

## West Plains Strengths

- **According to focus group comments**, West Plains is described as a friendly small town where people feel safe, even in the downtown. West Plains also has a lot of natural beauty, with rolling hills, pastureland and cattle, lakes and streams, a strong regional medical center, and strong shopping district.

*West Plains can be promoted for its Ozarks beauty, small-town friendliness, and large-town health and shopping opportunities. These points should be used with the promotion of the city in general, and especially alluded to in the promotion of the downtown when trying to attract businesses and residents for loft apartments. If community attitude surveys have been conducted that support the safety and friendliness statements, those statistics should be referred to in the promotions.*

- According to the Chamber of Commerce, West Plains is the largest city in 100 miles, so they estimate the retail trade area is about 135,000 to 150,000 people. People come from surrounding towns for employment, entertainment and shopping. The main shopping areas in West Plains are in the downtown area and the Southern Hills Shopping Center, which has Wal-Mart, J.C. Penney's and other chain stores. A new Goody's complex is going in near the Southern Hills Shopping Center and Porter Wagoner Blvd. also has larger stores.

*This provides a lot of potential visitors to downtown. The issue is making sure the visitors who come to West Plains from outlying areas know what is available to see and do downtown. Promotion and advertising of the downtown should be done around the medical center, Wal-Mart, the strip malls, and other shopping areas that attract a lot of visitors. These promotions can be through billboards, ads placed in grocery shopping carts (if grocery stores have that opportunity in that area), ads in restaurants and fast food establishments, etc. The point is, you're trying to steer into your downtown visitors who have already come to West Plains. If possible in those areas, it would be good to have kiosks that would have information about the downtown and direct visitors to it.*

*The ads should imply that visitors have "missed it" if they don't visit West Plains historic downtown. Visitors are more likely to respond if they feel like they may have missed an opportunity than if they are simply urged to do something. Possibly, there could be an ongoing*

*theme to the promotion of "Don't miss it" and "Have you missed it?" A promotion of this nature in the areas that already have a heavy draw could be a way to interest both locals and visitors to come to the downtown. It would also be a good way to create a buzz among locals and help them see downtown through new eyes.*

*It will also be important that a simple route to downtown be given in these promotions. Probably, the simplest thing would be to refer to it as being "a few blocks south of Bus Route 63, in the heart of historic West Plains." Once motorists get to Washington Ave., there should be a distinctive sign directing them to the downtown. It will also be imperative that this entryway into the downtown be made as appealing as possible. If visitors approach downtown from this promoted route and encounter rundown buildings and an uninviting area, they might decide to forgo the detour into downtown. At the very least, it will negatively color their perception of downtown.*

*Critical to the success of this campaign would be ensuring that the downtown is ready to be promoted as something people wouldn't want to miss. This means, the downtown must be an appealing place to not only shop, but also visit and experience. You don't want to promise more than you can deliver, otherwise people won't believe you with following promotions.*

- A lot of younger people are coming back to the area. People feel they can make a living in West Plains because of the many employment opportunities in and near it. The Medical Center employs over 1,500 people, Marathon Electric employs over 700 people, Bruce Hardwood flooring has more than 400 employees, and a truck manufacturing plant in the area employs more than 200 people.
- **According to focus group comments**, West Plains is described as a progressive place with strong cooperation between city government and other entities, which makes development and change possible and positive. Groups felt the biggest reason that West Plains is moving in the right direction is the master plan and the cooperation between government and private entities to make the plan a reality. Very strong competitors have been willing to put competition aside to work together to really establish and accomplish goals. *The importance of this cooperative spirit can't be overemphasized. It will be equally important to guard it and ensure it isn't undermined by territorialism.*

- **According to focus group comments,** West Plains is a very participatory community – a lot of people are really engaged personally with community activities.
- **According to focus group comments,** the city has been able to do a lot with all the support of the people, especially in passing a tax increase or a bond issue. Officials have learned that if they go out ahead of time and show people what the tax extensions or increases will do for them, voters will generally support them. Groups commented that people must feel like the city's going in the right direction and they're satisfied with the leadership.
- West Plains has a senior citizens center downtown and a high-rise senior facility across from the Civic Center. The residents of these facilities have become more a part of the community than they had been in the past, and as a result they are more supportive of tax issues. If the senior citizens perceive something is a good project, they're willing to support it.
- Groups unanimously felt that West Plains is moving in the right direction, particularly in regard to downtown development. Specific things mentioned were the Civic Center, street repairs, building repairs, new streetlights, incoming sidewalks, the number of thriving businesses in the downtown Square, the cooperation of voters in tax increases to help downtown, and the willingness of City government to work with other organizations. There is a spirit of change, and people are interested in making West Plains a better place.
- When the consultant visited West Plains, the overall friendliness of merchants was fair. None of the merchants were unfriendly, but most were not overly friendly either. Some visitors could consider the behavior bordering on aloof. Once engaged in conversation, however, all of the merchants became more friendly and quick to offer help.

*It might be a good idea to work with merchants to help them realize the value of making the first move to treat each customer in a welcoming, friendly manner. Many customers may be somewhat shy, and so won't make the extra effort to talk to the merchants and discover how friendly they really are. This doesn't mean, however, that they don't appreciate a warm, friendly greeting when they walk in the door and a pleasant goodbye when they leave. People do business with people they like. Sometimes customers will make small purchases*

*just because they like the merchant. Since West Plains draws from such a large geographic area, there will undoubtedly be people from outside the area who visit downtown shops, especially as more visitors are sent downtown from other shopping areas in town. Strangers to the area who are treated with a special kindness and appreciation when they visit West Plains' downtown will be much more likely to make return trips and to recommend to their friends that they visit downtown.*

- West Plains' downtown is the home of the County Courthouse, which means it draws visitors from throughout the county. Focus group participants said reasons they visit downtown included going to the courthouse, the title company, shopping, restaurants, and visiting the Civic Center. According to the community survey conducted, nearly 50% of the participants said they visited downtown more than five times a month, and another 36% said they visited downtown between one and five times per month. That's over 80% of the population that is in the downtown at least once a month.

*It will be important to add amenities and opportunities that encourage people to linger in the downtown, rather than just run in and out for errands. Since many people probably run errands downtown while on their lunch break, outdoor dining opportunities might be one good way to entice people to stay longer. There are already several types of shops that invite impromptu lingering of visitors, which include dining establishments, coffee bars, café, sandwich shop, and a bookstore just off the square. The more inviting the downtown becomes, the more likely it is these visitors will extend their business trips to downtown to include some leisure time spent there.*

- East of the downtown square is the 300,000 square-foot West Plains Civic Center. With an exhibit hall, theater, meeting rooms, arena, aquatic center, and fitness center, it draws thousands of visitors every year. The Civic Center has a theater and is a giant entertainment option, with rodeos, monthly gospel concerts, and performances through MSU-WP performing arts grants.

*It is important to capitalize on the number of visitors the Civic Center brings into West Plains' downtown. Although the Civic Center is technically in West Plains' downtown, it faces the backs of most of the downtown buildings and visitors who are unfamiliar with the area would never know that only a thousand or so feet away is a charming historic downtown. Unfortunately, at this time there is nothing at the*

Civic Center visitors can pick up that would inform them on where the downtown is and what it has to offer. This is a serious missed opportunity. A kiosk with visitor information about West Plains and its downtown would be good to place at the Civic Center. Its extended hours and proximity to downtown makes it an ideal place to provide information for visitors.

- SMSU has a campus complex on the western edge of downtown. The college has a 50-year plan and has developed everything west of the square. The fact that downtown is between the Civic Center on the east and the University on the west, and all three are within walking distance of each other, opens tremendous opportunities for West Plains' downtown. At this time, a walkway lit with old-fashioned lights is planned to extend from the campus to the Civic Center.
- **According to focus group comments**, with all of the parking lots and public parking in the downtown area, there is probably room to park couple thousand cars pretty close to downtown. They are also expanding parking at the Civic Center and the Senior Center.

*If arrangements can be worked out between the city, SMSU and the senior center to allow at least portions of their parking area to be used during a special event, this would allow a sizable event to be held in the downtown square and still accommodate the parking needs. Also, if it is a very large event, it would be worth exploring the possibilities of running a shuttle between the downtown and one of the shopping areas in downtown. If the event is likely to attract quite a few visitors, shopping malls sometimes are very willing to supply some of their parking area for shuttle service, since that means visitors will definitely be coming to their mall.*

- There are three churches just off the Square, which means there are a lot of people in downtown on a Sunday.

*To take advantage of these regular Sunday visitors to downtown, it would be good if at least one Sunday afternoon a month the shops could be open from noon until 5 p.m. A possible promotional tool shops could use on these Sundays would be an extra discount for people who present their church bulletin at the time of the purchase. This would help motivate people who are already in or near the downtown to stay and shop for a while. Gospel music concerts held in the downtown on these Sundays would provide a good draw on these days.*

- The genealogy library is located six blocks from downtown.

*This would tie well with a Founders' Day celebration, the Harlin Museum, and the Broadfoot collection. Also, since a folklorist has been hired to work with Ozark Preservation, Inc., the genealogy library would provide a good tie in with that. West Plains is in a good position to become a showcase and preservation hub for Ozark art, folklore, etc. It's possible that MSU-WP would want to become involved with this type of approach. The Ozark angle would provide West Plains a distinction from other small towns that are using the arts to help revitalize their downtowns.*

- The Harlin Art Museum is located in downtown and holds six art shows per year. In addition to Native American artifacts and items of historic significance from area residents, the museum houses the Lennis Broadfoot collection of a series of charcoal drawings and biographies of the oldest residents of Shannon and surrounding counties. The museum is owned and operated by a private foundation. In connection with the Broadfoot collection, it has had school children come to the museum for demonstrations in charcoal drawings.

- There are benches in front of shops around the square. The square is attractive, which provides nice places for visitors to relax. Without green space or shade, however, it's questionable how well utilized the benches are.

- There is already a full-time employee in place to manage the Welcome Center—the Welcome Center Director. The Director not only manages the Welcome Center, but also is in charge grant writing. Consequently, this is a key position in the promotion of West Plains.

*To ensure optimum results and avoid duplication of efforts, it will be imperative that there is collaboration between the Welcome Center Director, the Chamber of Commerce, and Downtown West Plains, Inc. Among other things, the collaboration could include grant opportunities and application, cooperative advertising, promotional brochure development, etc.*

- The Ozark Heritage Welcome Center is located at the northern edge of town and provides a good distribution center for information about West Plains. The Center is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday

through Friday, and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays. Unfortunately, it is closed on Sundays, but it does have an outside location where after hours people can obtain a map, *Visitor's Guide* and day-tours brochure. Information is also distributed to local hotels, but it's not always put where it is readily noticed.

- There are already a significant number of organizations in the city that work to promote all or an aspect of the city. These organizations are: Ozark Heritage Welcome Center, Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation, Missouri State University, West Plains Civic Center (managed by the city), Ozarks Radio Network, KHOM and the Point Radio, West Plains Daily Quill, Optimists Club, Southern Missouri Home Builders, Local Arts Council, and Car Clubs.

*These organizations can be a tremendous asset to marketing West Plains' downtown, but it will be important to supply them quality and timely information on a regular basis in order to maximize their potential benefit. A marketing plan that recognizes these organizations' role is needed to ensure the best advantage is taken of the opportunities these organizations offer.*

- There is WiFi at the Downtown Antique Mall and through the whole downtown square. People need an account to hook into it, however.

*It would be nice if the WiFi could be set up so that anyone dining or relaxing in the downtown square could access it, similar to what is offered in most coffee shops and even some McDonalds these days. Some cities (the city of St. Peters, MO is one) have begun offering free WiFi in their parks. This amenity would provide a good incentive for people to come downtown during long lunches, breaks from seminars at the Civic Center, etc. They could relax downtown and still access important e-mail messages or even work from their laptops.*

- There are a lot of outdoor recreational opportunities in West Plains. The outlying areas have good hunting grounds, the lakes and the rivers provide fishing and canoeing recreation. The natural beauty of the area also provides prime camping opportunities.

*Many of these types of outdoor recreational opportunities makes West Plains an ideal retirement community, which works well with the idea of putting loft apartments in the downtown. These will be good amenities to promote when marketing to potential retirees.*

- West Plains is home to the second largest dirt racetrack in the country, which attracts approximately 10,000 people on its biggest weekends.

*This is a lot of visitors coming to West Plains. It's important to ensure there is good promotional materials, ads, etc. for the downtown in the places these visitors typically frequent on their visits.*

- The Opera House has banquets and some performances. It is nicely restored upstairs and down. It contains a large banquet room with a balcony and also offers small office spaces.
- The Avenue Theater is located downtown. It is an old theater that has been restored and turned into a performing arts theater.
- There are a number of restaurants in West Plains, many of them downtown. Options include fine dining, casual dining, chain restaurants, Mexican restaurants, Chinese restaurants, and a downtown coffee shop.
- Business owners cited the low cost as a major reason they chose to locate their businesses downtown.

*The beauty and affordability of downtown provide good incentives to entrepreneurs. This is especially true if business owners can live above their businesses. This needs to be included in promotions to bring more businesses into downtown.*

- Business owners indicated that they might support a "special business district" tax, although they felt that property owners would likely support a sales tax while shop owners who rent would support a property tax.
- There is a good mix of shops and services downtown, with things that would appeal to locals as well as tourists. One thing missing, however, is a grocery store. (addressed in the "Weaknesses" section of this SWOT analysis)
- The downtown is fairly well filled in, without a concentration of vacant storefronts in any particular area. This gives the downtown a broader feeling of viability. In addition, the downtown shopping area is fairly compact and can be navigated on foot.

- A business incubator is planned for the Butler Building, which will encourage new businesses to be located downtown. The incubator will also bring more people into downtown to work on a daily basis. Phase 1 will open in the spring of 2008, and will be for education and training. Its classes will also be open to other businesses in the downtown. Fiber optic cable is available at the incubator, and an entrepreneurial suite for online business ventures will also be included. (MSU-WP offers an Associate degree in Entrepreneurship and classes from that will be part of the business education offered at the incubator) The first floor will have office and retail, also light manufacturing. Grants and an architect have already been acquired. Promoters are putting together funding for about \$1.5 million and will need to put together additional funding for the remainder – about ¾ million. NAP credits are expected to pay for it. A brochure on it is being prepared now.

*With the classes in entrepreneurship, this business incubator presents a unique opportunity to people wanting to start a small business. Since businesses today must also compete with online businesses, it would be good to offer downtown businesses training in online marketing and how to expand their businesses to include online sales. Although entrepreneurship courses from MSU-WP are going to be part of the requirements for businesses locating in the Butler building, a review of the course listings for the college's AS in Entrepreneurship didn't readily identify classes that would help in this area. (it's possible it would be covered in Marketing & Sales)*

- West Plains has already developed several strong special events. The second Saturday of every month, a Second Saturday Stroll event is held downtown. The event includes musicians, people making balloon animals, etc. It has a good draw for crowds, with about 90% of the visitors from the local area.

*Events with a strong local draw are highly desirable because they make area residents more aware of what is in their own backyard and can encourage them to think of shopping downtown more often. Locals can provide a steadier flow for retail. Tourism is good, but it has more peaks and valleys with seasons and economy fluctuations.*

Another event is the Old Time Music Festival, which features old-time music exclusively. This event probably has the biggest draw, and attracts visitors from a farther distance. It typically has about 3,000 to 4,000 in attendance, but the last time it was held, attendance

estimates were over 10,000. This event attracts an older crowd with nothing for the children and generally not interesting for people under age 30.

*It might be good to incorporate the Harlin Museum and Broadfoot collection into this event. Since the event attracts a lot of visitors, it is a good opportunity to expose and interest visitors in the museum and the collection, and possibly generate later visits to West Plains. One way to broaden the appeal of the event would be to include folktales and old-time crafts and games with the event. This would bring young families to the event and help expose them to the roots of life in the Ozarks. This would be an especially good fit if West Plains develops a position as a regional center for Ozark art and folklore.*

West Plains' annual Home and Garden show hosts approximately 120 booths, and is the largest home and garden show in southern Missouri. Approximately 3,000 to 4,000 visitors attend this event.

A Farmers' Market is held every week on Saturday morning.

In July the Colgate Country Showdown Regional Competition is held in West Plains. Another music-based event is the Heart of the Ozarks Bluegrass Festival. Although this is a popular annual event for West Plains, it is held two miles from downtown.

*It would be good to try and tie some venues with the Bluegrass event to the downtown. Also, it is important that information promoting the downtown is on display and readily available in the area where visitors attend this event.*

An annual Car show is held downtown. Approximately 1,000 people attend this event.

- The area around the downtown square is already in pretty good condition and investments have already been made in both the infrastructure and buildings. The city put \$800,000 of TIF money downtown, which went to lighting, benches, planters, and sidewalks. In addition, there are quite a few business owners who already have or are in the process of making renovations to their buildings.

*This is a great start and will help encourage further progress in the downtown. It will be important to make sure all downtown business owners feel like they are part of a team that will lead the downtown in*

*a different direction for the benefit of everyone. There is a danger that some of the business owners who led the effort in revitalizing downtown and possibly didn't get as much outside financial assistance to make the improvements will begrudge special assistance to downtown business owners wanting to make improvements now. They might feel like, "I didn't get any help with my improvements, why should they get help?" A special newsletter for downtown business owners might help everyone understand and stay focused on the importance of continuing the revitalization, even if it means some businesses receive more assistance than others.*

- The window displays of most shops are attractive and most of the upper-story windows are covered with either blinds or curtains. These factors make the area more appealing and appear more vital.
- The sidewalks around the courthouse square are in good repair. As one goes out immediately from the square, there are no noticeable problems with sidewalks that would cause significant difficulty for pedestrians.
- The City videotapes and broadcasts on cable every city council meeting, which helps keep the community informed on what the City's plans are for downtown. Copies of the tapes are also available.

*It would be good if a brief program that summarizes the downtown plans and progress could be produced and aired on the cable channel also. It wouldn't need to be long or produced more often than every couple months, but it would provide a concise focus on the downtown. It's possible students at the college would be interested in working on a program such as this as part of their class work. Also, it would be good to make both these program tapes and the council meeting tapes available for checkout through the public library so people without cable service have access to them. Doing this would also allow people who don't know how to set a VCR to tape at certain times the convenience of watching the programs at times convenient to them.*

- Downtown proponents use different media avenues to let people know what is going on. There is a weekly radio show and they have liberal access to the local newspaper, which is astoundingly well read. News releases are sent on a regular basis and the local papers are good at picking up the releases. In addition, the Chamber provides a good information outlet. Its Web site has weekly information about downtown and what is going on there.

- The city prints a quarterly newsletter called *Open Line*, which goes to anyone who gets a utility bill. Currently, however, it mainly covers city business and what is happening at City Hall. It doesn't carry much about events.

*This is an established communication avenue that can be better utilized to help revitalize downtown. Since the DREAM community survey indicated more than 50% of residents didn't feel revitalizing downtown was a priority, a city newsletter that goes to all residents can be an extremely valuable tool in changing residents' attitudes and habits. Also, focus group comments indicated that people currently give city government high approval ratings; consequently, articles concerning downtown in a city newsletter would carry a lot of influence.*

- The *Visitor's Guide* has listing of restaurants, antique shops, and map of city with points of interest identified.

## West Plains Weaknesses

- There is a lack of grocery shopping near downtown, which is a slight drawback for people considering downtown loft apartments. Most of the grocery shopping is in the southern portion of town. At this time, however, it's doubtful that the population in and immediately surrounding the downtown area could support a traditional grocery store.

*Since a portion of the small business incubator in the Butler Building will be used for retail space, possibly a mini grocery store could be housed there, similar to the corner grocery stores one used to find in urban areas.*

- **According to focus group comments**, on Monday nights there is nowhere to eat downtown. This is a drawback for not only people visiting downtown, but also for people who would consider moving into the downtown area. This is also a problem since the Civic Center is located at the edge of downtown and the events held there continually bring people into downtown. Many of these visitors would probably patronize an eating establishment that was conveniently located and open.
- **According to focus group comments**, one problem with downtown is that there are no high-volume retailers, such as a grocery store, to generate a significant amount of sales tax. Consequently, even if a special half-percent sales tax were passed, it probably wouldn't generate large amounts of funds to help pay for some of the downtown's revitalization needs. Other sources will need to be explored.

*Even at this time, a special sales tax would supply a steady supplement to help market the downtown. In addition, as the commerce in the downtown grows, the sales-tax revenue will increase.*

- **According to focus group comments**, right now a lot of the space in the downtown square is taken up by offices, leaving less room for retail facilities that might attract shoppers.

*While offices are good in that they occupy buildings and place workers in the downtown area, they don't encourage visitors to linger and shop. They contribute more to a mood of get in, take care of business,*

*and get out. It would be nice if more of these offices were replaced with retail facilities.*

- **According to focus group comments**, there is no ATM in the downtown area. Some people will decide against making some types of purchases if they aren't able to readily get cash when they are downtown.

*Even if banks will not open branches in the downtown at this time, it would be worth trying to induce one or two of them to place an ATM in the downtown. In or near the Civic Center would be a good choice, since the Civic Center gets a lot of visitors who would be likely to use that type of convenience.*

- The business hours that many downtown shops observe are extremely inconvenient to today's typical shoppers. In addition to closing early Monday through Saturday, many of the shops are closed on Sundays. This means during some of the prime hours and days when people are more likely to want to shop, there's very little open downtown. **According to focus group comments**, improved business hours are a priority in improving the user-friendliness of downtown.

*While it is difficult for a small shop to stay open long hours, flexible business hours could help the situation. It would be good if one night of the week at least the majority of the businesses could agree to stay open until 8 p.m. If mornings seem to be a busy time for some shops, they could be open a few hours in the morning and then close until about 3 p.m. in the afternoon. Then they could be open from 3 p.m. until 8 p.m. or later. The important thing would be that if shoppers come to the downtown on one of these designated evenings, there will a variety of shops open to them.*

*These evenings could be promoted as "Downtown Nights." It would be good if retailers could offer special sales or promotions on those evenings to further lure shoppers into downtown and away from the chain stores. Also, during the summer months, if there could be music in the downtown or other entertainment options on these nights, it would make a trip downtown more of an entertainment activity and draw more people. Friday evenings might be a good evening to start this practice, especially if there will be entertainment options included. Later, once shoppers begin to catch onto visiting downtown in the evening, the evening hours could be expanded to a second evening of the week.*

*For Sundays, a good start would be if one Sunday afternoon a month the shops could be open in the afternoon, possibly from noon until 5 p.m. With several churches located in and near the downtown, there are a number of people in the downtown area on any given Sunday. Afternoon Southern Gospel concerts in the downtown would provide a good draw on these days. A possible promotional tool shops could use on these Sundays would be an extra discount for people who present their church bulletin at the time of the purchase. This would help motivate people who are already in or near the downtown to stay and shop for a while.*

- Many of the merchants are comfortable with the amount of retail they have and don't care to grow. This mentality affects their lack of willingness to stay open later, even when large events are held in the downtown. When festivals first started to be held downtown, there was a backlash from some merchants because they didn't know how to deal with large numbers of people who might just be looking and not spending money.

*Business owners need to be educated on the value of people looking even when they don't buy, and how that can later translate into sales. Also they need to understand that stagnation eventually leads to the death of a business. Some business owners may be afraid of growth because they don't know how they would handle it. This will be something that can be addressed by the educational component of the small business incubator.*

- There are a lot of complaints about a lack of parking space in the downtown. This is especially true on court days. Business owners, employees, and courthouse employees sometimes take up all the parking spaces along the street. It is likely, however, that much of this problem is more perceived than actual since there are multiple parking lots behind buildings in the downtown. Many people, however, don't know about the lots, or don't know if they are for public or private parking. Many of these lots are also in poor condition, with little or no lighting, full of potholes, and in some cases not paved. Another factor is people sometimes feel like they are parking closer if they can see the front of the store from their parking space. Often they will have to walk just as far when they park at Wal-Mart, but because they can see the front of the store, they think they are closer.

*Signs are needed in the downtown that will direct people to the additional public parking spaces available. The signs should be large and distinctive enough that people can easily spot them. In addition, they should say "public parking" so even visitors know it is okay to park there when they are visiting the downtown.*

*The condition of the parking lots should also be addressed. If they are made attractive, people would mind less about parking in them. In addition to paving them and making sure the surface is in good repair, it would be good to add trees, flower boxes, and other beautification factors to the parking lots.*

*Since the parking lots are in the back of many of the downtown businesses, it would be advisable to encourage these businesses to dress up their back doors and allow shoppers to enter their shops from the back as well as from the front. If people can see an attractive entrance to a shop from where they are parked, they might not perceive the distance as being quite as far. Shopping malls are set up this way so that people can come in multiple doors, but never feel like they had to park too far away.*

*All improvements to the parking should be well publicized via the newspapers, Chamber and other organizational newsletters, the city newsletter, and a downtown Web site. Part of the information campaign should include making the public aware of the actual distance they might have to walk when they park in one of these lots or on a side street downtown. This distance can then be compared to how far one has to walk across a large, full parking lot, such as at Wal-Mart.*

- **According to focus group comments**, parking in the Square is dangerous. It's hard to back out of a parking spot because people treat it as a thoroughfare, when it's really a parking lot.

*If people are worried they will get hit backing out of a parking space on the square, they might be less likely to come downtown for leisure shopping. The speed limit around the square should be similar to what is posted in parking lots. Also, signs should be posted to remind drivers to watch for cars exiting parking spaces. If the parking lots in the downtown are well marked and made attractive, people might even prefer that alternative to parking directly on the square.*

- **According to focus group comments**, in addition to not being open in the evenings, some businesses put up signs such as “Be back in 15 minutes” during their normal business hours. This inconsistency in when shoppers can depend on the shops being open makes people not want to waste their lunch hour going downtown, only to find out the shop isn’t open.

*Business owners need to be made aware of how damaging those types of actions are for the whole downtown. One way to educate business owners on these types of things is through a newsletter specifically for downtown businesses. A print newsletter is preferable to an e-mailed newsletter, since many small business owners say they don’t have time to open, print and read e-mailed newsletters. Since the group of businesses isn’t large, the mailing costs wouldn’t be too significant.*

*The newsletter can address not only poor business practices, such as the one mentioned above, but also provide special event dates and business opportunities with them, positive business suggestions, information about funding opportunities for façade refurbishing, local and state legislation that would directly concern downtown business owners, and other matters of interest to downtown business owners. To remain timely and effective, the newsletter probably should be put out at least three to four time per year.*

- **According to focus group comments**, restaurant hours downtown are inconvenient. Some restaurants close fairly early—around 8:00 or 9:00 pm. After many Civic Center shows, there is no place to eat downtown. In addition, small coffee shops or bakeries often open at 10:00 or 11:00 a.m., making it impossible for people who work to stop for a cup of coffee in the morning.

*These are a lot of missed opportunities to bring or keep visitors downtown, where they will spend money. Possibly one or two of the downtown restaurants could work with the Civic Center and stay open later on evenings when there are later productions. In addition, if in the program these restaurants could put a coupon offering a percentage off an order on the evening of the production, it would not only let the patrons know that there is an open restaurant nearby, but it could also encourage impromptu visits. This would make it more worth the restaurant’s time to stay open late.*

- There are not good signs directing visitors to the downtown from the main routes into West Plains. Motorists have to already be close to

downtown before they begin seeing any signs. Also, there is nothing around the medical center and hospital directing visitors to the downtown. This is a real missed opportunity since the medical center draws people from all around the region. The hospital also has a Hospitality House where out-of-town patients and their spouses can stay during radiation and chemo treatments. Many of these patients and/or their families would enjoy visiting the shops downtown for an hour or so during their stay if they knew what was there and had clear directions on how to get to it. **According to focus group comments**, it’s hard to get around West Plains or to give directions because nothing is straight or square – the roads change names four or five times, and sometimes you don’t know they’ve changed.

*Signs directing visitors into downtown are needed along every major entrance to West Plains, especially entrances that lead into the current primary shopping areas. Since West Plains is a retail center for about a 60-mile radius, it draws many shoppers from outlying areas. If they were made aware of West Plains downtown and how to get to it, these shoppers might be encouraged to shop downtown as well as at Wal-Mart and the strip malls. Because roads in West Plains tend to curve, branch off, and change names, it is also important to put signs throughout West Plains that continue directing visitors to the downtown. Signs at the edges and center of town won’t be enough. All signs directing visitors to West Plains’ historic district should have a distinctive and consistent color and historic appearance.*

*In addition, it is important to work with the hospital to get information into the hands of patients’ families. Printed brochures with a list of shops and a map showing how to get from the hospital to downtown could be placed at the hospital’s information desk and/or with the hospital’s concierge.*

- It’s very hard to see the signs directing visitors to the Harlin Museum.

*If West Plains develops more identification with the arts, the museum will play an increasingly important role in attracting visitors to the downtown area since it houses the Broadfoot collection. The signs for the museum should be more prominent and more numerous.*

- **According to focus group comments**, it’s been very difficult to get the downtown group to cooperate on downtown advertising. An example of this is the Second Saturday Stroll. Some of the merchants have

started staying open later, but many refuse to contribute to the advertising costs.

*One of the things that draw businesses to locate near busy retail centers, such as Wal-Mart, is that they can cash in on the foot traffic these retail giants bring in through their huge advertising budgets. Small, individual retailers downtown, however, are very limited in the marketing dollars they can afford. This means they are usually unable to afford the frequency of ad placement needed to change the shopping habits of a target market. If an advertising co-op that promotes all of downtown is created, it can give downtown merchants a better ROI for their advertising dollars. Education of merchants on the benefits of such a co-op would be important. One way to educate merchants on the benefits of such a system would be through a business newsletter.*

- There is no single promotional piece for the city's downtown at the Welcome Center or located at any of the shops downtown.

*It would be good to have a printed piece that specifically promoted downtown. Such a piece should be easy to scan, include a map and a list of shops with their location, and be organized by interest areas. (i.e. antiques, clothing, etc.) —very similar to the types of maps you see at large shopping centers/complexes. If there is room, it would be good to also include a list of special events and at least a couple sentences about each event, in order to encourage return trips by visitors. That type of a brochure should be displayed and available at all of the shops in the downtown and at other locations throughout town. It should especially be at the Civic Center. That way, even if a visitor didn't stop by the Welcome Center, they would have an easy-to-use piece acquainting them what downtown has to offer.*

- Although the *West Plains Visitor's Guide* refers to the city's historic downtown, it does not have a map of the downtown, nor does it show the location of the historic downtown on the city map included in the *Visitor's Guide*. Also, quite a bit of the *Visitor's Guide* is dedicated to information about mills, springs, rivers, and other points of interest that are located across a fairly wide region. Some of the points mentioned are even located in Arkansas. Since visits to these different attractions would undoubtedly send people away from West Plains, it's inadvisable to give them such prominence and so much space in the *West Plains Visitor's Guide*. Also, while many events are listed under the Calendar of Events, there are no descriptions with those

listings. This is a missed opportunity to interest visitors in upcoming events and bring them back to the city. There are descriptions of several events in other locations of the *Guide*. Since the events are not grouped as events, however, it makes it difficult for someone to peruse the *Guide* and quickly comprehend the full scope of what special events are held in West Plains, when they are held, and what they are.

*It would be good to give more prominence to the city's downtown in the Visitor's Guide. The Guide should include a detailed map of the downtown with key landmarks and points of interest clearly identified. In addition, the city map should identify and label the historic downtown area. Also, it would help users if there were one or two-sentence descriptions of each of the primary special events, and if those descriptions were located either adjacent to the Calendar of Events list or on the pages either immediately preceding or following the list.*

- If visitors enter West Plains from the north on Hwy 63, the Welcome Center is at the outer edge of town and visitors can find information about West Plains there. If visitors enter West Plains from the east or west along Hwy 160, or from the south on Hwy 63, there are no signs directing them to where they can get information. This is a missed opportunity.

*Visitors should be informed of where they can get information as they enter the city from any of the main routes. Because the information center is not centrally located, people entering from the south would have to travel all the way through town to reach it, which would be a deterrent. It would be good if visitors who enter the city from the south, east and west could be directed into the downtown for visitor information. Possibly a kiosk with maps and informational brochures could be placed in the downtown, or a satellite information center could be placed at the Civic Center.*

- At City Hall, there are maps, a list of day tours, and other visitors-information pieces on display. This information, however, is mixed in with resident information on city services. This practice makes it more difficult for both visitors and residents to find the information they want. Also, the information at City Hall is only available Monday through Friday, during regular business hours.

*It would be more useful for visitors and residents alike if promotional and tourism pieces were separated from information on city services. Just putting them in different racks with signs on the top of the racks would be sufficient. It would also be useful to have a weather-proof information rack outside City Hall so people can pick up information after office hours or on weekends.*

- When the consultant visited the Welcome Center, the information on West Plains was not concentrated in one place, but was scattered about the Center in different locations and mixed in with information about other areas. This makes it harder for visitors to quickly comprehend what West Plains has to offer. In addition, the staff at the Welcome Center primarily promoted visiting the mills around the region, which essentially sends visitors away from West Plains. When specifically asked about the city's downtown area, the staff said they didn't have anything on the downtown. They also said they couldn't think of anything of historic interest when the consultant said she was particularly interested in history. (this is particularly disturbing since the Harlin Museum is located in downtown West Plains and it houses the Broadfoot collection, some Native American artifacts, and other items of historic significance)

*It would be good to group all the information on West Plains together in one place to make it easy for visitors to gather information on the city. The information can also be mixed in according to interest areas with information about other parts of the region and state, but there should be one area dedicated to only West Plains.*

*Also, while the staff at the Center worked hard to assist with suggesting activities, they clearly lacked important information about West Plains that would help them direct visitors into the city's downtown and to some of important places of interest. It would help if the Welcome Center staff members were provided a written list of talk points that were broken into interest categories. (i.e. arts, history, etc.) That way, anyone working there would be able to direct visitors to things in town that would be of interest. Without a written list, suggestions for what to see and do in West Plains are only as good as the worker's memory at that time.*

- In the 2007 Community Survey conducted by the DREAM Initiative, only 42,3% of the participants placed a priority on revitalizing downtown. This means the majority of West Plains residents at this

time don't view revitalizing the downtown as a priority and probably would be less likely to support publicly-funded expenditures on it.

*A multi-faceted education campaign is needed to help locals understand how a healthy downtown helps everyone, not just downtown business owners. In addition to news releases, a Web site and information in the city newsletter that highlights downtown will be important components of this type of campaign.*

- The Civic Center receives lots of visitors, but at this time, there is nothing there to hand out that will steer these visitors into the downtown.

*A kiosk with visitor information about West Plains and its downtown would be good to place at the Civic Center. Not only is the Civic Center located at the edge of the downtown, but it also has extended hours, which makes it more convenient for visitors.*

- Although there are benches around the Square, there is no green space that would invite visitors to linger in the area. Without inviting areas in the downtown, people are more likely to stay only as long as it takes them to conduct their business. At the time of the consultant's visit there also wasn't any outdoor cafes that would invite impromptu dining and extended lingering. The less time people spend in the downtown, the less likely they are to spend their discretionary dollars there.

*Even just a few small tables set outside of sandwich and coffee shops provide strong invitations for visitors to relax and linger in the downtown on nice afternoons. Add to that a little green space, flowers/plants and some shade, and you have turned downtown into a fun place to visit, not just a place where you quickly run in and out to attend to necessary business.*

- West Plains has a beautiful Civic Center that attracts thousands of visitors, for meetings, conferences, conventions, special events, etc. However, when visitors come out of the Civic Center, the view that greets them is the backs of unattractive downtown buildings and a lot filled with empty semi trailers. These factors give visitors a poor impression of West Plains and don't encourage visitors to explore the downtown further.

*Since so many visitors come to the Civic Center, more needs to be done to make the downtown's view from it appealing.*

- Although the immediate downtown has been significantly improved, many of the areas leading into the downtown appear rundown and are uninviting. This can turn visitors off from wanting to continue into the downtown and shop there. The area along the railroad track on the opposite side from downtown looks bad and needs to be cleaned up.

*It will be important to pay attention to the primary entrances to downtown, and areas immediately adjacent to downtown. When people consider investments in real estate, they pay almost as much attention to the appearance of the approaches to the property as they do to what immediately surrounds the property. It will be difficult to successfully market the downtown if the approaches and nearby surrounding areas are deteriorating.*

- Although the facades of most buildings around the square are attractive and well maintained, the shops located along little side wings on square look a little more neglected.

*It will be important to ensure the façade improvements extend into those areas also. These little side arcades offer good opportunities for setting up outdoor dining, and interesting spots for visitors to relax.*

- Windows of vacant buildings aren't well utilized. Some are just empty, others are covered with yellowed newspapers.

*It would be better if vacant store windows were filled with a large, colorful poster promoting the downtown. Another possibility would be to rent out the window space in vacant buildings as ad space for other downtown businesses. This would make the area seem more vital, even if there are several vacant stores.*

- The current downtown logo is the turret on the Zorn building. Unfortunately, the Zorn building is falling into disrepair, and the whole downstairs looks like the building is vacant. This makes a bad impression when the city is using the most recognizable part of the building as its logo.

*Because of the historic significance of the Zorn building, an ideal solution would be for the city to acquire the building and maybe turn it*

*into a museum or something else where the city is in control of the condition of the building. If the city cannot gain control of the building or convince the owner to clean it up, it might be advisable to change the downtown logo to something else.*

- The Yellow House Community Arts Center is listed in the *Visitor's Guide* as a point of interest. The house, however, is somewhat in disrepair with paint peeling in places and the windows on the second story in disrepair and missing a screen.

*It is important that the facades of the buildings specifically listed in the Visitor's Guide are in good condition. You don't want to draw special attention to buildings that are in disrepair.*

- Although its multilane highway access is improving, West Plains is quite a distance from an interstate highway. This makes it harder for West Plains to attract impromptu visits from motorists.

*West Plains will need to work more on becoming a destination and building its strength as a regional center.*

- Although the Heart of the Ozarks Bluegrass Festival is growing and becoming more popular, it is held two miles from downtown. This means it probably has limited impact on sending visitors into West Plains' downtown.

*Since so many visitors come to this event, it will be important to leverage its popularity to encourage visits to the downtown and stimulate awareness of the downtown. It would be good if complimentary venues in the downtown could be added during the Festival. Also, promotional information about the downtown should be on display at the Festival location.*

## West Plains Opportunities

- People travel through West Plains on their way from Springfield, MO to Memphis, TN or Tunica, MS. Hwy 63 is also a direct route between Branson, MO and Memphis, TN. There are already a number of tour busses along these routes stopping in West Plains to eat, but they don't stay long enough to shop. It would be good if the tour directors responsible for setting the itinerary of these tour groups could be provided information about particular events and points of interest in town that might appeal to these groups.

*The first step would be to create a list of the tour companies that come through West Plains. . If there is a way to obtain from these tour groups the typical demographics of the people who go on the tours, and the types of things that the tour groups visit when they get to Branson, that would provide a good indication of the types of things and events that would interest these groups .Both printed information and personal contact will be needed to optimize the potential of convincing tour directors that West Plains is worth an extra couple hours of time along the tour route.*

*Since many of these tours will be going to Branson for Country Western music shows, events that feature that type of music or even the Old Time Music Festival are good events to promote to these tour directors. Elsewhere in the "Opportunities" section of this SWOT analysis, the possibility of allowing independent concerts around the square on specified days by local musicians is discussed. If that is done and catches on to the point that you can always depend on musicians entertaining on those days, this would be something good to promote to the tour directors.*

*Other good events to promote to these tours would be events where local artists or craftsmen have displays set up in the square. This is especially true if the Broadfoot collection is on display at the Harlin Museum or in the downtown.*

- A downtown business incubator project can help move both more businesses and specifically-desired businesses downtown. A business incubator is already planned for the Butler Building (see "Strength" portion of this SWOT analysis).

*There may be ways to also create a virtual business incubator downtown in order to allow a better distribution of desired businesses. Some assistance and support could be given to preferred businesses, only the businesses would be in different buildings rather than in one building. One form of assistance would be to partially subsidize the rent for the first year, with the monthly rent based on a percentage of the business's gross receipts. The rental assistance could be done with an option to buy the building. The virtual incubator could also be set up so that local investors can buy shares in different businesses.*

*One suggestion focus group participants made was to put something of a food mall in the old Richard's food store downtown. The mall would include things like a bakery, candy shop, flower shop, etc. Another good fit in an establishment like this is a place where people can come to a location, pre-prepare several meals in one session, then take the packaged meals home with them. (see [www.letsdish.com](http://www.letsdish.com)) This is a new concept that has been growing in popularity. Putting in restaurants, coffee and sandwich shops, and gift shops across from the Civic Center might be another good option for making the downtown more appealing to visitors.*

**According to focus group comments**, participants felt strongly that small businesses should be encouraged and the City should inform potential business owners of loans, grants, and other possible funding for businesses. Another function of a business incubator, whether virtual or actual, could be to help prospective business owners find funding sources.

- **According to focus group comments**, participants felt more downtown dining options would draw people.

*While expanded options can provide a draw to the downtown, it will be essential that the hours restaurants and shops are open are expanded also. This is particularly important on nights when there are performances and evening events held at the Civic Center. Possible options for keeping specified restaurants open on these evenings and ways to direct Civic Center attendees to these restaurants are discussed in the "Weakness" section of this SWOT analysis.*

- A lot of business comes to West Plains from northern Arkansas. According to the Chamber, West Plains is the largest city in 100 miles and has an estimated retail trade area of about 135,000 to 150,000 people.

*It would be good to add billboards promoting West Plains' historic downtown along the routes leading into West Plains from Arkansas. So visitors don't confuse the downtown with the other primary shopping areas in the city, it would be nice if these billboards could feature a scenic picture of downtown. That way visitors might be attracted by the nostalgia of the area as well as know West Plains historic downtown is not the modern shopping areas they are used to visiting. These billboards would also be good to put around the Southern Hills shopping area. (this is discussed in more detail in the "Strength" section of the SWOT analysis)*

*Placing downtown promotional pieces at gas stations on the main highways would also be a good way to promote the downtown to people as they approach West Plains.*

*When special events are being held in downtown, It might also be good to put up a marker board in these highly-visited areas with the announcement, "This week in downtown West Plains." That way when visitors and residents are doing their regular shopping, they will know if there is something special going on downtown.*

- *When the consultant visited downtown, one coffee shop had a promotional card that offered free coffee after a number of purchases. Other merchants may have had similar offers, but the consultant didn't encounter any other of these on her visit. It would be good to encourage more merchants to utilize these types of promotional tools. These are good tools to promote return visits to the downtown area. Another possible promotional tool would be to create a brochure with discount coupons in it for the different merchants, similar to what one generally finds at outlet malls. Representation in the brochure could be tied to membership in a downtown merchants' promotions group. The brochure would then be made available at the participating merchants in the downtown, at the Welcome Center, the Civic Center, and other locations around West Plains where the downtown is to be promoted.*
- *Downtown building owners are getting a lot of requests for small, one person offices. Adding this to some of the old downtown buildings will fill the need and move more people into downtown.*

*It's advisable that these buildings be more on the edges of downtown so as not to take up prime retail space.*

- *The Civic Center hosts a variety of events, including Grizzlies games, school plays and shows, and music shows. Thousands of visitors come to the Civic Center annually.*

*With thousands of visitors already coming to the Civic Center, it's important to capitalize on this advantage and attempt to move them into the downtown. Promotional information on downtown should be prominently displayed at the Civic Center. A kiosk might be a good option to accomplish that. To keep the area from becoming cluttered with too much information, the printed pieces should be held to a minimum. Recommended pieces would include a downtown map with a list of shops and restaurants, a brochure with promotional coupons/ads for downtown businesses, and an informational piece that includes special events planned for downtown. (Promotions at the Civic Center is discussed further in the "Strengths" section of this SWOT analysis)*

- *Some cities hold noontime brown bag concerts by local talent to encourage people to come to the downtown for lunch. This would also work if there were designated evenings when local talent can come and perform in the downtown square.*

*The square can be opened at specified times and days for independent concerts. (possibly from noon until 2:00 p.m., and then again from 5:00-8:00 p.m.) Local musicians could set up at designated spots in the downtown to perform. These spots could be on a first-come, first-served basis, or booked ahead of time. Also, they should be far enough away from each other so that the music from one musician won't significantly interfere with another musician. (decibel limits might have to be set to avoid problems with some musicians wanting to blast their music out too loud.) It's okay and actually desirable to be able to faintly hear music from other areas of the downtown—this ties the whole downtown together. Dress and acceptable-behavior standards might also have to be established to avoid problems arising later with musicians that might be offensive to visitors.*

*Since there is a lot of local music talent, and if it is free for the musicians to perform, it's reasonable to believe that with time and some promotion this could become an ongoing feature of downtown. Music filling the downtown would attract people to downtown on those days and would also provide an incentive for tour buses to make*

longer stops in downtown. While this is something that might take a while to catch on with both musicians and visitors, with proper promotion it could provide a good draw.

While live performances are preferable and provide a better draw for visitors, playing music through speakers placed around the square could also help give the downtown more of a special feel;

- Downtown is associated with the Old Time Music Festival, which already attracts large crowds and is growing. More events are being added, including mule jumping and vendors selling home-made craft-type items on the square. This year they also had bigger-name groups playing. This event attracts an older crowd with nothing for the children and generally is not interesting for people under age 30.

Since this event is already growing, it would be good to keep investing in the momentum of the event through broadening the appeal. One way to broaden the appeal would be to include folktales and old-time crafts and games with the event. This would bring young families to the event and help expose them to the roots of life in the Ozarks. This would be an especially good fit if West Plains develops a position as a regional center for Ozark art and folklore. Tying in the Harlin Museum and Broadfoot collection could also provide a good fit. (the Old Time Music Festival is also discussed in the "Strengths" section of this SWOT analysis)

- West Plains recently attempted to hold a boat show, but attendance was not up to what was needed. If not too much time has gone by since it was held, it might be worth trying again. You need to figure on the first year not being very big, and give the event more time to catch on. You don't want to throw away a good idea prematurely.

First, look at how the event was promoted. Was there adequate lead time to identify the appropriate target markets and then get the message out to them? Was it promoted sufficiently, or in communication avenues that the target market was likely to use? Then look at when it was held. Was it in direct competition with larger or more established events that draw on the same target audience? Also, look at the target markets that would most likely be attracted to this type of event. What is its size and proximity to where the event was held?

After doing this analysis, see if there are some adjustments that can be made that would give the event a better chance of success. If so, then you might want to try the event again and give it time to succeed.

One issue could be West Plains' proximity to large lakes. If the types of boats targeted for the show were large boats that are more appropriate for lake recreation than river that could be an issue. The nearest large lake is Norfolk Lake, which is about 50 miles away. That could be a little far to attract a large group of boating vendors and enthusiasts. It might be a good idea to try to have a more inclusive sport show that would include river recreational boating and fishing. Hunting equipment would provide another good addition. With the amount of outdoor sporting opportunities in West Plains, broadening the event a bit might be the key to drawing larger numbers.

West Plains also tried to have an "Art on the Square" event. The idea was to get 100 local artists to display their work for a weekend. In order to get quality artists, high goals were set for entry into the event, and only about six artists applied for the event. While the first attempt to hold the event wasn't successful, it would be a good fit with positioning West Plains as a cultural arts hub for the Ozarks and is worth refining and trying again.

In addition to going through the analysis outlined above, it would also be a good idea to lower the standards the first few years. The event needs to build momentum and a reputation before it can hold to high standards for entry. In addition, it would be good to combine this event with a display of the Broadfoot collection. Maybe include character actors to represent some of the people Broadfoot sketched in his collection. Another addition would be charcoal line drawing demonstrations and classes, similar to what was done for school children at the museum.

Another event that offers a lot of potential, but seems to be falling short, is the Farmers Market that is held at the edge of downtown from April through December. In its current location and under the current governing rules, the Market is dwindling. Currently, it is by membership only, which limits the number of people who can be there.

It would be good if the Market could be expanded into the downtown and opened to more vendors. Vendor spaces can be identified and given on a first-come-first-served basis, reserved, or a combination of

the two. (The Wentzville Community Club runs a flea market in this fashion, and then someone in a golf cart goes around the area about 8 a.m. and collects the booth rental from the vendors.) Also, if other entertainment venues could be added that would make a visit to the Market fun, even if you don't go to buy produce. Entertainment that could be added would be music, making balloon animals, caricature sketches, street skits, etc.

With its historic buildings and hometown USA atmosphere, downtown West Plains can provide fun, family-entertainment options for Christmas shopping and excursions that shoppers can't get at the malls.

Creating "living windows" in the shops around the square on specified weekend nights would be good. The window displays would include people posed in various Christmas scenes.

Another thing that can be done at Christmas is to set a theme that tells a story, and then position character actors from the story at different locations around the downtown square and arcades. Create a flyer with a map to show where the different characters are located. Have the characters each tell their part of the story through interaction with visitors. Visitors can collect "trading cards" from the different characters at each location or have their pictures made with them.

Visitors could also be given a card that must be stamped at different shops or locations around the square. Once shoppers have collected all the stamps, they would be eligible to drop the card into a drawing for a prize.

Of course, Christmas music, either performed live or piped in with speakers, would help set the tone. Carolers dressed in old-fashioned garments would be a good touch.

To set the downtown Christmas festivities apart from what shoppers would find at the malls, everything should tie to the historic nature and ambience of downtown. For that reason, it would be good to have an old-fashioned Santa there, rather than one dressed in a modern Santa Suit.

Another option would be to work with churches in the downtown area to see if they would be interested in supplying the singers for a "living Christmas tree." With that, a platform structure is built in a pyramid,

Christmas-tree shape and then covered with evergreen boughs and lights. During their performance, the singers stand on the platforms built into the tree.

To start with, it would probably be best to limit the activities to Saturday evenings between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Once the event catches on in popularity with shoppers and participants, it could be expanded to possibly Fridays or other evenings in the week.

- Hunting in the area is huge. Many people come to Central Missouri because the hunting is so good there. In addition, there are several rivers in the area for fishing and quite a few camp grounds.

Events and contests built around these outdoor activities have a good chance of attracting crowds. These events can include fishing-lure, duck-call, and turkey-call, contests. Local craftsmen who carve or otherwise make these types of hunting and fishing aids would be good vendors to add to this kind of an event.

- The majority of the participants in the D.R.E.A.M. Initiative community survey gave a high-priority rating to improvements to make the downtown more pedestrian friendly. Consequently, it's highly likely that adding pedestrian trails and walkways through and connecting to downtown will have community support. The city already has walking trails along the railroad and Howell Creek, near the downtown. Connecting them to the downtown might encourage pedestrians to go into the downtown for refreshments.

Once the downtown is better connected with pedestrian paths, there will be natural places to add green spaces. Since the Harlin Museum is up the hill from the downtown square, a good feature to add would be a walkway and green space between the downtown square and the Museum. Focus group participants also suggested a waterfall in this area, which would make this an especially appealing area for visitors.

Public information campaigns for these types of improvements will be important to show residents that improvements they have identified as important are being made. As residents see and are able to enjoy improvements in the downtown that they deem are important, they will be more likely to start understanding the importance of further revitalization in the downtown. They are also more likely to support

*funding initiatives when they know the money is going to something they feel is important. These types of campaigns need to be multifaceted and include newsletters, Web sites, news releases, ribbon cuttings, and other celebratory events. They should also be ongoing.*

- There are currently plans to connect the university and the Civic Center to the Square with pedestrian paths, which will make it more convenient for visitors at the Civic Center to go downtown and students to go downtown between or after classes. Connecting the college to downtown via pedestrian paths will increase the opportunity to open and promote downtown businesses that appeal to students.

*One promotional option would be to offer students special discounts at downtown stores. Placing ads and promotional information in the college newspaper would be a good way to communicate with students. It's also possible that a student reporter for the college newspaper would be interested in covering the downtown happenings and developments as a regular beat.*

*Promotional information about the downtown should be placed at student-gathering places at the college, such as in the student center, cafeteria, lobbies, etc. Bulletin boards would also be good places to place promotional information. Since UM-WP is a two-year commuter college, it is highly likely the ages of its student population is widely diverse. (unlike four-year universities that primarily serve younger students who live on campus) While the above-mentioned promotional methods may be effective for students ages 30 and up, promoting downtown via interactive Web sites, blogs, and youtube.com would be good choices for younger students.*

*Suggestions on promoting the downtown at the Civic Center are address in the "Strengths" portion of this SWOT analysis.*

- The West Plains' Genealogy Library is only six blocks from downtown. It would provide a good tie-in as part of a Founder's Day event, the Broadfoot collection, and any other event that focuses on Ozark history and folklore.
- The old town spring is under the old Post Office, which is a church now. Currently there is clear Plexiglas over the spring, but it is still visible. There have been discussions on selling the church. If the church could be renovated to house a number of different types of shops, especially shops that would appeal to tourists, it would be nice

to open the spring more for viewing and turn it into a tourist attraction.

- A lot of visitors who come to West Plains from neighboring areas go to gas stations, convenience stores, fast-food stores, and Wal-Mart, but they might also want to shop at some of the downtown specialty stores if they knew they existed. Workers at these places, however, often are unaware of the types of specialty shops that are located in downtown, and are unable to direct visitors there. Getting information to the frontline service workers in these locations could help direct visitors downtown specialty stores.

*Probably the most efficient way to do this will be through a printed piece that includes a map of how to get to downtown, a list of the shops in the downtown along with their addresses and phone numbers, and a map of the downtown. If room is available, a list of annual special events can be included. Frontline workers can be made aware of these brochures and direct customers on where they can find them. These brochures could be placed in racks at these stores and locations.*

- The city prints a quarterly newsletter and sends it to all residents who received a utility bill; however, it is only used to inform residents on what is happening at city hall. It would be good to use it to promote events or the downtown. Currently, local residents get their information about events and what is happening downtown via the radio, newspaper, Chamber of Commerce mailings, the Internet, and word-of-mouth. While these are all important communication avenues, they don't offer as broad of a reach as a city newsletter would provide.

*A city newsletter is an important tool that would be extremely beneficial for any communication/marketing campaign the city might undertake, because it will ensure residents get the information. In addition, to change attitudes and behaviors, the information needs to be more ongoing and consistent than can be accomplished when you are dependent on a news editor deciding whether and how to cover the information.*

- With the number of historic buildings located in downtown, visitors might be interested in self-guided walking tours of the downtown.

*It would be nice if there was a printed, self-guided tour of downtown West Plains. Each historic building should have a picture in the tour pamphlet/booklet along with a paragraph about it. The booklet might also have a suggested day's itinerary with things to do and places to eat.*

- Both the Welcome Center and City Hall have information about West Plains, and are likely places people might seek information about the city. A little rearranging of the information available at both of these locations would make it more user friendly.

*At the Welcome Center, the information about West Plains was not concentrated in one place—it was scattered about with other information about other areas. It would be more convenient for visitors to West Plains if there was a section devoted to West Plains. Duplications of the information could also be mixed with other areas according to interest.*

*At City Hall, maps, newsletter, a day-tours brochure, and the Visitors' Guide were on display, but mixed in with residential information on city services. This makes it a little more difficult for a visitor to find. Separating the visitor information from the resident information, and labeling the sections accordingly, would make it more user friendly for both visitors and residents.*

When the consultant visited West Plains, the volunteers staffing the Welcome Center were very friendly and tried to be helpful, but missed several important opportunities to promote the city when the consultant visited there.

*It would help if the Welcome Center staff members were provided a written list of talk points that were broken into interest categories. (i.e. arts, history, etc.) That way, anyone working there would be able to direct visitors to things in town that would be of interest. This idea is discussed in more depth in the "Weakness" section of this SWOT analysis.*

- When the consultant visited downtown, there were promotional brochures and information about West Plains available for visitors at the Downtown Antique Mall. The consultant, however, didn't notice any at other shops.

*It would be nice if the majority of the shops had a brochure that included a list of the shops in the downtown along with their addresses and phone numbers, and a map of the downtown. If room is available, a list of annual special events can be included. This could be the same brochure suggested earlier in this section for placement at Wal-Mart and other shops. Ensuring that most if not all downtown shops had the brochure prominently displayed and available would maximize the chance visitors will get the information they need to either make them want to stay longer or make a return visit. Although the Visitor's Guide has a lot of good information in it, it's not easy to scan and it takes a bit of time to go through all the information. A brochure, such as is described earlier, would provide a good supplement to the Visitor's Guide.*

- A Web site specific to downtown would provide good information about what is going on downtown and be a valuable promotional tool. In addition, it can be linked to the Civic Center and downtown businesses can link to the site.
- With the Broadfoot collection, the Harlin Museum, the performing arts venues at the Civic Center and MU-WP, and the wealth of local musicians and artists in the area, West Plains is in a prime position to become a hub for cultural arts in the Ozarks. The Harlin Museum provides a lot of potential. It has significant collection of artifacts, especially relating to life in the Ozarks. It can provide a lynchpin in promoting West Plains as a cultural arts base for the Ozarks.

*Downtown already sells a lot of locally-made traditional craft and artisan products, and the area has many artists who are maintaining studio space in their homes or don't have studio space. If an area in downtown can be provided where local artists can come and show their art, that might provided a good draw for visitors. A good example of that is the Foundry in St. Charles, Missouri, which has a number of studio spaces available for artists and also a large gallery where art shows can be held. (possibly the old Baptist church might be a good location for something like this) Some communities have even added loft apartments and studio space for artists in their downtown as part of their effort to add residents and interest to their downtown. Spartanburg, South Carolina has an interesting program that brings beginning artists in and incorporates their help with promoting arts in the downtown. (see [www.hub-bub.com](http://www.hub-bub.com) –the A.I.R., artists in residency, program) Under a similar program in West Plains, possibly these artists*

*could help with the Harlin Museum and a section of the gallery display would be for the current resident artist.*

Of special significance at the Harlin Museum is the Lennis Broadfoot charcoal drawings collection. The drawings, however, are not always on display and the the museum has short hours—Tuesday-Saturday, from noon to 4 p.m.

*It would be nice if the hours could be extended and if at least portions of the Broadfoot collection could always be on display. Also, a DVD featuring the life and work of Broadfoot already exists. It would be nice if that could be on a continual loop and played alongside his collection, or even just a few portions of it played. Once the hours have been expanded, more promotions of the museum should be done. To date, it has not been promoted very much. The Museum can easily tie with any events dealing with art or life in the Ozarks, and should be promoted during these types of events.*

*The museum has had school children come through in the past and there were people at the Museum to act out the characters in the Broadfoot collection. Then the children were given lessons in charcoal drawing and asked to copy Broadfoot's work. This would be a great thing to offer all visitors on Saturdays during the summer. Maybe start with only the first Saturday of the month, and then if it becomes popular, expand it. It would make downtown West Plains more of a tourist destination. On these Saturdays, there could also possibly be a play about life in the Ozarks held at the Avenue Theater. A single package price could be charged for admission to the museum, the lessons, and the play.*

A folklorist was recently hired by Ozark Preservation, Inc. to help collect and preserve some of the Ozark heritage in the area. In addition, the nearby city of Mountain View Arkansas has a folk center.

*It would be good to expand on arts, folklore, and Ozark craftspeople. It ties perfectly with the Broadfoot collection and thus sets West Plains apart from other cities in the Ozarks.*

- Murals painted on the backs of buildings would be a way to make the downtown more appealing, especially from the parking lots that are located behind many of the buildings. This is especially important with the backs of the buildings you see from the Civic Center. An attractive appearance from the backs that are visible from the Civic Center will

invite visitors to the Center to explore the downtown further. Beautification of the backs of the buildings and parking lots could encourage people to feel safer parking there. In addition, the addition of murals throughout downtown would tie well with West Plains positioning itself as a cultural arts hub of the Ozarks.

- Focus group participants indicated that the beautification efforts should focus on giving the downtown area a cohesive look and feel. Green space was a priority and suggestions included a small park downtown with benches and tables, more trees, planters, landscaping and some sort of stream or fountain.

*Since the survey indicated that residents in general didn't give beautification of the downtown high ratings of importance, it would be advisable to start the beautification efforts with something the general population can enjoy almost immediately. Park areas and places where families can enjoy the outdoors would be a good start and these types of improvements are usually favored by the population. It should be noted, however, that only 39% of survey participants rated green space in downtown as a high priority. Before significant city funds are spent on it, a public education campaign is strongly advised to ensure people understand the benefits of this.*

*Also, referring to these improvements as "increased recreational opportunities for residents" rather than "downtown beautification efforts" could help people accept the improvements more readily. It will be important to keep the public informed of these "increased recreational opportunities for families" so as to build momentum for other, more involved improvements, such as a fountain or waterfall. If the water features are privately funded, that should be emphasized to avoid public criticism over spending city funds on these types of improvements. The same is true if the improvements are financed by federal, state or private grant money.*

- According to the community survey conducted, less than half of the participants rated the following downtown amenities as excellent/good: available green space, dining options, and entertainment options. This could indicate that residents would be more supportive of efforts to improve these aspects of downtown. (the exception could be with green space, since only 39% of the participants rated that as a high priority for the downtown) More than 60% of the participants rated casual dining as a high priority for the downtown. Other businesses that were rated as a high priority by 43-

46% of participants were bookstores, upscale dining, clothing stores, and an ice cream/soda fountain.

*These numbers would indicate a high likelihood that the public would support these types of businesses. These statistics should be used in efforts to bring these types of businesses to downtown West Plains.*

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

- Real estate costs in West Plains are lower than both state and national averages. Based on a 2007 ESRI report the median home value in West Plains was \$107,813. In Missouri, the median home value was approximately \$131,900 (2006 U.S. census data) and in the U.S it was \$185,200 (2006 U.S. census data). With lower housing costs and a regional medical center in town, West Plains is a good fit to be marketed as a good retirement area. Many people already have been drawn to West Plains from Mountain Home and the retirement community there.

*It would be appropriate to advertise the retirement advantages of West Plains in publications that appeal to the 50-plus age group. This is especially true for the St. Louis and Kansas City metro areas. For the purposes of downtown, an emphasis on downtown apartment-living should be included. Building owners in West Plains are already seeing Baby Boomers becoming interested in downtown second-story apartments.*

*Another potential market would be seniors who live within a 100-mile radius of West Plains, but in communities that don't have nearby hospital facilities. These people may already be coming to West Plains for medical services and shopping, and would be receptive to relocating to West Plains since it is familiar to them. Good places to advertise to them would be around the medical center and at the shopping areas in West Plains. Ads placed in other community newspapers would also be a good way to reach them. This age group typically reads newspapers. Good selling points for them would be the ability to continue living in the Ozarks, still enjoy a friendly, small-town atmosphere, but at the same time live within minutes of excellent medical care.*

- The campground just outside West Plains is 6,000 acres and can have up to 8,000-10,000 people staying at it. Huge influxes of them come

into the Southern Hills area to shop. Steering even a fraction of them into the downtown holds tremendous potential.

*Placing billboards, ads, and promotional materials around the Southern Hills shopping area can help move some of these visitors into the downtown. This suggestion is discussed in more detail in the "Strengths" section of the SWOT analysis.*

- The historic, Main-Street-America look of West Plains' downtown is what developers are spending millions of dollars to reproduce at shopping centers. It might be possible to interest shopping-center developers in purchasing and developing sections of downtown to lease out to retailers, similar to the way they would lease space at a shopping center.

## West Plains Threats

- Chain stores on the south side of town are open in the evenings and on weekends, while downtown businesses close early Monday through Saturday, and most don't open at all on Sunday. Consequently, shoppers continue to be drawn shopping areas away from downtown, because they're assured of more shopping options at the times and on the days they want to shop. Retail shops in the downtown will continue to meet with limited success until more business owners are willing to adopt more user-friendly hours.
- There has historically been a problem with achieving a consensus on steps that the downtown area as a whole can take to revitalize the area. A key sticking point seems to be the desire of individual business owners to do their own thing and an unwillingness to infringe on their autonomy. **According to focus group comments**, West Plains tried to create a special business district tax years ago, but the effort failed because an agreement on the logistics couldn't be reached. Many were cautiously in favor of trying to create a special business district, but only providing that the businesses involved were self-selected.

*Revitalization of the downtown will lag as long as every business owner continues to act autonomously, rather than as part of a cohesive downtown group. Work must be done to build cohesiveness among the downtown business owners. Part of building cohesiveness will include educating business owners on the benefits of taking necessary steps now to spur revitalization, versus the consequences of continuing with the status quo.*

*It will also be important all business owners understand what is being attempted through revitalization and why that is important to them. The "what" must be stated at its most basic level and be an objective nearly every business owner would agree with. For instance, almost all business owners would agree they want a downtown that offers long-term economic stability for both real estate investments and business viability. Once the objective is established, you can begin working on how the objective can be achieved. Establishing a universally-agreed-upon foundational premise also enables you to demonstrate how different actions of some downtown business owners can erode the foundation of stability that everyone agreed was in their own best interest.*

- In the 2007 Community Survey conducted by the DREAM Initiative, only 42.3% of the participants placed a priority on revitalizing downtown. Unless more people can see the importance of a healthy downtown, community support for the revitalization will be lackluster at best. In fact, there could be a public backlash against spending money to revitalize downtown if people don't understand the importance of investing money there.

*A multi-faceted education campaign is needed to help locals understand how a healthy downtown helps everyone, not just downtown business owners. In addition to news releases, articles in the city newsletter and a Web site that highlights downtown will be important components of this type of campaign.*

- **According to focus group comments**, downtown stakeholders identified a number of specific businesses as important to the development of downtown. These businesses, however, were not given a high priority by the majority of the participants in the Community Survey. Since only a minority of residents gave these shops high priority, it's questionable how well they would patronize these types of businesses. It will also make it more difficult to sell to the public the importance of providing assistance to bring these types of businesses into the downtown. These businesses were: coffee shop (39.7%), upscale specialty shops (34 %), antique shops (33%), and art galleries and shops (31%).
- Potential downtown improvements that focus group participants considered important to revitalizing and increasing the attraction to downtown were considered a priority by less than half of the respondents in the community survey. Part of this could be because 76% of the survey participants had lived in West Plains for 11 or more years, and nearly 60% of the participants had lived there for more than 20 years. Long-time residents are less likely to see the need for change. Local residents, however, are the ones who are needed to support revitalization efforts, especially when these efforts include expenditures on beautification and infrastructure improvements in a specific area..

*A campaign is needed to make residents more aware of how changes and improvements in the downtown will benefit everyone. A good example where an education campaign could be beneficial in changing attitudes is with building code enforcement. According to the community survey results, only 32.7% of the participants considered*

*stricter building code enforcement a priority. At the same time, 51% rated improving building facades as a high priority. A public-education campaign could help people understand that without stricter code enforcement, façade improvements will be spotty because it will be based on building owners' willingness to spend the money on improvements.*

- *There are a few businesses that privately own their buildings, but they don't have the money needed to make essential improvements to them. At this time there seems to be an unwillingness to force these businesses to make the minimum necessary improvements to their buildings. Although their financial difficulties are understandable, if these businesses are allowed to let their buildings continue deteriorating, they will remain a drag on the revitalization of the downtown.*

*Development or enforcement of building maintenance codes is needed to ensure continued viability of the city's commercial/residential buildings. Solutions must be found to either help or force these building owners to bring their buildings up to acceptable standards. Possibly a downtown investment group could be created that would buy these buildings, make the necessary repairs/renovations to them, and then either sell or lease the buildings. The original business owner could be given first option on the sale or lease of the building.*

*A second option would be to help the business owner obtain financial assistance to fix up the building through either a special revolving fund for downtown revitalization, special low-interest loans, tax credits, etc. Most business owners are intimidated by working through the processes necessary to obtain these types of assistance, and often are unaware of what is available to them. It would be helpful to have someone associated with the downtown revitalization whose job is to help business owners find and obtain these types of financial assistance tools.*