions.

(agreement.)

The people that live here, they'll be coming in from the new highway.

Moderator: Let's look to the future of Downtown. What other sorts of businesses would be a good fit for California.

Specialty shops. Ice cream store, bakery.

Bookstore.

A bookstore is not going to work anywhere.

With the Internet.

The day of the book is rapidly disappearing.

We've got a nice library.

Until there's some draw, none of those things are going to work.

We need an anchor place, but you've got to have 2 strong arms.

Look at Arrow Rock. There's not a lot there, but they've got the theater and the historic tours, and people like going to walk around and some shops and some restaurants. They've done very well.

If you cultivated wholesome arts... we have a tradition of good musicals, good plays, and that would keep young people developing skills and confidence.

Moderator: What about entertainment? What would be a good fit?

If you're going to bring dining in, we have plenty of diners. We need more dinner places. Mexican, Italian, steak. And they were talking about showing movies at the Finke, and then if you had teen night Fridays, your teens could go there.

From when school starts to when school ends, you're not going to have anyone going on Friday nights. The nights are booked.

And that was the problem with the Ritz Theater. The problem is the way movies are distributed. They would not distribute them to him.

I live next to a town, and I remember when they were \$2 in Poplar Bluff. And now it's \$8. I would love to have a movie theater here. And we've lost the movie rental place.

Let me come at it a different angle, even if it's a bad idea. When they had the analysis of 9-11, they talked about a lack of creativity. Is there a place where you could have a building that might house something that would involve young people in the summer? And you could have any number of things...it could be a leadership seminar...

There's a healthy patriotism without nationalism.

(agreement.)

A blend of things...

But that wouldn't be a business.

(unintelligible.)

It would be good for young people. Something that would be a leadership seminar.

Moderator: What are the priorities for the look and feel of Downtown?

We'd have to get rid of the apartments down there.

The downstairs apartments, you mean.

Yeah. We don't have enough businesses to do this.

In the uptown, there's some vacant dead space, and one of them is hopeless. It looks like the building's caving in.

Some of those things need to be looked at.

Just our buildings, at the start. We went to a party, and a lady was complaining that she wanted to open a business, and she said it's already owned. I said, "the Mexican restaurant's for sale." And not a lot of other people can...

(many people talking at once.)

People are feeling like they can't be successful.

There's no community that's not already owned, though.

Right. And the Mexican restaurant's for sale if you want to own something.

Every year, there's a list of the top 50 places to live in the country. One year, Green Bay was on that list, and in the 1980's, they had almost free sitting to give a facelift to much of the City. Something like that was a big little thing for Green By.

Some of our newer people talked about how impressed they were...unifying the architecture.

I notice on Oak Street, those are kind of transition facades. They don't blend with the historic area. I think the City all is fantastic, and it's just beautiful. All the gardening... it's special. If more effort were made on these corridors, it would be great. I think those facades, if there were a way to set a standard and have a review board and maybe hire an architectural firm; it's going to have to happen that way.

And a lot of towns do that. They set the guidelines.

Because California has a lot of beautiful buildings that need to be restored.

There needs to be some incentive.

But that's the DREAM money.

And if it's struggling or they don't care, you can't let them remain an ugly-looking spot.

Moderator: Have you seen other downtowns that you would like California to resemble?

We took a little field trip to Fulton, and they have a several block area with neat street lights and historically correct buildings. Sedalia's done a really good job.

How is Fulton doing?

They have restaurants, services like attorney's offices.

A couple small dress shops. A neat furniture store.

Specialty furniture.

You would think that close to Columbia...

But it's a college town.

But your college kids aren't going to go...

But the parents will go.

You're selling kids short. You're selling college kids short.

They really started catering to the college kids. Before, they ignored them. But now, they got things like coffee shops and pubs and it does well. You go to Fulton at night, and that district is thriving, because of college kids.

Turn the hospital into a junior college.

Or a satellite of the college.

Or an organized home school. I'm not saying California High School is a problem, but I think a quality home school environment would make it. You'd get people from Jeff City.

And that building's already there. And the home schooling, there's your...

But would it be home schooling?

Or a private school. I do not agree with the theology of the school where my granddaughters go, but their education is solid. They're actually learning something.

That's your best thought. You bring more people in. And you have the building.

But that building's in lousy condition.

(disagreement.)

I like Deadwood, South Dakota.

Hermann.

(many people talking at once.)

It was amazing, the change. There were restaurants and all that.

I think Boonville's great. They had lots of neat little old-time restaurants and pubs and shops.

That old hotel's got a nice restaurant.

But do you think they survived because of the casino?

They got creative about bringing industry in there. It happened to be the casino.

We don't have a casino or a winery or brewery. Hermann does well because of the wineries, and Boonville does well because of the casinos. We'd have to bring in something.

What's Arrow Rock's draw?

The Lyceum.

It's the historical significance that drew Lyceum.

When Interstate 70 came in, Boonville thought they were going to fold in, and they got the casino and industry. I think when the highway moves south, a lot of businesses think they're going to close their doors. They just have that in their mind that it's going to kill their business. We've got to educate them differently.

Moderator: Thank you very much.