

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

FINAL SURVEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

CITY OF KENNETT, MISSOURI

May 7, 2007



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City of Kennett

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



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SECTION I

FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted two focus groups in Kennett, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the Kennett community in regard to the downtown area. The two groups included individuals representing city residents, Chamber of Commerce, city government, and building owners.

Participants of each group were from a variety of backgrounds, and all had an interest in downtown revitalization.

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

A. Questions Posed to Building Owners

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

General Questions about Kennett

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

Downtown Specific Questions

04. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Kennett is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?
05. Why did you choose to locate your business or make an investment in property downtown (or not in downtown, for other business/property owners)?

06. From what you hear from your customers, how “user-friendly” is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they’re looking for?

07. How do you communicate to your customers about information about what’s going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation) or with your own business? How would you like to be communicated with regarding what is going on downtown from the City of Kennett?

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

08. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Kennett. We’d like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...

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

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

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

10. Of all the potential improvements we’ve just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the city?

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

12. Would you be willing to support a “special business district” in which an additional sales tax would be collected that would provide services specifically for downtown?

B. Questions Posed to the City Residents, Chamber, and City Government Group:

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

General Questions about Kennett

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

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

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

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

Downtown Specific Questions

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

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

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

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

09. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Kennett. We’d like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...

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

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

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

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

12. What other downtowns in the area would you say Kennett's is most like? What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* it to resemble?

C. The Kennett Area

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

The participants described Kennett as a safe, friendly, family-oriented community in Southeast Missouri. Kennett is an easy distance from Memphis, Tennessee, and within a day's drive from St. Louis, Kansas City, New Orleans, Chicago, and Atlanta.

The focus group participants had mixed feelings about the direction that Kennett is moving. Some were overwhelmingly positive, stating that Kennett's downtown revitalization and plans for repairs are moving Kennett in the right direction. They also felt that highway expansion of 412 is positive for Kennett, drawing more people through the town and giving drivers easier access to Kennett from Interstate 55. Some participants cited the new aquatic center, saying that it brings more people downtown and is evidence of the beginning of this downtown revitalization.

Those who were did not feel that Kennett is moving in a positive direction felt this way for two reasons: 1) they were skeptical because they have not seen as much progress as they hoped for within the last few years, and 2) they compared Kennett to its past, 40 or more years ago, and feel that, in comparison, downtown Kennett has gone in the wrong direction since then. These participants, however, did admit that if some of the changes promised—such as removing awnings, repairing sidewalks, and working on parking—were carried out, then Kennett would begin to move in the right direction.

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

Residents do a lot of their shopping in Kennett, at the Wal-Mart and the strip centers on the edge of town. They do their grocery shopping in town, as well. Many go to Jonesboro, Arkansas or Memphis, Tennessee for a wider selection of shopping options.

Some residents do shop downtown, since there are a number of stores in Historic Downtown Kennett, such as a clothing store and a drugstore. However, many residents who would like to shop downtown find business hours inconvenient, and therefore do not shop in the historic Square as much as they would like.

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?

Kennett does have a number of restaurants, including “mom-and-pop” type restaurants, Mexican restaurants, Chinese restaurants, an Italian restaurant, a barbecue place, and the country club. Residents take visitors to these restaurants, but it is also not unusual for them to take a trip to Memphis for shopping and dining.

For entertainment, the recreation options are various, and there is a theater group in downtown Kennett, as well a bowling alley and a movie theater in town, but the residents also felt that more varied entertainment options would be beneficial to Kennett.

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

The participants felt that there are many recreation options in Kennett for all ages, at the parks, at the high school, and at the country club. The parks, as they described them, are excellent, and there are a number of them. Recreation options in Kennett include softball fields, baseball fields, soccer fields, a football field, a track, tennis courts, a golf course, camping grounds, and the new Sheryl Crow Aquatic Center. They also mentioned the library, which does not provide outdoor recreation, but provides a balance of interesting activities for children who prefer books to sports.

D. Downtown Kennett: Describing the Present

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

Most participants felt that downtown Kennett is moving in the right direction, with the revitalization efforts, the new highway expansion, and the new Aquatic Center. A few participants were skeptical, though, and felt that downtown was not progressing as fast as they had hoped, and that the current downtown is, according to one participant, “decrepit.” Most of the participants, however, stated that progress is happening slowly, but that change cannot happen overnight, and they are optimistic about the potential downtown.

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

The building owners and business owners chose the downtown area, in some cases, decades ago, when the downtown was thriving. Those who bought buildings recently chose them for their beauty, and felt a strong desire to be located downtown.

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

As the county seat, downtown Kennett has the county courthouse, as well as the license bureau and other official business. Kennett residents visit downtown primarily for these types of services or for business purposes. Secondarily, some visit downtown for shopping, but cite inconvenient business hours as a hindrance to doing more shopping in the downtown Square.

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 groups felt that downtown is not as “user-friendly” as it could be for a variety of reasons: business hours, parking, the streets and sidewalks, and signage.

The business hours are primarily 8:00-5:00 or 9:00-5:00 on weekdays, making it difficult for working residents to come downtown for business or shopping if they do not already work downtown. While some businesses, like the license bureau, are necessities for which people will take time out of their jobs, the businesses that are optional, such as shops, are difficult for residents to access because of their business hours.

The parking, the participants felt, is not in itself inconvenient, since there is plenty of parking downtown. The problem, according to these groups, is that business owners, business employees, and courthouse employees often take all of the street parking, making it difficult for residents and visitors who may not know where the parking lots are located. They felt that parking is a high priority, and that if there is a way to ensure that business owners and downtown employees park in certain lots rather than on the street, the businesses would become much more accessible for customers. Suggestions included having businesses and the courthouse require employees to park in lots rather than on the street, and making street parking two-hour parking.

The streets and sidewalks, according to the groups, are an issue. The sidewalks and streets are uneven, making it difficult for anyone to walk around, and making it particularly difficult for people on bicycles, in wheelchairs, with crutches or walkers, or pushing strollers. These were a high priority in making downtown more “user-friendly.”

Signage was an issue, as well. The participants stated that there is not sufficient signage, and that the awnings currently up throughout downtown make it difficult for people to find the businesses they are looking for. There is an effort under way currently to take down all the awnings, but even once the awnings are down, signage will, according to the groups, need to be addressed. Signage bringing people downtown and signage within downtown are both important elements in increasing the user-friendliness of downtown Kennett.

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

Local residents get information by word of mouth, the newspaper, the radio, or the local cable channel. They feel well informed about downtown events and entertainment.

E. Downtown Kennett: Looking to the Future

As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Kennett. 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 groups expressed that, currently, the downtown square does not have all that many vacancies, which they viewed as a positive thing, but they did have suggestions for additional businesses. They felt that adding more restaurants is a priority, and suggested Italian food, as well as some outdoor dining. For shops, they suggested specialty stores, a sporting goods store, and more clothing options. They felt that specialty stores would serve a different market and sell different goods than Wal-Mart, and therefore would not have to compete as heavily with Wal-Mart. For recreation, some participants suggested interesting options for families and children, such as a skating rink, paintball, laser tag, or a rock-climbing wall.

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?

Renovations, upgrades, repairs, and beautification were overwhelming concerns for both groups, and were brought up as being of the highest priority. Some participants suggested that repairs and beautification would make downtown more enticing to businesses considering a move to the Square, and would make more customers want to come downtown.

In discussing repairs, the groups felt that street and sidewalk repair should be among the first things that the city addresses. They also mentioned the possibility of a revolving loan fund to help building owners repair and renovate their buildings.

Beautification, both in adding greenery and in cleaning up the downtown, was mentioned many times by participants. They felt that the downtown area should have more greenery, flowers, and trees, as well as more places for people to sit outside. They also unanimously felt that the awnings around downtown should be torn down, since the, according to one participant, give the downtown a "cavelike" feeling. Some participants brought up trash as a problem in the downtown area, and others brought up building repair as an aesthetic concern overall, since "eyesore" buildings can give the entire downtown and unfinished look.

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

City residents, Chamber, and city government representatives all felt that a high priority is to give citizens and business owners a shared vision, and to have everyone working together toward a single plan. Creating this cooperation was the highest priority for this group, and the members were in consensus about it.

Building owners mentioned the following things as their highest priorities: a shared vision that brings people together toward a common goal (much like the other group's priority), a parking plan, beautification, aesthetics, "cleaning up" the downtown area, and attracting new businesses and residents downtown.

General Public: What other downtowns in the area would you say Kennett's is most like? What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* it to resemble?

Both groups most often used Jonesboro, Arkansas as an example of a community that has revitalized its downtown, and mentioned many changes in Jonesboro, in the user-friendliness, the aesthetics, and the variety of shops and restaurants.

Another nearby community that some participants mentioned is West Plains, Missouri, which they felt gave a realistic picture of what Kennett's downtown is capable of. As West Plains is also a small community, and one that has undergone recent revitalization, the participants felt that it could be used as a model.

Other downtowns that the participants mentioned as admirable or as examples of successful revitalization efforts included: Springfield, Missouri; Cape Girardeau, Missouri; St. Louis, Missouri; Columbia, Missouri; and Clinton, Missouri.

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

The building owners group felt that the city could continue to work on beautifying downtown and making it more user-friendly, which would bring in more customers and other businesses, revitalizing the area.

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 downtown building owners focus group stated that they would not be willing to support an additional sales tax for the "business district," because they fear it would drive away potential customers, especially Kennett residents.

F. Key Points

Key points about the Kennett area:

- ◆ Kennett is a safe, friendly, family-oriented community that is within easy driving distance of a number of major cities.
- ◆ Some participants felt the Kennett is moving in the right direction, citing downtown revitalization, the highway expansion, and aquatic center; a few participants felt that Kennett is not yet moving in the right direction, stating that progress seems slow.
- ◆ Residents shop primarily at the Kennett Wal-Mart, the strip centers on the edge of town, and grocery stores in town. They also sometimes shop in the downtown Square, and sometimes travel to Memphis, Tennessee or Jonesboro, Arkansas for shopping.
- ◆ Kennett has a variety of restaurants, including ethnic foods such as Mexican and Chinese.
- ◆ Residents do sometimes travel with their visitors to Memphis for dining options.
- ◆ Entertainment options include music, a movie theater, a theater group, and a bowling alley.
- ◆ There are various recreation options at the parks, the high school, the country club, and the new Sheryl Crow Aquatic Center, including sports of all kinds. The participants also mentioned the library as an option for those who prefer reading to outdoor recreation.

Key points about downtown Kennett in the present:

- ◆ Most participants felt that downtown Kennett is moving in the right direction, with the revitalization efforts, the new highway expansion, and the new Aquatic Center.
- ◆ A few participants felt the downtown is not moving quickly enough in the right direction, and expressed concern about the “slow progress.”
- ◆ Building owners and business owners chose the downtown area decades ago, when the downtown was thriving, and more recently for the beauty of the buildings and a desire to be downtown.

- ◆ Participants felt that downtown is not as “user-friendly” as it could be because of business hours, parking, the streets and sidewalks, and signage.
- ◆ 9:00 to 5:00 business hours make it difficult for local residents who work outside of downtown to patronize downtown businesses.
- ◆ There is plenty of parking, but since employees and business owners often take up the street parking spots, there is a perceived parking problem, since customers are not as familiar with the parking lots and would often prefer not to walk that far.
- ◆ The streets and sidewalks, according to the participants, are currently uneven and need to be redone in order to make downtown more user-friendly.
- ◆ More and clearer signage would make downtown easier to navigate.
- ◆ Local residents get information about downtown events and businesses by word of mouth, the newspaper, the radio, or the local cable channel.

Key points about the future of downtown Kennett:

- ◆ For downtown businesses that they would like to see, the participants mentioned an Italian restaurant, a larger variety of restaurants, outdoor dining options, a clothing store, a sporting goods store, more specialty shops, and a recreation option such as a skating rink.
- ◆ Repairs and beautification would make downtown more enticing to businesses considering a move to the Square, and would make more customers want to come downtown.
- ◆ Street and sidewalk repair should be, according to the participants, among the first things that the city addresses.
- ◆ The downtown area should have more greenery, flowers, and trees, as well as more places for people to sit outside, and the awnings should be torn down.
- ◆ Building repair is both a structural and an aesthetic concern, since some buildings in the downtown area are, according to participants, “eyesores.”
- ◆ The participants were in consensus that the highest priority was to give citizens and business owners a shared vision, and to have everyone working together toward a single plan.

- ◆ A parking plan, beautification and aesthetics, “cleaning up” the downtown, and attracting more businesses were among the other priorities.
- ◆ Jonesboro, Arkansas and West Plains, Missouri provide good examples of downtown revitalizations; the participants admired both these towns’ efforts and felt that Kennett could learn from these towns.
- ◆ Other admirable revitalization efforts that the groups mentioned, in Missouri, were Springfield, downtown St. Louis, Cape Girardeau, Columbia, and Clinton.
- ◆ Beautification and an improvement in “user-friendliness” are the two things that would most significantly help downtown businesses.
- ◆ Business and building owners would not be willing to support an additional sales tax for the “business district,” because they fear it would drive away potential customers.

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SECTION II

DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT: CITY RESIDENTS, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, AND CITY GOVERNMENT

Scott Tudor, been in Kennett about 45 years, way on the west side of this corridor. Also, I work for the City of Kennett Fire Marshal.

I'm his wife, Cindy Tudor, and I've been in Kennett since about 1980, and I'm a retired nurse.

I'm Karen van de Burg, I work for a land and title company, and I've been in Kennett since 1970.

Jan Macrette, and I'm the director of the Chamber of Commerce. I've been the resident of the area for 50 years. And we did the DREAM application.

I'm Roger Wheeler, mayor of Kennett, lived here since 1969.

[others joined as the group progressed]

Moderator: Thanks again for speaking with us tonight. To begin, I wanted to ask you to talk just a little in general about Kennett. We're based in St. Louis, and this is my first time here, so if you were describing this town to someone like me or someone who was thinking of moving here, how would you describe Kennett?

Well, we have all the advantages of access to metro areas without having to have the daily hassle of metro lifestyle. We are within a day's drive of the Gulf of Mexico, you can get to Biloxi or Gulf Shores, New Orleans in a day's drive. You can get to Kansas City or Dallas or Nashville or Atlanta, and so we have a very good central location, we have a southern lifestyle, a little slower pace here, and it's a comfort to know—a lot of time, our teachers, firefighters, policemen, city officials—that these people are people we know, we grew up with them. We know their kids or their parents... so that's a really comfortable thing, especially in today's climate, with crime and all the things that are going on. We have our problems. It's not that we're not without them... we're not a culturally diverse community, but when there is a need, everybody does work together to address that. We have a good workforce, good education system... it's consistently improving. The citizens are working toward a better quality of life. We do have some recreation. A lot of things for kids, sports activities, swimming pool, of course the library, the museum... very good, strong civic clubs, a lot of churches, good community in that way. We just now have a new industry, and highway 412 is getting ready to be finished, which is bringing more business into Kennett, more traffic.

Kennett seems very family-oriented. I think socially, the social life revolves around our children's activities, and like you said, there's a lot of activities for children, a lot of opportunities there. Sports and music and, you know, a little theater group that's downtown.

Let me put it this way. I was born and raised in Michigan, but I go visit Michigan now and come home to Kennett. I love Kennett. I made a statement recently that if I move again, they're going to have to pick me up and move me lock, stock, and barrel. Andy Moore, who works out at McDaniel, came in the office today, and I said, "I hope you're not after me." McDaniel is a funeral home.

Moderator: If you had to say, would you say that Kennett is going in the right direction or the wrong direction?

The right direction.

Absolutely.

Moderator: What sorts of changes recently would you say—

Well, the big change is Emerson Electric, and the (name unintelligible) trailer company's coming in. There (unintelligible)...

(many people talking at once.)

You know, generally we may take two steps forward and one step backward, then another step or two forward. But we're gaining ground.

Right. We have the right ingredients. A lot of things have come together as the culmination of several years of work. Having 412, a four-lane that connects us directly to 55, and it's a major corridor through Tennessee and Arkansas, that opens up a lot of transportation for us, and then we just finished a new airport terminal, new 5010-foot runway, so that gives us access for the larger planes, and that has had a good impact as far as corporate travel, and then with this new company coming in and the city's got an industrial park... a lot of things we haven't had for a lot of years are coming in. It's great to talk about quality of life and all, but the jobs aren't there. It's difficult.

Moderator: What would you say are the major shopping areas here in Kennett?

Wal-Mart supercenter.

(many people talking at once.)

Bootheel plaza.

We have a couple department stores.

The grocery store.

We have a large video store.

(many people talking at once.)

We do have several restaurants, Grecian Steakhouse, three Mexican restaurants.

Four.

Two or three Chinese restaurants.

A barbecue place.

The new barbecue place opened Saturday, and they were out of meat by 2:30.

We do have a real nice country club, golf course, and dining. We also have a great community hospital, and recently Medic 1 signed onto our ambulance service. We have a great community of doctors, several internists, OB-GYNs, pediatricians, which is really good...

We are the county seat, so we have a healthy supply of attorneys, but it also brings more business.

We have a new county jail.

Justice center.

That's a large...large building.

And the new facility behind the social security office...

Safe Way, the halfway house.

And the community supervision center. A lot of new construction. A lot of new homes, nice homes.

And we also have 3 long-term healthcare facilities. One is very new.

And there's parks, almost 100 acres of parks, of public parks, within the city limits. It's off the restaurant subject, but there we are.

Also, we have a very well trained fire department.

Yes we do.

(unintelligible)...they have the equipment and the training, if there were some type of chemical warfare or anything in this reason, they would be ready.

We have Hazmat people in place.

We have our utilities here, they're very competitive with, and gas and water. And they also have Internet service, and are in the process in covering the city with citywide fiber optics.

The cost of living is one of the lowest in the country.

Has been for years.

We have a lot of new subdivisions in the area. There's the Greenbriar estates...

Shelton.

Lots of new homes are being built.

Very nice estates going up.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: You all started to talk about restaurants a few minutes ago, and that was my next question. Where do you take people that are coming to visit for dining or entertainment?

A lot of people go to the country club, because they often have jazz singers and a little theater with a little show every few months, from plays to just shows.

There's Sissy's, it's Italian food, it's very nice.

I would take people to Sissy's.

(many people talking at once.)

Depends on what kinds of entertainment they're looking for.

There is a club in town called Shaker's.

Barbecue.

All these places serve alcohol, so there is motley entertainment.

(many people talking at once.)

We do have a nice bowling alley.

It has really improved.

There's a club incorporated with the bowling area. You could bowl and drink beer if you want to.

He bought the old West End Package store.

(side conversation.)

Moderator: You all started to talk about parks as well. What sorts of outdoor recreation are popular with kids or local residents.

Softball, baseball, soccer.

Softball, baseball.

What do we have? We have Indian Park.

(many people naming parks at once.)

We have a baseball field at Jones Park, which is mostly your church-league type league. Elmore Park has an established field that's mostly just a practice field. Indian Park has a whole complex of ball fields back-to-back, and they just secured land, and they're going to have a completely dedicated soccer complex. Right now, they overlap into some of the ball fields, and they're terrible. The Shelton family that donated the original land is involved in the additional 27 acres, but they've got to get it level and whatever, and it's going to be a super soccer complex. It's really, we've really been blessed with the facility we have out here for athletics and whatever. High school has an excellent football stadium... whoever built that back in the late '60's or whenever, had the foresight to see it made large enough for growth... and it has an excellent track around the football field. It is rubber-based material. Excellent athletic facilities.

Tennis. Tennis courts.

The one park on the south end of town is a wooden area, fenced, and it gets a lot of overnight camping and whatever with boy scouts, girl scouts, whoever, with it being fenced, they can go in there and secure it where they don't have to worry about marauders and stuff like that.

Going back to Indian Park, that's another good thing about this community. This is a very generous community. All of that property was donated by one family. And when I think about other endeavors, like our Dunklin County Relay for Life Race, and the Delta Children's home that raises an enormous amount of money through the generous contributions of the community. We have various things.

I was just going to say, the Sheryl Crow aquatic center, a very active swim team. Of course, that's also open to the public. That was also through donation, as well as the land on which it's built. The goal for the fundraising committee was to raise 70,000 dollars in addition to Sheryl's contribution to do things out in the park area, and they've raised in about 2 months 186,000 dollars. We have a pavilion and we're getting ready to build a trail and landscaping. That's part of the pavers once we get the lighting in, on the sidewalks, and the wiring completely underground...

Moderator: Let's talk specifically about downtown. I asked earlier whether you thought Kennett was going in the right direction. What about downtown in particular?

One day this past week, we had a grand opening for Pyramid group, which is home health care outfit, in one of the buildings down there. Dawn's Clothing Store, they just recently moved back downtown out of a strip mall. Dr. Adams who's part of our group, he just opened an office on the south side of the Square. The north side of the Square had a vacant building, and they've moved Tae-Kwon Do into that now. Of course, Scott and Cindy have rehabbed the whole west side of the square, and done a great job.

And how many housing units do they have?

Two. One of them is 2400 square feet, the one on the side there, and the middle building at the back is a 2-bedroom apartment.

Neither one is vacant.

No. We got good renters and found time to keep it clean, and in the middle building at the top, in the future, we'll (unintelligible). Also, in the other building, my brother's an artist, and he's supposed to put his studio up there.

In the lower commercial buildings, under the lofts, we have Gibson Recovery Center, a Rehabilitation Center that just went in recently. The middle building is trying to incorporate some type of western-wear, leather coats and jeans and things like that.

And then, on the other end, there's a café and place there, but he is struggling. He's tried a video arcade, and then he's done breakfasts at night. What he'd really like to do, he wants to close and completely do a remodel, and he has a living area upstairs, so he can live there and do his work, but he wants to do a nice café, revamp, but he needs to figure out how to make it work.

He's got excellent idea.

And he's an excellent person.

He just needs to stay with it, stick with something.

Somehow, if we can get people at the courthouse and around the Square to support his endeavor, you know, it would offer more chance for success.

Our downtown is, I should've brought the picture of how it looked a couple years ago. We've been going through this process now for, going into our third year, because Karen and Scott, there was the committee that started all this way back when, when we were planning for the pool, which opened in 2005, so we actually started this 2004. So, we've come a long way from even then. We've still got a long way to go.

Moderator: I think you sort of already answered this question, but what are the main reasons people come downtown?

I go downtown to look for shoes at Dawn's or a pair of Jeans.

It's got the county government, so the license bureau, City Hall, courthouse is right in the middle, post office, library, the Dunklin County Museum.

You have to go to the Square because you have to go to the courthouse, the license bureau, the post office. We have to develop our storefronts to pull people in when they do their usual things. We have a drugstore that's been established for years. The people are down there, but it's just been getting to the extra shops—how do we look good, bring people in here, establish something they want.

Moderator: Are there things you used to be able to do downtown, in the more recent past, that you now do elsewhere?

Well, the store on the corner, James Caan's (?), was a department store, and they had family clothing. Men's, children's, women's, household. A small Famous Barr almost.

And you could get real upscale clothes from New York, and you could go into the Square that now we drive into Memphis or Jones. And their Christmas trade was phenomenal, because they had one whole side of the store devoted for gifts for teachers, fire department... it was all wrapped up and you were taken care of.

They had two-dollar gifts, whatever price range you wanted.

When they went out, that was a huge thing. Next to them was a ladies clothing store, Smith's. But the furniture store is a very good furniture store, they do very good trade and have for many years. We used to have Palace Café. Karen and I both worked at this bank, when this was a bank, and, you know, went all around the Square and shopped or looked, and eat at Palace Café.

(many people talking at once.)

I think the Palace Café of all of it was our biggest landmark, because it was just a mom-and-pop place where you could go get a sandwich or homemade pies. That's where you met for lunch, and it was full all day long. If you could get a deli downtown that was consistent, had good food, did all the work, kept the doors open, that would be a good thing. But you've got to get somebody in there with the stamina to keep with it.

(many people talking at once. Side conversation.)

I go to the courthouse three to four times a week. My job takes me downtown. I went twice today. And I went to the coroner's office, I know we haven't got to this whole parking situation...I have never had trouble finding a place to park. People complain all the time about the parking, but I pull around here, and within just a few feet of the door...

We don't hear that. We get all the negative stuff with our people who have the properties, they're forever fussing about the parking. They want better parking.

I still think while we got lots of parking spaces, that we could gain a lot by the courthouse employees not taking up everything immediately around the courthouse.

That's what he complains about. The employees take his places. He can't get people in and out of the deli. That's why shifting to nighttime business, he's trying it...

Moderator: Speaking of parking, how user-friendly is downtown? Business hours, parking, easy to find your way around?

I think sometimes, because it is a one-way circle, and it's a state highway through the middle of it, so there's... (cell phone ring)... but, we have several parking lots. Maybe parking is, because I'm not down here all day everyday, but it could be there's a perception there's a problem, because if you go to Wal-Mart, you don't park at the front door. You have to park and walk, at least a little bit. The closest place you could park at Wal-Mart, is probably about the same distance.

There's a parking lot behind us that holds about 35 vehicles.

That's where the bank employees used to park. We had to park way down here. And we did. You didn't park right in front of the door, because that's reserved for your customers. Some of our store owners park in front of their own stores, and that's how people know the stores are open. So, you know, it's hard to cure that, too.

I would think that would be the neat thing about the Square is that you can park and walk and get some exercise that we all do need, and go into these shops and visit. You go to downtown (city name unintelligible), and you go downtown and antique, and you can get a sandwich. I think if we could just get a good restaurant in there, where people could walk and enjoy themselves, they would just flock to the downtown.

It's just a mindset.

Yeah, we want everything fast, hurry up and get it, that's why we've got McDonald's and Burger King.

I think the younger generation, they're a fast food generation. We drive my kids crazy when we go to church on Sunday, and they cannot stand waiting for food after. They just sit there and say hurry up with the food.

If you think about it, how many people from this area go to Memphis and park and walk around for hours...

I mean, how far do you walk in a mall? You walk and walk and walk.

The parking lots that we have, there's one here, one over by the furniture store, the one behind the south side of the Square... none of them are...they're within a hundred yards of the center of the courthouse, literally.

(many people talking at once.)

(unintelligible)...the loft apartment we had, it used to be an embalming studio or whatever you call it.

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

And the downstairs was a furniture store, and I heard about the embalming thing. The center was an old drugstore, and I've got paper back to 1925 and it was a drugstore before then.

Moderator: What about the business hours downtown? Are those convenient for people?

Mostly not. 8 to 5 or 9 to 5. 5:30, maybe.

If you get off work at 5:00, you miss downtown. Mitchell stays open til 5:30, maybe.

The clothing store, sometimes he'll stay open til 5:30 or 6:00 depending on how many people he's got.

There's nothing downtown, really, after 5.

One guy tried a video arcade with nachos and pizza, and it was open late, but it just ebbed off.

(unintelligible, noise. Person names a shop, shop name unintelligible.)

Well, yeah, that's one of those niche specialty shops. You've got to have people around to draw the number you need to stay in business.

How long's Cosby's bakery been in business?

See, that's another niche.

(many people talking at once.)

They've had a successful business since you were a little guy, so like 50 years. And they're still cooking the same cakes and cookies they did then. They're only open til 5:00.

What group did we meet with, and they...they said, "How do I get from here to Cosby's?"

Oh, who was that?

(many people talking at once.)

If we could get Cosby's to move downtown to the Square.

Well they're not far. They're in the downtown development district.

Moderator: For people who aren't quite as familiar with the town, is it easier for them to find downtown? Is the signage good?

No. We have no signage that says "downtown" anywhere, do we?

I don't think so.

And that would be something. Our Chamber office is out on the corner opposite from Wal-Mart, and that's a busy intersection, but there is no signage. It's been brought up before. To have "Historic Downtown Kennett." We even need signs that say "Sheryl Crow Aquatic Center" because during swim season, we have swim meets.

Yeah, we need signage.

Moderator: How do people get information about what's going on downtown, whether that's things going on with businesses, special events?

Word of mouth.

Newspaper.

Chamber, if it's a community thing.

And we have a local cable channel that shows community events, and they also show time and temperature, so people go there all the time for weather.

We do, if it's a community activity that's happening, we have that on our website, and we also do a calendar of events.

Moderator: From what you know, do you think the word gets out there to the people you need to get the word to?

Yeah.

Well...

Probably not. I mean, there's a lot of people in town that are kind of apathetic about what's happening, I think. Their idea is to go, they may come down to go to a movie, or, but their focus is too much around Wal-Mart.

It was Wal-Mart that caused so much problems with the Square. The Square was a lot better until Wal-Mart came along.

Well, we're down to two grocery stores. We had a Kroger. It folded.

Safeway.

Yeah.

We're down to two grocery stores other than Wal-Mart.

What year did Wal-Mart come in?

I've been here 30 years, and I don't know how long the supercenter...

We had Gibson's.

And Magic Mart. It was in downtown.

We had Sterling's downtown. There was an old snack bar in the back, and it was always full of people. We had Graber's. That was a big chain then. And Dekato's was downtown, too, and it evolved out to the strip mall after things started leaving downtown. That used to be a lot busier. I remember when I first moved here, it was a lot busier.

Well, there were 65 employees in this bank.

They also had open campus, so there was a lot of lunch trade that came from school. Junior high, at the time, was about 4 blocks, within walking distance. So kids came downtown all the time for lunch, after school.

Moderator: Let's talk a little bit about the future of downtown. Let me start by asking you about what kind of businesses you'd like to see downtown.

I think a good restaurant, maybe Italian or something like that, would help.

Well, we had a place in an older building close to downtown called Charlie's Pizza, and it was a mom-and-pop place, and they stayed busy all the time, and unfortunately it burned in 2003.

It was in an old hotel.

We tried to get Main Street Pizza to come back, and they almost did.

Oh, that would have been great.

They moved to Jonesboro, Arkansas, and started a new restaurant, and we were hoping they'd come back.

Italian restaurant...

Well, I don't know, I think there's maybe an opportunity for sporting goods, because the Wal-Mart has cut way back on what they provide. I think they've eliminated their gun sales altogether in their store. Johnson's, Conoco, those guys that had the gun shop and bait shop and all that stuff, they've sold out and gone out of business.

Something like a Shooter Shack.

Shooter Shack came in, but its timing was bad. Now I think you'd have an opportunity for some sort of sporting goods...

So as in hunting, fishing, that type of stuff? Or are you talking about baseball, that type of stuff?

Skeeter-Cal supplies mostly school, uniforms and equipment, but there's an opportunity... What they're doing at Dexter with the incubator program, I think we've got some spaces down there if we can convince the owners to, to, you know, let us set em up that way. There might be an opportunity for someone to come in in the incubator program and get something started.

That's what we've talked about. I've tried to figure out ways...

Oh, another thing is some kind of ice cream stand downtown.

Especially summertime.

I think, I'd be surprised if the Share Boys don't move their Snow-Cone place over.

You know the bookstore in Blytheville does real well, because John Grisham goes in and signs books, and they're small, but their bookstore does really well, because they manage to get good authors in to do signings. It would be nice because we don't have a big selection at Wal-Mart to buy books. If you like to read, you have to go to Barnes and Noble at Jonesboro. If you incorporated ice cream and bookstore, or coffee shop...espressos.

If you get a store with multi-purposes... downtown you got to have a strategy, you've got to pull people in. They do need seasonal things. It helps a lot.

Moderator: Any other businesses you'd like to add to the list?

Well, there's not many vacancies down here. You know, there are really a lot of things here, but because of the awnings, maybe they're not easily identified.

We used to have a skating rink that stayed full all the time for the kids to go to. Unfortunately, it's gone. It wasn't downtown, but... the skating rink, that would be great.

I think that's a bad thing. I don't know whether the skating rinks in general are active in other communities.

I think they do laser tag now.

Paintball.

And they do the rock-climbing thing.

Moderator: What about parks or green space, that sort of thing? Do you think there's a need for that sort of thing downtown, or connecting downtown to parks or trails?

When we started looking at this, we started looking at smart communities and connecting, because the logic behind coming up with "what is our downtown district?" is adjacent to those boundaries. We have, I guess the thinking is, how do we facilitate access to the downtown area, and how do we strengthen what's already here? Versus how to bring new things in... first of all, you strengthen your core, your base. So it would be great... I talked to Brian and Terri both about let's incorporate... let's be more energy efficient and all, but to make it an easier pedestrian access, our sidewalks, the condition that they're in right now, it's very difficult for a person who can get around pretty easily to walk because of, they need repair, so if you have crutches or a cane or a wheelchair or a baby stroller, it's really difficult to navigate, and so we have a lot of ways we can connect. We have the middle school that's three blocks from downtown, several churches that are very active have activity centers within three to four blocks from downtown, and to the south we have South Elementary School which is six blocks... We have Cotton Bowl Commons, which is senior citizens housing that's about three blocks from the eastern boundary of the district, so that would be a great way to link it together, to have better trails. In fact, we have an old railroad that runs through part of the district, and at the very beginning stages, we actually got with the Rails to Trails program to see if we could develop that to better walking access. If you could provide that better access down there... but, so much of that lane has been reclaimed. We got in there a little too late.

Well, we also have the old Walker Manufacturing building. Used to be a clothing manufacturer building. They're soon to start working on that, and we'll have 46 loft-type apartments, and that's supposed to be completed in 2008, which would be—that's right on the edge, that's right across from the aquatic center, so that would contribute some support to a downtown café or other stores.

You know, 46 households that weren't there before. It's a building used for storage.

Well, in the process, they've also purchased a couple properties that'll be demolished.

Moderator: Well, let's talk a little about the look and feel of downtown. Other than demolishing eyesore buildings, what sorts of other improvements do you think need to be made to improve the look and feel of the area?

I think the awnings need to come down.

The awnings have been there for 40 years, they were erected in the 60's and that was the thing.

You got one up, one down.

They serve a purpose... I mean, it is nice to be able to walk around when it's raining, you're protected. You don't get wet. But because the awnings extend to the edge of the sidewalk and have supports, it's difficult to do any kind of sidewalk work, and that was one of the things about this whole project is to remove the awnings so the sidewalks could be renovated and the historic lighting be installed. Again, the awnings, the buildings that Scott and Cindy had redone, those had awnings, and when they came off, you could actually, for the first time in years, see the businesses. It's much more inviting when you can see. Because most of them have that...

Well, we didn't have adequate lighting under the awnings to showcase the businesses anyway.

The awnings give a cavelike effect. When you take it off, it's like, "Wow."

It would be nice to have a little canopy, a little overhead protection above the door.

A recessed entrance.

(many people talking at once.)

And the old turn signals, the walk, don't-walk signs, those are old.

They've looked at those and trying to figure out ways, that's part of the whole idea, because all the signal lights are hanging, you know...had to redo all that. And we do have a wire that provides the electricity to the pedestrian crosswalk that is dovetailed to something that runs across... so things like that could be improved.

I must say, though, as president of the Azalea Garden Club, we do do our part. We keep flowers in the boxes around the courthouse, and there are other clubs. We do a lot of beautification.

That's something I wish could've been done differently, that intersection next to Wal-Mart that was bricked... I wish that could've been turned into a flower bed. Could've done something like with a big "K" for Kennett, instead of being just solid concrete.

The neat thing too is the Azalea Garden Club is a federated club, and there are a lot of grants available for these businesses, and do beautification work. There are a lot of things we can tap into.

Well, and now, I read constantly about energy efficiency, because that is our future, and how Chicago, even on rooftops, they're sodding and doing so much landscaping and things like that for energy conservation, but again going back to that greening, and as more, we're very fortunate to be in a town where... I went to New York a few years ago, and Macy's was doing this huge promotion about their spring, and I went in, and it was beautiful, and I thought, this looks like our yards at home. For people who are not used to trees and dogwoods and azaleas and tulips and, it's something that we take for granted that we really have a beautiful town at many times of the year. Spring is a time in our town, and bringing that aesthetic to the downtown area. The downside of that is a lot of maintenance, with trees and shrubs. But anyplace that you go, and that you want to be there, and that's what those living things bring to that.

Yeah. It's true. It's just like the flowers that Jack planted in front of his business. He knows the pavers are coming in, but he was still like, "Could I put up a few flowers? Just for now, just cause it's spring, just cause I want to?" We got so many phone calls about it. The flowers were so attracted. You can't imagine how many calls we got about probably 22 dollars worth of flowers.

Our voting issue last time, we tried to get a tax passed of demolition on buildings, and it failed.

It wasn't a big margin, was it? It was close.

And the fire department can't burn em. They can remove the shingles and the asbestos.

People see the word "tax" and they say "no."

Moderator: Was that going to be sales tax?

Yeah. 1/8 cents sales tax, but dedicated to cleaning up Kennett. To be able to demolish some of these buildings, to make a tax lien, and if they don't, then you foreclose and sell

the property. Just a long, drawn-out process. But we had some properties that are decaying wherever the owners passed away and the heirs are scattered all over the world and don't really care about it, so one of em recently, somebody else picked it up for the back taxes and started work on it. We got some others that are just eyesores. It's kind of long, drawn-out. And we didn't have any excess cash.

Part of it, too, is that the things that when you see it everyday, you just kind of get conditioned to it, and don't notice it. I mean, there's things that... working here, until I started working at the Chamber, once I started working there you see things in a different light, particularly when you're constantly bringing people in and showing them around, and all of a sudden, "Oh my gosh. How many times have I driven by that and not noticed?" Some of it is seeing things in a different light. This is kind of started people to think about it.

We've got two or three on the west end of town. It's just unbelievable. I mean, pickup trucks, washing machines, couches, chairs, junk. Hopefully we'll do something about that.

But it's outside of the downtown district, but you can't...if somebody comes in, a client, to look at the Emerson building that sits vacant out here, you could find a route to get them out there, but...

Any business that's coming in to look at the community, they're smart enough... first of all, they can find out more than we care for them to know on the Internet. Gone are the days of fluff, because they've research folks that have already looked up demographics and crime rate, and then they may do those tours themselves, and drive around, but most everybody I've ever shown anything to, they also say, "We want to see the worst spots, too. We don't want you to show us..." And every town has that. As do we. But, somehow, the downtown is the heart of the community, and even industrial prospects, they like to see the downtown area. It's almost like, if you have taken care of your downtown, you are remembering your history, you have a respect for your community. There's...downtown is more of an emotional thing...

It's the heart.

Right.

Even if you look at, when we look at old photos of the businesses, you're like, "Do you remember when J.C. Penney's was down here?"

I wish we could load a bunch of people up and take them over to West Plains. When I was there with my son, we went down to look up records, and the court square has been rehabbed, I mean, and every building was occupied, and their Wal-Mart is way out away from downtown but they had a thriving downtown community there.

And I have an opportunity, through the merchants, to see through film and everything else what downtown looked like around the turn of the century, and that was the place to go. That's where everything happened was downtown, the Square.

The whole cotton market, everything was there.

And that's so much of us want to see the Square come back.

(Unintelligible. Many people talking at once.)

... the town was packed full of people.

I guess we started this from a retail perspective, and I really hadn't thought of business other than restaurants, but now I'm thinking, what can we do to support what's already there, and to enhance the look from that marketing perspective?

Another thing...I came in late, and I don't know what I missed before I got here, but one of the things I want to ask is, would it make any difference, and how much trouble would it be, if we stopped the trucks from coming through the Square.

Well, yeah, we've got a deal with MODOT on that one.

But, MODOT can reroute it. The thing is, here's the issue, I look at it from a different perspective. If we push the truck traffic, we see that every leg of 412 that opens, we get more and more traffic hitting us at that section up there, that forces our traffic onto our south bypass, and a lot of traffic in from highway 25, and there's already congestion on both bypasses. We have elementary school, industrial parks, on our bypasses. If we push our truck traffic onto those bypasses that are already congested—not by St. Louis standards or anything, but they're a safety hazard at certain times of the day—you know, what's that going to do to it?

I have this really strong feeling about traffic. You can find hundreds of communities in this country, even just over to Cardwell and Arbor, and they chose to bypass. They didn't want that traffic. They wanted to bypass...

They don't need to fly through here like they do, but that's my...

But when you start sending them somewhere else... I don't want to keep traffic away from the Square.

I had a businessman tell me in Blytheville, he said that that downtown went downhill when they built that curved, crazy curved road through the middle of downtown

Blytheville. He said that was the biggest mistake they ever made, was to but that curved road through downtown.

I mean, I travel all the time, and I get off the interstate to look at things, to learn, and you never know what's going to strike somebody. These trucks come from all over, and you never know who that truck driver knows and what company he works for. It might hit somebody just right that it'll bring us more business. That might be one in a million chances, but traffic's a good thing.

I've been to two or three towns where they had a little Square kind of atmosphere, and there was no traffic. You walked it. And that's just what it was for, for people to go downtown to shop businesses and walk. (unintelligible)...

Moderator: Let's talk about other towns. What other towns or cities have you been to where you've seen things downtown where you've thought, this is what I want to see?

Cape Girardeau.

We just toured their downtown area.

I've been out at the Chamber for almost six years, and when I first started, I immediately started looking at downtown, and Cape Girardeau had just started their organized downtown effort, and so I've been up there several times to several of their meetings, and some of the main street...

Downtown Jonesboro, Arkansas, too...

Jefferson City has a great downtown.

It's been a couple years since I've been there.

They've done a lot of work, even in the last couple years. They had huge tubs of flowers and pavers and all that.

I think that's what people look for. When I'm teaching art classes, they look for tranquility. Water features and flowers, and they want to be out in nature.

Well, we have such a hectic lifestyle, and it's nice to go somewhere that is pleasing, that gives you that sense of peace, but somebody's got to maintain all that. Nashville, Columbia Missouri.

Some communities, though—when'd I go to Seattle? I drove all the way to Colorado without getting on the Interstate. There were so many small towns that were so clean, so neat, had good property maintenance and probably good enforcement. And so I was just... I think, what three years ago, they passed the mandatory trash thing in Kennett, Kennett is a much cleaner community today than it was three years ago.

Yes.

And I think we can do more with that, but I got to give credit to our code enforcement officer, because it's certainly an improvement.

There's a lot of difference between us and Springfield, Missouri, but I'm telling you, 15 years ago, Springfield was set on 3 streets. Everything you wanted to find was on those 3 streets. And now it's just grown.

I mean, St. Louis is... when we were trying to find someone to come in and rehab that building, I came up and met with some of the people that are doing the Eli Walker loft apartments in St. Louis.

Oh, those are beautiful.

It's going to be great. They were, so, you know, I stopped at, what's that little? Salem, Missouri? On Highway 19? Studied Clinton, Missouri, they advertise as the largest downtown.

I hear lots of good things about that place. I had some friends up there.

I studied a lot of them.

Is it a progression thing? If somebody works on the outside to make it look better, the owner's going to work on the inside?

We've done both of them. We've got contract written up where once they take care of the inside, we take care of the outside.

(many people talking at once.)

...you could get a restaurant in there. People would love to sit out on a balcony and eat. If they could view the downtown area.

(unintelligible. Many people talking at once.)

We've got some buildings on the Square that are old.

They're all old!

I think the Singer building that we've got is the first one built.

(many people talking at once. Side conversation.)

Moderator: Well, the last question I had for you is to kind of wrap up everything we've been talking about. Looking ahead for downtown, what do you think is the highest priority? What needs the most focus and most attention?

We got to get all the people to agree, to make us want to do this. Some of the people I've talked to down there don't want to do anything.

When we first started this, three years ago, we went around and we've had a lot of community meetings before we did the first grant application. We actually visited with every property owner and asked if they would, you know, agree to remove their awnings, and everyone agreed except for maybe 3 or 4 property owners, and since that time a couple have changed hands, but our mayor's going to go visit with them again and see... you know, because at that stage of the game, I think, Kennett has never received grants like this and never done any work, and people were very skeptical, and we are the Show-Me state, and once we have that first grant or the pool built, in every stage, we've gotten more people to come on board with it, but you know, we got the people like Scott and Cindy and Dr. Adams...

I think what Scott said about getting everybody together is what I commend the mayor for.

What you said to the planning commission.

I really appreciate what you're doing getting them motivated, because I think what they do and what this Chamber does and what this does, all three together, working together, will get it done. You can't have arguing between the three. You got to have the three working together.

To have a cohesive plan, and to have something that's enforceable. Let's say, the Tudors have worked on their building, but right now there's nothing to stop, if somebody decided to paint their building purple, other than peer pressure.

(many people talking at once.)

I think it's visual. We need to get those awnings down and better visual statement.

I mean, people haven't seen, haven't gotten any part of it that's completed. The new parking lot around the pool and behind the city parking lot that's on the south side of the square doesn't have the lighting up yet. So if they haven't been involved in the planning process, some of them haven't quite got that vision.

I think once they see it, they'll go with it.

Once they see it, they'll be like, "Oh my gosh, that's what you're talking about!"

Has there been any talk of possibly making a deal with somebody that's got a bigger building or an empty building that they could move the museum into and make it a better place and get it off the Square, and then...

Well, the building itself is a historic landmark.

It's the old City Hall.

That building's on the national register. It has to be redone.

It's terrible on the outside.

We cannot eliminate that building. It has to be redone.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

Moderator: Well, that's all the questions I have for you. Thank you.

SECTION III

DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT: PROPERTY OWNERS

Jack McDaniel, I'm owner of a building.

Lou Adams, likewise.

Ron Berg, I own a business outside of downtown and I'm still on city council. A hardware store.

Tim Belsley, city administrator.

John Robinson, I'm the (unintelligible).

Mary Jo Bird, I'm own Bank Antiques.

I'm Patty Riggs, I have the license office, I'm the agent for the Missouri department of realty.

Moderator: I'm going to start off with a basic question. This is my first time to Kennett. Tell me a little bit about Kennett. If I were looking to move here, give me a feel for your town.

Great people.

Good utility and tax rate.

I think we've all seen Kennett when it was busier and happier and busy downtown. I remember that from being raised here, and I'm kind of disappointed to see the dilapidated buildings and so few people circulating. I've been hearing about renovations for years now, and my big question is, when's something going to happen? Because twenty years down the road, I may not be too interested in it. I'd like to see something happen soon.

I was hoping that this was going to inform us on what we already had planned and we have contributed to and this that and the other. What has happened to that, the walks... you know. Well, what happened?

What I've heard is, we ran out of money.

We used the first 400,000 up doing the pool and behind Mitchell's and all of the concrete work...

How much was contributed by individuals on that?

The contributions were for the pool. That was for the pool area and all of that. That wasn't any of the concrete.

We still have the (unintelligible)...

There's still 400,000 dollars that we've gotten that's in the plans, the plans are drawn, and they're actually accepting bids to start the work with the new light poles, new sidewalks. You should see some progress in that. You may have noticed the new fire hydrants... that's a precursor to some of this other work. Sometime within the next two or three months, I think you'll see some action. There's 400,000 dollars of federal money that we've gotten and it's in place, everything is set, all we have to do now is get the contractor lined up.

... I had to explain that, how they were going to go about it, so that this group, the focus group, they're just a research group to talk about, how do you want to market downtown. And they've got another group, the engineering study, and I think it's like, they've got another phase of construction that should start, and may have been part of...

Well, the first phase knocked down the old structures and walls, the second phase was basically with the private contributions to build the swimming pool, and the city's 400,000 grant built the parking lots, the sidewalks, that sort of thing, around the pool area, and next the council I think will look at the bids at the next meeting, we'll add lights, do a little bit more sidewalk work around the pool and around Kennett Street and on South Main. We're writing another grant to remove the awnings. We're writing another grant for a revolving loan fund so that local businesspeople can borrow funds at a low rate to refurbish the facades where the awnings have come down, or perhaps put up new awnings. We need a follow-up grant, for additional grant for additional lights along the Square and more sidewalk work. After that, we need to write another one. We're a long ways from getting done.

Well, yeah, we haven't started yet. We're a long way from being done... I thought we were already in the middle, that it had already been approved. What happened to that other grant that we applied for, and the bond?

That's the one we're talking about, discussing the bids in the next council meeting.

What happened to the first one?

That built the parking lot and a lot of sidewalk work.

Moderator: Let me get back for a second. We want to find out what you want from downtown in this phase of the DREAM project. Right now, I just have some questions about what you'd like to see from your downtown.

What I would like to see is as far as downtown is refurbished buildings, get something with a pleasing appearance. That itself should draw some activity, some specialty businesses, something that will make people remember when they stop in Kennett, bookstores, restaurants, different kinds of interests... basically, I would like to see our town, just the appearance. Start off with making it look better.

Moderator: Let me go back for just a second to the Kennett area as a whole. Residents of Kennett, where do you do your shopping? Where do you go do your retail shopping and your grocery shopping?

Well, I personally like to support the Square, and I do everything I can in the Square, but unfortunately, we don't have a whole lot of choice, and Wal-Mart is kind of where we have to go whether we'd like to or not, because they sell absolutely everything, and I think they've run a lot of businesses out of business.

They certainly have.

(many people talking at once.)

I'm disappointed that the city fathers ever let Wal-Mart in so near and changed the whole structure of Kennett. I'm just kind of comparing what I've seen in other places, like downtown Jonesboro is beautiful. All the buildings seem to follow suit, and the businesses came in, when it was beautified people were interested, and they came in, and they bought these buildings, and they remodeled these buildings. I think the first stage is we have to beautify the town. It's so ugly. Something should be done about trash. My god, I've never... so many cities around here that you might compare, like Pickett and other little towns nearby, don't have trash problems. Why do we have trash? So much trash. Why is it not picked up? Why are the people who supply these cartons not surcharging or something? I think the first thing is to beautify our downtown because we have a highway running through, and I think if the downtown were beautified, people would be attracted to Kennett. I'd like to see it made busy again.

I do think a lot of people shop out of town. Not people in this room, maybe, but just the average thought of going shopping, that means go out of town. Jonesboro, or Cape, Memphis.

Moderator: How far is Memphis?

90 miles.

Moderator: Do you do grocery shopping in town?

Yeah.

Moderator: Is there shopping downtown?

There's a clothing store.

There's no grocery stores.

There's a clothing store.

(many people talking at once.)

McDaniel's there, there's a drugstore.

(many people talking at once.)

It goes back to what comes first, chicken or the egg. You say make it beautified, and I say that we need some businesses down there that will draw people.

Well, downtown Jonesboro, a lot of those buildings were empty...

They were terrible before they started cleaning up.

Really, and they cleaned up these beautiful brick looks, and creature comforts, and a beautiful downtown, and businesses came in. I don't think there's an empty building in downtown Jonesboro anymore. I sure hope that when we move along, that we get a nice restaurant downtown. There's got to be a few things that draw people, a few creature comforts, and I think somebody's trying to put in a little deli, which is good, but... yeah, I think beautify is the first step. It sure was in Jonesboro, as far as I'm concerned. I don't know. I don't think a business wants to be there if the people are not there right now. I mean, it's hard to attract a business if the people aren't there, and it's as ugly as it is. I wonder why nothing's done about these buildings that are falling down, and they're such an eyesore. I don't know much about the governing rules for the city, but it looks like there should be some kind of mandatory thing to keep the buildings up.

Code enforcement.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: For my own curiosity, where do people work in Kennett? What's the major industry here?

We had factories to close, we have a new one coming in. A lot of people drive to Blytheville to work. There's a lot of schoolteachers.

And the hospital.

(many people talking at once.)

It's like a mass exodus early in the morning, if you're up to see the cars leaving town.

I've always said, Kennett's a great place to live, but it's not so great as far as making a living. I agree, I think (unintelligible)... get people shopping locally in town. From a city council standpoint, the sales tax thing. That shows two things. It shows that a bunch of shopping is going out of town, to Jonesboro, Cape. To do these things, the City needs money to spend to develop some of these projects, yet we don't have revenue as it stands to do that.

Yet we won't go to higher sales tax, but we'll go somewhere else and pay their sales tax.

Moderator: Where do people go for dining and entertainment?

We invite friends in.

(laughter.)

As far as dining is concerned, we have some local ethnic restaurant, Mexican, Chinese, everything, but as far as dining out, Jonesboro.

Sissy's is nice.

Moderator: So you would go out of town for dining, too. How far is Jonesboro?

45 miles.

We're becoming less popular.

There's a fish place up north of town, ten miles. Shorty's. We have a barbecue place up in Holcomb, it's not very far. And Sissy's is good. We go out there a lot. It's a little, locally owned restaurant that's very nice.

Excellent.

The restaurants we have seem to be busy. The next step up... (unintelligible)

Moderator: We talked about this a little bit, but I'd like to shift our focus to downtown now. You've already talked about this a lot, but what direction do you think your downtown is heading. I know a few of you aren't thrilled with the direction. Have you seen improvements? Do you think things are in an upswing, or would you say it's the wrong direction?

I think the pool helped a lot. I have more business on the day of a meet. And Harley moved back downtown.

That's a big draw

(many people talking at once.)

The clothing store moved from out by Wal-Mart.

He left the Square and now he's come back.

And he bought his building. He was paying real high rent out there, but I think... I don't think he's happy. But I probably shouldn't say that. He's not here to speak for himself.

One thing is downtown revitalization. They'll never make it like when we were kids, but I think anything we do, the appearance—just kill the weeds and pick up the trash would be a great improvement. There's a little town north of us called Harmon, and most of us have been through Harmon, 25 years I've passed by there, and it's 500, 600 people, but it's neat, and it's clean. And their socioeconomic ethnic mix is not too far from ours. And it was neat. I was impressed. I mean, I'm not going to move to Harmon, but I was impressed that a little town would look that good. And I think anything we do, with all these grants, this DREAM initiative... I think we have a real opportunity for some marketing here, and I think that's going to be the key, is, we want a nice restaurant, we're going to have to solicit it and maybe give some tax incentives, and I know that rubs people the wrong way that live here, I've never got a tax incentive, but if you want it, if it brings business, there's a chance that we're going to get a new account down at the bank. All I'm asking for is opportunity.

We are getting a 48-unit housing development across the street from (unintelligible), and it's...

Is that going to be condos?

Loft condos, I think.

(many people talking at once.)

That would be nice.

That's an 8-million-dollar project.

(many people talking at once.)

A couple years ago, things were going way downhill pretty bad, but then Sheryl Crow and some other locals, they put some money down to build the pool. Since then, I'm not sure that we've gained a lot, but at least we aren't losing anything right now, as far as it's not going downhill. We realize that we have an opportunity to utilize the pool and the courts and the new apartment complex down there, and it will consolidate our efforts and our monies and whatever, and this is a good time to start building and start making things better. Once we get things looking up, I have an idea that once you start seeing some activity in some places, you're going to have some initiative for some other people to come in and want to be a part of it and maybe buy or lease some properties and plan those and make em... I have a feeling, hopefully that's the way this thing will pan out, if we don't give up on it.

The Square area does not have a lot of vacancies. The west side's full, the rest is pretty full. Most of downtown around the Square is not vacant. There's some on the side streets that may never be occupied in their current condition...

We also have the little theater group that's buying their building about a block away from downtown.

It's a real old building, they've taken that, they've bought that. They have a theater program... they've done an attractive thing.

Learning one thing in city council, courthouse employees parking. Nobody was ever afraid to take the stand that you gotta park someone else. You finally get to there, and you can't find a parking spot.

And there are parking lots.

There are.

When they get the Justice Center open, that will relieve somewhat on the parking, but on court day, the people...

It's always been...

Do people come in your back door, and use the parking?

Yes. People who come in the front door are lookers and people who come in the back door are buyers.

Moderator: Why did you decide to locate your business or property downtown?

Mine was already there.

That was the place to be back then. I was in between all the major stores.

I'd say yours is probably the most recent business that's been down there. Why did you...?

Well, I actually almost bought where Horse Feathers is, I came very close, but I wanted to be downtown, and I liked my building. You know, I just... then I liked stairs. I don't like stairs anymore.

(laughter.)

...and I thought I could single-handedly bring some life downtown, and I don't think I did (laughter).

You know, we're the only bank downtown, and I don't see us moving for two or three reasons. One, that if we moved, what would we do with the building? Now, building's not functional. I wish we had a more functional building. What would we ever do with it?

You could use it as a gas station.

(laughter.)

Well, you're fortunate, because you have painted parking and all that. I can't see that you would...

No, I don't think that we would, I don't see that in the future. I think that that bank will stay right there.

I think you got a good location.

It's busy, and we all thing we're a one-horse town, but you get here and try to pull out on the road and you'll get run over, or try to walk across it.

(many people talking at once.)

We have a theater downtown, renovated last year.

Moderator: Does that bring a lot of people downtown?

I would say it does.

Oh, my word... (many people talking at once.)

If we get the theater to go out and pick up after it closes, because people take their trash out and throw it down...

You know the Karate brings in people. That Karate exercise place, the fitness... yeah.

(many people talking at once.)

If they're having a meet, they're parked all the way down in front of my building.

Moderator: How user-friendly do you think downtown is, from your experience or from what you hear from your customers?

It's not, because the parking that's available is taken up by people working downtown, so the people that come to shop or do business with you can't find parking.

Now, on the south side of the Square, by Mitchell's to Vine...there's no enclosed parking. There's no one that I know of that's down that far.

Now, Tony told me that his wife was not going to park anywhere but in front of her building.

I said down to that.

On your end, probably not.

(side conversations.)

My employees don't park in front.

Do you all get overflow from the courthouse from your buildings?

Yeah. Absolutely.

Now, do the courthouse employees park on the Square?

They do. Yes. They fill up that area on the East Side...that pretty well, and a lot on the north side too.

Well, when we took the building downtown, we parked in the lot, but it didn't do any good, because then the old bank building, those employees took up the parking that we were vacating, so they park anywhere they want to now.

It seems like it would be so simple to get everybody working together, to say, "You know what, we're going to park in the parking lot instead of in front of our business," and the courthouse employees should, too...

At one time, we thought it may be at that time Judge Crawford, if they express that they would appreciate it if the employees park somewhere, that that might carry some weight. I got busy selling license plates.

You know, people come to you because they have to. They're going to find the place, and they're going to come there, because they have to. They don't have to come to me.

(unintelligible)...the sidewalks.

I have to say, if people want to park, they say "I can't find a place to park on the Square," but what they mean is they can't find a spot in front of a building where they want to go. Yet they will roll to that other place out here, east of town...

(many people talking at once.)

They'll walk half a mile up there and not say anything.

We're going to clean it up and make it pretty, and then they'll want to come down, right Doctor?

That's right. Well, maybe part of the cleanup initiative and renovation could be addressing the parking and seeing if somehow the courthouse control could influence people to walk a half a block, I mean, it's just half a block off to the one that's just over by you, Patty, and the whole side street is always empty over there, so if I'm for some reason driving, I go along side street, it's always empty.

If I remember correctly, the county paid for the lot...(unintelligible).

Oh, someone donated that lot.

The county paved it.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

Moderator: Besides parking, what else would improve user-friendliness, like curbs and sidewalks?

It's not handicapped accessible at all.

Do you think that the people who the owners, managers, don't you think that they could have enough authority to have their employees not park on the Square? Wouldn't the same thing apply to the courthouse? Couldn't we talk to the, with the clerks, you know, they're not all elected offices there, all of the workers...for that person to say, "We need for you to park, if you're working for me, you need to park over such-and-such."

Doesn't that get into the fact that it's public parking, and they're maintained with public dollars, so you can't actually ask them, because they're citizens.

Patty, I didn't say ask. I said tell em.

(many people talking at once.)

Well, wasn't there, when there used to be parking meters, did they park there all day? So we probably need to meet with county commissioners if that's the direction...

(unintelligible...)

In (city unintelligible) they do little lines on your tires, and there's a time limit, and we could do that.

Columbia started that, too.

(unintelligible...)

Moderator: Do you have any other complaints or issues? The business hours or anything like that?

Well, that's something that depends on what business you're in.

Wal-Mart stays open 24 hours, and I know a small business can't do that.

We tried it many times on different nights, and I assure I did my book work, but I was open.

I used to be open on Thursday nights, and it was a nice quiet time.

(many people talking at once.)

...a lot of overtime and no traffic.

...(unintelligible)...that's the nature of their business. They're going to be open after kids are off school, and they're open at night, not during the day. Maybe a better mixture.

...if we get a different mix, that's what I would like to see. Some businesses, restaurants down there, we'll get traffic at night...that's what I would like to see is something that would make the area utilized in different times.

There's several promotions. Invite different bands from surrounding towns, people would show up on the courthouse Square. That's as far as it got.

(unintelligible)... that state highway. If we could find some way to capture the kids, when they're up and down the street up there...the traffic, that really impacts the ability to have outdoor events downtown. Probably ways to do that, but that would be adjacent to the Square, not on the Square.

Moderator: Do you have any sorts of festivals downtown?

In the past, you closed off the busy end... and that worked just fine.

We have had, but we haven't in a couple years.

We did Oktoberfest for a while downtown.

Moderator: Any other issues downtown that we haven't talked about? Lighting, any of that?

(unintelligible mumbling.)

I think we have a big nuisance factor with all the cruising that takes place. I don't know, maybe you can't do anything about it, but other towns do, and stop this kind of cruising. They don't stop at your place, they're speeding...I'm surprised that the policemen aren't catching some of those guys. The other thing is the sound. Many places have ordinances against this boom box thing, but it's more than that...the vibratory nuisance of the noise factor.

...we're constantly having people coming to the council meeting (unintelligible)...kids are hanging out and vibrating their windows. Enforcement's been a real problem. The police say that by the time they get there, the radios are turned down and there's nobody around. But enforcement has been a real problem. But we do have nuisance laws. When they catch people, they can write them a ticket. In reality, it doesn't work like that.

Moderator: How do you communicate to your customers? Advertising, etc.?

Local paper, mainly.

Radio.

(many people talking at once.)

I spend a lot of money on (unintelligible).

Moderator: Let's talk for a second, you know we've talked about the current state of downtown, but let's talk about what you'd like downtown to look like. We've talked a little about this, but what kind of businesses would you like to see downtown?

Restaurants.

Shoe store. We had a shoe store, and we need it back.

Dawn's does a lot of shoes.

They do have some shoes.

Ladies shoes... I'm talking about, where the traffic is.

(many people talking at once.)

I ask people from out of town what they buy, and the top two answers are shoes and underwear, so we need a lingerie store and a shoe store.

I'd like downtown Kennett to look like downtown (unintelligible) City.

Never been there.

Old Square kind of a place. The town itself is no bigger than Kennett. They've got a lot of restaurants, bookstores.

Little specialty shops and such. My son lives in Hernando, Mississippi, which is smaller than Kennett. Of course, it's 10 minutes from Memphis, but still it's its own community, and it has a precious downtown. Great restaurants downtown, and little stores, and, you know.

Cottleville, Tennessee. It's neat. And it's basically...

And it's clean, and it's pretty...

More antique stores would be, would be *fine* with me. The more there are, the more people...

(many people talking at once.)

My daughter lives in Hoover, Alabama, right outside Birmingham, but when I go there, I go through Mississippi and through Alabama, and there's a lot of little towns. I've never seen anything that looks as decrepit in that area as our town, and those people, they don't have any more jobs than we have here, but everything is clean, neat, orderly, and it just makes you sick.

Sometimes, several antique stores is what saves it.

Yes.

A lot of those towns... (unintelligible).

(unintelligible)...when you start getting people...

Most of my customers do not live in Kennett, and some of them are from Michigan. There are people who just go through little towns looking for antique stores. We don't have anything that says where downtown is.

Moderator: That was another question of mine. Do you have issues of signage?

Well, we were always told that you couldn't have a sign in front of a business that led you to another business district. Now, it could say "historic downtown." But we've been told it couldn't say "downtown" or it couldn't say "business district" if it was in front of another business.

(many people talking at once.)

...it was all related to the, I think, the highway. And they couldn't decide on this highway. And also, he said we couldn't have a truck route so the trucks couldn't come downtown.

That's the highway department.

(many people talking at once. Side conversations.)

Four years ago, the State of Missouri offered to give the City the special (unintelligible) from the Square, and you can't have trucks going through it. They were going to pave it, make it in perfect shape, and they turned it over to the City to maintain ...the city council in a heartbeat voted no, because they couldn't afford the maintenance on it. (unintelligible)...it's just one of those things.

One thing that concerned me at that time was, on the School Board, was that traffic by the schools, particularly the morning and afternoon.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Any other businesses that you would like downtown?... Okay. We haven't talked much about parks and green space.

We don't have much, and I think there's some exciting property, not there, but behind the...

The office there, uh, across from Riggs.

Right across from Riggs, but back in there where there's an alley and, beside the museum, and the alley, and then there's some space back in there that could be a park or...and we could use that alley, that could be, we could name it something cool and let kids paint on the walls... next to the show, there's a grassy area that just sits there that could be something, a parking lot or something.

(many people talking at once.)

They used to show movies outside, there.

Next to the theater, you know, there's a vacant, and it's been vacant ever since I remember

Right next to the theater?

Yeah.

(unintelligible, side conversations.)

But there is a little park, you know, it's going to have a walking trail...(unintelligible) They didn't want to plant trees, because nobody would want em. You don't know that, or that's not true.

Well, the trees were planted... (many people talking at once. Unintelligible.)

I'm having a hard time hearing. Could you repeat that?

Trees down in the park, the pool area.

They planted the trees behind Mitchell, and I complained, and I said how come I didn't get one of those, and they said it was a private person.

Moderator: Well, we've talked about the aesthetics. Is there anything else that you'd like to mention about the aesthetics about downtown?

I think it would be wonderful if, when we work downtown, when we do actually have people to work, that we could have people that live in Kennett to pour the concrete and do the work...

None of em bid on it.

(unintelligible conversation.)

You know, we've all mentioned other places that have had renovations, we talked about Dyersburg and Jonesboro, and Oxford, and I think (name unintelligible) had a big renovation, and I wonder if there's any way that we communicate to these people, and one thing I see is, I guess sidewalks everywhere need to be replaced, but we really have rough streets and rough sidewalks. You can really trip and get in trouble. You know, it's hard to ride a bike around town, because these are rough roads around here. All these different things, to me, mean a lot. Smooth roads, smooth sidewalks, and beautification, and I wonder if there's not some way that people in the planning stage can't communicate with all these other towns we're talking about and find out, "Hey, what was your experience, and what were your mistakes, and what were your strong points, and how can we emulate some of these successes?" because I've seen some that are really good, and I think everybody else has too. I'm just really impressed with Jonesboro. All the brick crosswalks and the chairs, public chairs and public places. It's very very attractive.

...isn't that your part in this?

Moderator: My personal part in this is not to do that, but part of the DREAM project does have people that have expertise in that area.

And when they walked around downtown and saw the sign over the, Brogden's, that nostalgic look, isn't the plan to do some kind of renditions of a nostalgic downtown and actually have a picture of what McDaniel's Firestone's could look like, isn't that part of what Sally Hemingway and them are doing?

I think there's a rendition.

A general idea?

That's consistent with what the community wants, and what we're working on now.

Well, not...

It is consistent, because we're doing the old-style streetlights already. West Plains has done this, and they're close to the same size we are, they went through this some years ago and they're getting ready to redo it again, but... benches and places for folks to sit.

I'm going to go back again. We talked about, they took the awnings down, and all of a sudden, it stopped. Now, I can't get anybody to tell me what happened. Does anybody know?

Most of the money of the grant is to take down the awnings, but we started on the parking lot.

On the parking lot at the pool?

The parking lot at the pool and the parking lot behind Mitchell's.

(many people talking at once.)

It had originally been planned to take down awnings and do more sidewalks, and we didn't have enough money, so we're going to put in sidewalks and lights with this next grant, and then with the next grant...we're going to spend two, three million dollars to do all of what everybody wants done downtown. Most of that's going to be grant money, not local citizens paying for it.

It's a process, Mr. McDaniel. It's a process. All the grants you have to write, and all the different things you have to do.

But again, it's my understanding that we had the grant.

We had a grant.

We didn't do something, we didn't get that in time, or something? I'm going back with the Chamber, when the...

No sir. We got that money, we spent that money, and now we're going to grant 2 to get that money.

Moderator: So if you could pick your highest priority, what would that be?

Make it more attractive.

I suppose, for me, it would be that there's a plan. That there's a plan. So... you see a beginning, and you see what the end looks like, and maybe everybody's working together. Maybe we have a feeling that some people, you know, that we need to feel that it's all going to be done and everybody's going to do it.

I think those are both good and everything, but I think the emphasis, our plan, our attractiveness, everything we do's gotta be neat and clean. You might need paint, you might need to take the awnings down, but still keep the sidewalks and the streets clean.

Well, I've already did the same thing you're saying... one thing that I know we need a lot of work on, and I think it's coming, is the sidewalks. It's difficult for anybody middle-aged, whatever, to move around some of the sidewalks...that's going to be a very difficult process, but the sidewalks and the appearance. The maintenance... all those things are important.

Well, I agree with them, making it more attractive and beautification, and I think a lot will follow. Somehow I think that some of these actual buildings have to be taken to task, and I don't know how you do that, but there are some buildings that just are really eyesores, and I just wonder if in the process, some kind of little coercion might happen to some of the owners to rectify some of these eyesores.

To encourage them to fix up and clean up?

Yeah, sure. Maybe even plant some flowers and put some ceramics back where they've fallen 20 years ago, paint some rust. All of that. Beautification is what I'd say, and it would include all that.

I'm going to go back to the chicken and the egg. I think the businesses and then they'll beautify. You're saying that the beautification will bring the business. We're talking about the same thing, but in different order. We need to have more things downtown to attract people to come downtown. That's the whole secret right there. You can do all the beautification in the world, but if you don't get any business down here, you've wasted your money.

Moderator: Is there anything that the city could do right now to help—other than cleaning and those things—is there anything that city could do to make your business or property values stronger?

By the city, what do you mean? City council, the city as a whole? The population.

Moderator: The city government.

I wish I knew something we could do with the things we have available. I don't really know... I think this is going to a private initiative more so than a government initiative.

We could establish districts, which will offer tax incentives, but it's still up to property owners whether they participate or not. TIFs and all those kinds of things, but there has to be users, and the City of Kennett has never really explored those possibility. The new housing project and some other kinds of things... there's some opportunities (unintelligible). All those things are relatively new to the citizens of Kennett, and they do have tax incentives, and this community is not used to utilizing tax incentives...but there are opportunities.

I just remember that the, in the early stages of this, when Jan Macrette kind of had the ball to carry, and she was talking a lot about some of the tax incentives to property owners, but I just wonder if it wouldn't be good to notify... I never was, this never was really discussed with me, although she had mentioned this, but I think it would be nice for everybody that owns a property to know, "You know, there's some advantages here to cleaning up your property." So if there really are any incentives, voluntary, whatever, I think each and every individual ought to be notified in writing that, as part of this project, you have an opportunity to take advantage of these incentives.

Part of the process will establish those, and there will be a report in that regard.

That's good.

Moderator: I have one last question. I'm not sure how much this applies to you, but I'm going to throw it out there. There's been some talk of creating something like a "special business district" which would have an extra sales tax, but the extra tax would completely go to revitalizing downtown. Is that something you'd be interested in?

I think that's been offered before and turned down.

That would just drive business away, wouldn't it?

We sure don't need that.

A lot of cities have used it.

I don't care. I don't want to have any more taxes on the downtown, my customers, than what they're paying now.

Well, now, I think what was offered before was that the sales tax from downtown could be used on downtown. Not that it would go up.

But not an increase.

Not an option.

Moderator: This would be an extra tax.

I've done a study on sales tax, and our per capita sales tax receipts are significantly lower than any other city I can find.

(many people talking at once.)

...and when you're in that boat, you can't start parceling out little pieces of what you have when you don't have enough to go around in the first place. If this city is not willing to invest in its future, we're going to have some problems. More than you got now.

Were you saying like a tax downtown, an increase in tax downtown, and the money stay downtown?

Moderator: Yes.

If you had to pay more to shop downtown, that would just be one more reason not to. That would just kill us. Absolutely kills us.

(unintelligible)... In Kennett, we collect per capita, a total of \$104.50 per year per person...

Are other places tax rates higher than ours?

Yes... In Hayti, for example... (unintelligible.)

Now, our sales tax rate...

Now, wait a minute. Compared to all the, what rate now are we talking about?

Now, the rate is relative. Hayti has a higher sales tax rate, but they also have more retail business than Kennett does.

And I don't know why.

I'm saying a higher rate downtown would kill downtown. If it's not uniform across downtown, of course it's going to kill your business.

A lot of other developments in the state have exactly that program, including downtown.

I'd have to be convinced. Like I said, we can't even get the tax passed on cleaning up all the buildings.

We have a 7/8 sales tax, and that increase would clean up the streets and the buildings.

Moderator: That's all my questions. Thank you very much.

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