Warrensburg, Missouri

Downtown Revitalization & Economic Assistance for Missouri

Destination Assessment

March 2014

D·R·E·A·M Initiative

PGAV PLANNERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Destination Assessment of the Missouri DREAM Initiative provides an assessment methodology that offers an unbiased point-of-view and applies this fresh perspective to a hierarchy of needs required by visitors for a fulfilling visit to Downtown. Warrensburg's market positioning is discussed, as is the Destination Assessment Team's (Team) visit to the community. Specific recommendations in this report are grouped into the categories of marketing, Downtown improvements, events, and retail operations. Each recommendation provides activities that the City and Warrensburg Main Street Inc. (WMS) can promote, encourage, or implement. An outline of specific recommendations follows:

Organization:
- Improve collaboration
- Capitalize on existing visitors

Physical Improvements:
- Install gateway signage
- Improve wayfinding to existing public parking lots
- Enhance rail crossings and depot area

Events:
- Continue to develop Downtown events
- Establish an event venue

Retail Operations:
- Improve customer service
- Encourage regional promotion

While all of the recommendations within this report will help Downtown capitalize on its tourist trade, capitalizing on existing visitors will likely have the most immediate impact on Downtown businesses. All of the recommendations in the Physical Improvements category should be priority issues for the City of Warrensburg, as visitors need to know they have arrived in Downtown, locate attractive and welcoming parking areas, feel safe, and be encouraged to walk around. Without these aspects, other activities are ineffective.

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INTRODUCTION

The DREAM Initiative concentrates efforts on downtown revitalization because the overall health of a community is greatly influenced by the vitality and viability of its downtown. Downtown reflects the human attributes of a community. While much of America becomes culturally homogenized, downtowns should retain their unique identity and reflect the incredible diversity contained within the American city. For visitors, downtowns embody the character of the community and represent treasures awaiting discovery in an atmosphere that does not exist at a large shopping center on the outskirts of town.

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) is a primary destination in Warrensburg and the campus is located just blocks south of Downtown.

The DREAM Initiative recognizes that downtowns exist within the larger context of the region. Visitors may be attracted to destinations in a region, such as a natural or historic feature, but the nearest city's downtown should also be a part of their adventure. For today's downtowns to be viable destinations, they must offer something to attract existing regional visitors such as unique shopping, dining, and recreational opportunities.

The Destination Assessment component of the DREAM Initiative is designed to help a Missouri downtown better understand its potential to derive benefits from tourism. The assessment will formulate a realistic vision for improvements to the local tourist activities. Recommendations to address potential synergies among existing attractions are made to help the downtown capitalize on surrounding assets. Conditions are identified that downtown stakeholders need to address to improve the visitor experience. This task does not produce a marketing piece, nor will it portray only the positive aspects of the community. The elements of this report include a description of the rapid assessment process, a description of initial conditions observed, a review of visitor survey information gathered, and recommendations for improvements. A listing of visitor attractions and events considered in this assessment is included in the **Appendix.**

The findings and recommendations contained within this document, while primarily prepared by the Team, include anecdotal observations of the tourist experience from Warrensburg-area leaders, businessmen, residents, and involved State agencies. It is anticipated that the Missouri Division of Tourism and the Missouri Arts Council will play an ongoing role in providing technical and financial resources, as applicable.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM

A vibrant tourism trade offers many potential benefits to a community. Tourism can help enhance the image of an area, increase local pride, and improve quality of life. Tourism is recognized as an important component of a diverse economy and provides economic benefits such as additional tax revenues, employment, and redevelopment and investment opportunities. Tourism can help build a distinctive, unique, and productive community.

The economic benefits of tourism include job creation, as well as increased retail sales generation, essentially bringing new money into the community. Potential new retail sales from tourism can help counter the inconsistent nature of the retail market. The attraction of new money to the community through an active tourism campaign is an effective economic development strategy. Additionally, existing retailers will benefit from a better understanding of their market area and how to use marketing techniques to communicate with targeted visitor profiles. As the tourism effort grows, merchants will realize the benefits of enhancing their operations to be more visitor-friendly, such as expanding business hours and services.

Local residents will benefit from added visitor services. A thriving tourist trade will cause greater money circulation throughout the community. Improved services, infrastructure enhancements, and events will benefit visitors and residents alike. Increased economic activity provides new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities and enhanced shopping convenience, choice, and competitiveness. A balanced mix of accessible retail and related services is attractive to residents, visitors, and investors.

These positive effects of a successful tourism industry can resonate through many business sectors, including non-tourism related businesses. In light of the far-reaching impacts of a successful tourism industry, and the size of the local industry, tourism should be viewed as a strategic sector. Any economic development strategy or long-range planning effort should specifically address the tourism industry and its importance to the local economy.

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The Destination Assessment provides a snapshot of the tourism industry operating in Warrensburg, with a focus on Downtown. This "rapid assessment" process consists of reviewing data and marketing materials, visiting the community and its key features, and meeting with community tourism stakeholders. The recommendations contained in this report provide strategic direction as the City and Warrensburg Main Street, Inc. implement planning and design efforts to help local destinations succeed. Understanding the framework used to evaluate Warrensburg's destinations will provide context for the recommendations.

Development of a tourism strategy, just as any business or product development strategy, begins with an evaluation of the relationship between product and the customer in a competitive marketplace. The analysis of this relationship results in the development or identification of an aspect of the product that will make it a more attractive choice over other, similar products. This feature is called a "competitive advantage" and will give a community an edge over its rivals and an ability to generate greater success. The City should strive for a competitive advantage for its product in areas such as cost, operating efficiency, or service. The competitors in this scenario are other communities attempting to attract the same market.

Product

The product is Downtown and all of its amenities. Businesses, restaurants, infrastructure, people, streets, sidewalks, parks, events, and other attractions create the product. Specific attractions within the City include the University of Central Missouri (UCM), Hidden Pines Country Club, Keth Memorial Golf Course, the Johnson County Courthouse, the Old Johnson County Courthouse, the Mary Miller Smiser Heritage Library and Museum, the Culp Building, a One Room School house, several parks, numerous local restaurants, several lodging options, and numerous retail shops. Other elements include historic buildings and homes, railroad heritage, and nearby attractions such as Knob Noster State Park and Whiteman Air Force Base (WAFB).

Warrensburg is home to several events during the year, including Old Drum Day Festival and BurgDogsUnleashed Public Art Project, Burg Fest, The WMS Summer Concert Series, Downtown Trick or Treat, and First Friday Art Walks. Other events, primarily centered around UCM, include the Get the Red Out Street Fair, UCM Homecoming Weekend, and Tailgate with the City. Other large regional events include the Wings Over Whiteman Air Show (held sporadically) and the Johnson County Fair.

Customers

Visitors to various attractions in Downtown Warrensburg are its customers. Visitors include residents, commuters, and travelers, as well as traditional tourists. Downtown Warrensburg must understand these existing visitors and their associated trends. Visitors can be categorized by the reason for their visit, such as:

<u>Business Travelers:</u>
Most likely to travel during the week, driven by businesses, primarily basic needs of lodging, restaurants, services, gift shopping, and evening entertainment. There is potential to impress these travelers and gain return visits for pleasure.

Family Travelers:
Most likely to travel during the weekend, driven by relatives, less likely to need lodging, primary needs tend to be shops, services, and restaurants.

Ethnic and Cultural Seekers:
Looking for exposure to new experiences, development, and education. Interested in the area's way of life and people. Adventuresome and looking for more than basic needs, such as museums, galleries, concerts, festivals, and performances. They are likely to shop for unique items.

Heritage and Passive Recreation Enthusiasts:
This visitor enjoys the scenery and feel of the area more than the interaction with the people. They are more inwardly focused and reflective. Their needs are similar to the culture seeker, but they are just as likely to enjoy a drive through town to look at architecture or a walk in the local parks.

Active Outdoor Adventurers:
Intense enjoyers of the parks and natural areas. These sportsmen enjoy a wide variety of recreational opportunities. They tend to be outdoorsmen, boaters, hikers, or golfers and they are always on the move. They are devoted to, and spend significant money on, their chosen sport.

Urban Entertainment:
The shoppers, team sport spectators, college visitors, night owls, or amusement park attendees. They tend to travel in groups and have a higher expendable income. Internet connectivity and cell phone access is important to them.

Warrensburg also has unique visitor markets, including:

Visitors related to UCM:
Many of these visitors are in town to see friends and some are parents of students. These visitors may or may not attend an event, but will likely patronize local bars and restaurants. Parents are likely to need a hotel, but friends may stay in student housing. These visitors may have more expendable income than the existing UCM students they are visiting, with parents having significantly more income. Friends may be big social media users and will likely seek live music. There may also be alumni returning for sporting or other events that may spend a fair amount of money. Parents and returning Alumni will likely be very sensitive to the image that Downtown presents; particularly regarding safety.

Visitors related to Whiteman Air Force Base (WAFB):
These visitors consist of military families, servicemen and women, and business people, as well as regional visitors during large WAFB events. Additionally, Missouri Guard members do monthly weekend duty at WAFB and tend to provide full occupancy of Warrensburg lodging during their stay. These visitors include overlapping needs of many of the segments already discussed.

Market Positioning and Brand

With an enhanced product and clearly identified customers, the focus turns to identifying how the product is viewed by the overall marketplace, or positioning. Effective positioning is an important component of competitive advantage. Downtown Warrensburg must determine a distinct market position that draws on its unique strengths that will set it apart from other destinations. It is essential to understand how customers currently perceive Downtown. Strategies that reposition the product in a market take time, patience, and persistence as long-held preconceptions are modified.

The welcome page of the Whiteman Air Force Base website.

The preconception of an area that a visitor has is called the image or brand. A brand is a promise that a product will deliver a particular service or activity in a consistent way. Warrensburg must craft marketing strategies that build on existing positive aspects of Downtown and reposition its brand to align with these strengths. It is critical that Downtown is able to deliver on the advertised brand or repositioning will fail. Worse yet, the brand of Downtown Warrensburg may become untrustworthy.

If marketing strategies are successful in reaching the intended market and the product is compelling enough to draw visitors, they will carry with them the desired preconceived idea of Downtown's brand.

Destination brands produce a distinct image in the mind of the customer. Each of the "realms" listed below represents an opportunity to differentiate from the competition and offer a unique consumer benefit. Destinations reach their maximum potential when they leverage all four realms. A description of these four realms (excerpted from the October 2007 edition of *Destinology* as published by PGAV) follows:

REALM ONE—PLACE:
If you visit the Empire State Building, you go to a building with the city surrounding it. Up at the observation tower, the **place** becomes an oasis high above bustling Manhattan. What benefits does the place provide for the guest? Some people like the high energy feeling of being in the city, but they may also like taking a break from the intensity. People go to a destination. It exists in a physical place. A destination should try to get the most out of the power of its place.

REALM TWO—EXPERIENCE:
Hike in the canyon. Ride the coaster. Attend a show. People want to *do* something at a destination—something unique, something to brag about, or something to share. The experience of a destination can provide key benefits to guests and a fundamental part of its brand. A destination can reach its full potential when it promotes the benefits of a unique experience and delivers.

REALM THREE—MINDSET:
Sometimes a destination epitomizes or evokes an attitude, value, or mindset that has meaning beyond the physical limits of the site. Colonial Williamsburg set out to "own" the concept of Colonial America, and people might feel more patriotic just thinking about it. When a destination can symbolize an aspirational concept, it can form a powerful connection with its guests. The destination becomes a touchstone for the concept and people return to renew their connection with it.

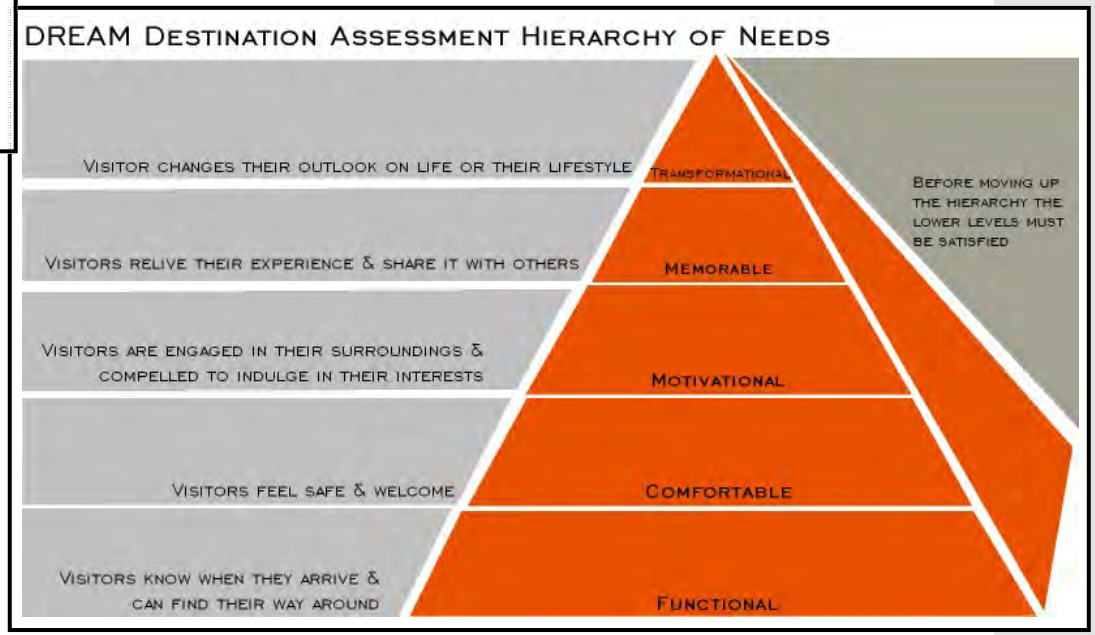
REALM FOUR—ORGANIZATION:
What role does the organization behind the destination play in the brand? The Niagara Parks emblem conveys tremendous trust among regional guests who want to spend their money with the organization that helps preserve the nature and heritage of Niagara Falls. The organizational dimension of a destination may also make a big difference to future employees, donors, business partners, granting agencies, or other organizations. People want to associate with a cause or organization they feel good about, one that expresses their own values and aspirations.

When people think of Warrensburg as a destination, do they long to be in the place, get excited by the experience, aspire to the values represented, and trust the organization behind it? When the answer is "yes" to all four, people will attribute a high value to visiting Warrensburg, which relates directly to attendance and financial success.

HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Destinations, and in a larger sense downtowns, are customer-oriented businesses and any product development or marketing decisions should consider the customer's wants and needs. During the Destination Assessment Kick-Off Meeting, the Team introduced the concept of a destination consumer "Hierarchy of Needs." This hierarchy illustrates that customers must have their most basic needs met before they can attain higher levels of fulfillment from the destination. This customer-focused theme will recur throughout the recommendations for Downtown Warrensburg.

For the purposes of this Destination Assessment, PGAV uses the hierarchical scheme shown here, listed from bottom to top, to illustrate and describe the motivations of the typical, "downtown" Missouri tourist.



There are a number of reasons that drive an individual consumer's decision to travel and a number of desires that influence their choice of destination. A typical visitor must have very basic needs met before progressing to another level of fulfillment in their experience. For example, if the visitor does not feel safe, they will not engage in their surroundings.

Downtown Warrensburg should review if its destination assets are adequately meeting visitor's needs. Questions to consider for each hierarchy category include:

1. Functional: Does the City provide adequate wayfinding to make travel throughout the area easy and somewhat intuitive? Do visitors know when they have arrived in Downtown? Does the City adequately provide basic comforts, such as parking, bathrooms, and a place to rest? Is information about destinations and events easily obtainable?

2. Comfortable: Is Downtown Warrensburg pedestrian friendly and well lit? Are building facades and streetscapes aesthetically pleasing? Are there numerous lodging and dining options present in the City? Does Downtown provide adequate comforts so that the visitor can relax while away from home?

3. Motivational: Does Downtown Warrensburg provide visitors with activities in which to participate? What will motivate the visitor to get out of their car and act? Does Downtown provide a chance to learn, interact, and explore? Is there an opportunity for adventure or escape from their normal lives?

4. Memorable: Does Downtown leave the visitor with positive memories? Do visitors often return to Downtown? Do visitors recommend Downtown to others? Is there positive word-of-mouth about Downtown?

5. Transformational: Are all of the aforementioned needs met? If so, Warrensburg has created a fulfilling experience that will imbue the visitor with a valuable new outlook. The visitor will want to return to and reconnect with the destination to relive that positive experience. The visitor will also seek to bring others to Warrensburg and share the experience.

A view of Downtown, looking north along Holden Street from Madison Street.

In the case of a visit to a large destination like a resort, zoo, or theme park, a single organization manages the visitor experience. This technique ensures a seamless experience that flows smoothly and consistently from parking and restrooms to attractions, food, and shopping. The brand of the attraction is maintained throughout. People have come to expect this level of product and service. Downtown Warrensburg can benefit from emulating this model by considering the complexity of Downtown and developing strategies to marketing the area as one destination, albeit with multiple tourism product owners and interests. For example, Downtown can support a coordinated aesthetic presentation or theme, manage a consistent and unified marketing campaign, administer and coordinate special events, and encourage businesses to adopt more uniform business hours.

Although the Destination Assessment focuses on tourism, many of the report recommendations promote improved quality of life for existing residents and businesses. Many of the recommendations from other DREAM Initiative components, such as design concepts, will provide essential infrastructure to support the visitor industry. This synergy of benefits demonstrates the DREAM Initiative's integrated approach to planning that will achieve the best results for Downtown Warrensburg.

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT AND ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCE

ASSESSMENT VISIT EXPERIENCE

During the DREAM process, the Team visited Warrensburg on several occasions. On the initial visit, the Team toured the area, visited various attractions, and discussed Downtown with several business owners. The Team enjoyed meals at local restaurants, shopping in local stores, strolled through the UCM campus, and visited Blind Boone Park, Pertle Springs, and a new regional winery. The initial impressions of Downtown Warrensburg were free of influence and without any local representative or City input.

The Historic Warrensburg Depot is home to Amtrak, The Chamber of Commerce, and the Warrensburg Visitors Center.

At a Destination Assessment Kick-off meeting held in October of 2013, local opinions were solicited from representatives of nearby attractions or tourism-related businesses and groups including Knob Noster State Park, the Warrensburg Comfort Inn, the Johnson County Historical Society, and the Warrensburg Convention and Tourism Advisory Board (CTAB) that operates the Warrensburg Visitors Center. Noticeable groups that did not attend this meeting include the Chamber of Commerce and a representative from UCM. Additional research was conducted on several other DREAM Initiative trips and an inventory of area attractions and events was compiled over time. This inventory can be found in the **Appendix.**

Warrensburg is the county seat and largest community in Johnson County, Missouri. The City is located about 40 miles southeast of Kansas City in West Central Missouri. The highways of U.S. 50 and State Highway 13 intersect in Warrensburg, just north of Downtown. The nearest Interstate is I-70 about 15 miles to the north of the City. The 2010 Census shows that Warrensburg has a population of 18,838 people. The City is home to UCM and its nearly 12,000 students. The University and nearby Whiteman Air Force Base (WAFB) are the region's largest employers, representing over 9,000 jobs. Downtown Warrensburg is the center of government, being home to the Johnson County Courthouse, City Hall, police and fire departments, United States Post Office, Trails Regional Public Library, and other businesses offices as well as the Warrensburg Depot Amtrak Station.

The Team began its assessment in Kansas City, Missouri, although individual members had toured Warrensburg before the assessment. In Kansas City, the Team found a Warrensburg Visitors Guide at Union Station. The Team then initially approached Warrensburg from eastbound Interstate Highway 70, noting few billboards for UCM or other Warrensburg attractions. The Team left Interstate 70 on exit 49 and traveled south on State Highway 13. At the new roundabout, one of the Team members noted that on his individual visit, he mistakenly travelled the Highway 13 loop around Warrensburg and entered the City by intersecting Highway 50 westbound, near the Warrensburg Veterans Home. The Team then also reviewed the Highway 50 approaches to Highway 13. The intersection of Highways 50 and 13, north of town, carries a significant amount of traffic. The Team observed more signage for Warrensburg attractions along Highway 50; including signage for UCM. This intersection also provides access to numerous dining and lodging options.

Examples of lodging options in Warrensburg.

As the Team travelled south on Highway 13, they noted the wayfinding signage installed by the City. Highway 13 becomes Maguire Street and at the intersection with Business 50, the traveler trying to reach Downtown has a decision to make; continue south or turn right. If the traveler turns right, the wayfinding directs them to turn left onto Holden Street. If the traveler continues straight, the wayfinding directs them to turn right onto Gay Street. On one visit, a Team member entered Downtown by travelling along North Street and turning left on Holden; although there is no wayfinding along this route.

The intersection of North and Holden Streets is where the Team felt they entered Downtown, although there is no gateway signage that announces the arrival. The streetscape lighting, decorative sign poles, landscaping, pavers, and banners begin at this point and the Team felt very welcomed to proceed south on Holden. Team members remarked upon the location of the Farmer's Market, the building architecture, Johnson County Courthouse, and the murals that are visible along Holden Street. Holden Street is a well-travelled, two-lane, bidirectional thoroughfare with parking on both sides. The Team noted that motorists in Warrensburg know to stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk; likely a positive by-product of a Downtown being located so close to a university.

On the initial visit, the Team followed the wayfinding signage to the public parking lot on W. Culton Street and walked through the pedestrian walkway to reach W. Pine Street. There was no issue finding parking. There was no directional signage for the Visitors Center or UCM visible from the lot. The Team walked over to Holden Street and chose a restaurant for lunch.

During lunch, the Team chatted with a waitress that was very friendly and knowledgeable about the area attractions. The Team was informed of Blind Boone Park, the Original Town Area with the Mary Miller Smiser Library and Museum, and the Culp Building. The Team was also encouraged to visit Pine Street and to participate in the First Friday Art Walk.

After lunch, the Team visited the Warrensburg Depot; the home of the Chamber of Commerce, an AMTRAK station, and the Warrensburg Visitors Center. The Team remarked on the potential and historical features of the Depot. The Team found information on other area attractions.

The Team left the Depot and walked throughout Downtown to visit several establishments and attractions. Most shop owners were very friendly and a couple were extremely sociable and enthusiastic about Downtown Warrensburg. Walking Downtown was pleasant and easy. The feel of the center of Downtown is strongest at Pine and Holden Streets. However, this intersection is across the rail line from the Depot.

Downtown is home to parks, monuments, benches, attractive landscaping, and numerous displays of historic architecture for the pedestrian's pleasure. The Team did not note many bicycle racks, but did find multiple examples of bicycles chained to the decorative lighting.

Examples of signage in Warrensburg.

A mural found along Holden Street.

The Team also walked to the UCM campus and back to Pine Street, to get a feeling for the distance that a student would have to walk to reach restaurants and entertainment venues. The walk is about 4 or 5 blocks and should not be unbearable; particularly for a young college student. There is wayfinding signage on the campus to ensure that students and visitors know how to reach Downtown. The Team felt it was very obvious that UCM students, employees, and visitors are the single largest consumer market for Downtown Warrensburg businesses and attractions.

The Team returned to their car and visited a few other City attractions that included the Original Town and Museum and Blind Boone Park. The Team briefly toured the Old Courthouse, where volunteers were busy with restorations. At Blind Boone Park, the Team enjoyed the highly interactive exhibits along the walking path. The Team also drove to the various commercial areas in the City to note the services available which a visitor might need. Warrensburg has a wide array of businesses.

The Team travelled back into Downtown to observe the evening activity and to attend the First Friday Art Walk. The Art Walk provides a visitor with a "passport" to visit various Downtown merchants after hours and learn about the art that the store has on display. As expected, the merchants were friendly and willing to discuss Downtown with the Team. The restaurants and bars were busy in the evening and the Team visited a few establishments. The Team wasn't greeted quite as warmly in the evening as they had been earlier in the day. The restaurants and bars tended to attract a younger clientele and the Team felt a bit more like outsiders among the college crowd.

A lack of bicycle racks in Downtown may encourage improper use of the decorative lighting poles.

The initial assessment visit was a busy weekend for Warrensburg; it was Parents Weekend for the UCM students. The Team could not find a hotel in town and had to travel to Interstate 70 to find accommodations for the evening. At the intersection of Highway 13 and Interstate 70, the Team visited a recently opened winery. The winery staff were very knowledgeable of the area and encouraged a visit to Warrensburg. However, there was not yet a place for distribution of brochures or pamphlets for area attractions. The hotel had plenty of information about Warrensburg and the region.

Overall, the Team's impression of Downtown Warrensburg was of a healthy and active community with few commercial vacancies. However, the Team felt that the primary attraction for visitors would be UCM or events held at UCM.

VISITOR PROFILE

The Missouri Division of Tourism tracks and provides a numbers of important statistics regarding visitors to Missouri attractions and events. This information can be used to help understand visitors to localities, State tourism website users, and the overall impact of tourism in Missouri.

According to the 2013 Missouri Division of Tourism Funding Report, the State estimates that, for every $1 spent in Statewide tourism marketing, $58 in visitor spending is generated. An estimated 36 million tourists visit Missouri annually. The Division of Tourism categorizes Missouri's $11 billion Travel industry into various business types including:

- Eating Places Only
- Eating and Drinking Places
- Drinking Places Only
- Hotels, Motels, and Tourist Courts
- Rooming and Boarding Houses
- Camps and Trailering Parks
- Trailering Parks and Campsites
- Organization Hotels and Lodging Houses
- Producers, Orchestras, Entertainers
- Commercial Sports
- Misc. Amusement and Recreation
- Boat and Canoe Rentals
- Public Golf Courses and Swimming Pools
- Amusement Parks
- Tourist Attraction
- Amusement Not Elsewhere Classified
- Botanical and Zoological Gardens

Of these uses, the businesses most often found in a Downtown environment (including restaurants, bars, and lodging) represent almost $10 billion of the total amount of visitor expenditures. In Johnson County, Missouri, these uses represent just over $53 million in taxable sales and employ about 1,800 people.

For 2012, the State estimates that, per trip, visitors spent approximately $318, with an average trip of about 2.7 nights. The average Missouri visitor is 47 years of age with an average annual income between $50,000 and $59,000. About 43% of Missouri visitors have a 4-year college degree or higher. The average visitor party size is 3 people with 38% of out-of-state travelers being couples, 31% traveling with children, and 10% traveling alone. In-state travelers were less likely to be travelling with children (25%) and more likely to be traveling alone (17%). Most Missouri visitors (85.2%) arrived in automobiles.

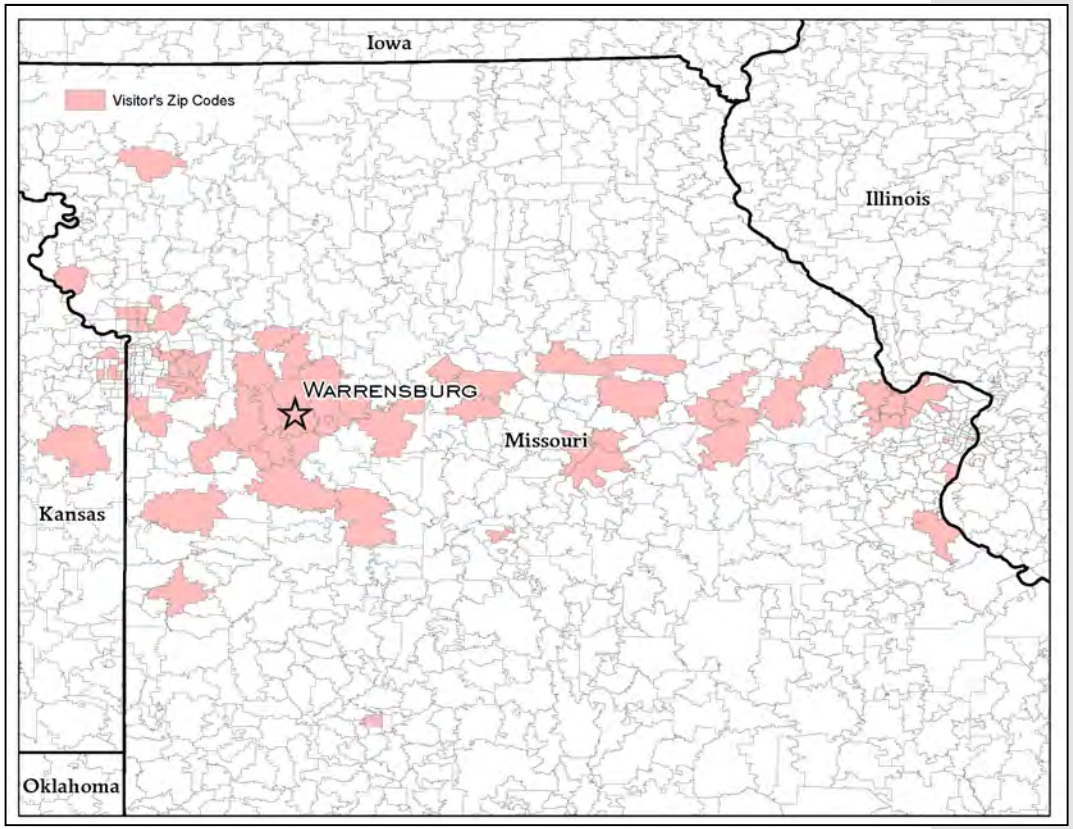
Visitors to the Missouri Division of Tourism's website, www.visitmo.com are about 65% female and 61% intend to travel without children. These virtual visitors primarily seek information on local attractions, historical sites, State parks, and events.

Beginning in 2009, UNICOM·ARC coordinated with Warrensburg to conduct a visitor survey in various locations throughout the City using local volunteers. The results of this survey are found in the December 2011 Warrensburg Visitor Survey Report.

One hundred and fifty-one (151) interviews were completed by visitors from various zip codes surrounding Warrensburg. Response from residents living in the Warrensburg zip code of 64093 were excluded from the report as this was a visitor survey. **Figure 1** demonstrates the geographic location of the respondents and the following overview provides some of the survey information to help identify Warrensburg visitor trends.

- About 43% of the respondents indicated they were staying overnight in Warrensburg. Responses were ranked:
  - ◊ 44% responded "other" for where they were staying; many staying with friends at UCM.
  - ◊ 33% indicated family or friends.
  - ◊ 11% were staying in a hotel/motel/ bed & breakfast in Warrensburg.
- About 94% indicated they had visited Downtown Warrensburg before.
- About 53% of respondents indicated they visit Downtown Warrensburg at least once a month. About 9% indicated "other" which may mean they were students and didn't see themselves as residents.
- Respondents indicated why they most often visit Downtown. Top responses included:
  - ◊ About 45% said dining.
  - ◊ 38% indicated nightlife or entertainment.
  - ◊ 37% said shopping.
  - ◊ 27% indicated a special event.

Figure 1: Visitor Survey Respondent Zip Codes



- About 89% of respondents found it easy to find their way around Downtown Warrensburg. Only 42% indicated that parking was convenient in Downtown; 45% indicated it was inconvenient. About 67% of respondents felt Downtown business hours were convenient.

- Respondents were asked what kinds of general businesses would make them more likely to visit Downtown. Top responses included:
  - ◊ 39% indicated bars and nightlife.
  - ◊ About 34% chose family dining, 23% fine dining, 15% outdoor dining, and 9% a breakfast restaurant.
  - ◊ 24% indicated bands/live concerts/music. However, only 7% chose family events, and 3% chose activities for teenagers. 14% chose activities for college-age students.
  - ◊ 14% indicated interest in Art galleries and events

A memorial park dedicated to ragtime pianist and composer John William (Blind) Boone, who grew up in Warrensburg, is located just west of Downtown.

- Respondents were then asked what specific businesses might make them more likely to visit Downtown. Top responses included:
  - ◊ About 28% each chose a men's clothing store and/or an ice cream shop.
  - ◊ 22% chose a women's clothing store.
  - ◊ About 20% indicated more shops in general and/or an antique store.

- Respondents were asked what physical improvements would make Downtown more appealing to them. No response received a majority, but top responses included:
  - ◊ 29% indicated renovation of historic buildings.
  - ◊ 27% indicated fountains.
  - ◊ 23% indicated more/better parking.

- Over 70% of respondents expected to spend less than $100, exclusive of lodging, on their visit.

- Respondents were asked about their hobbies. Top responses included:
  - ◊ 72% indicated activities of walking/hiking, 62% hunting and fishing, 58% boating, and 56% camping.
  - ◊ 71% chose fine dining.

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REACHING DESTINATION POTENTIAL

Warrensburg faces many challenges, but it also has many assets in its favor, as it seeks to enhance its tourism industry. The City is primarily known as the home of the University of Central Missouri (UCM) and all the visitor activity and events that come with a State University. However, the region has some attractions that draw different visitors, particularly from Kansas City, Missouri and nearby Whiteman Air Force Base (WAFB).

Conversely, Kansas City itself is a destination and has numerous attractions that draw visitors to the region. With effective strategies, Warrensburg can capitalize upon these visitors. An example is Powell Gardens, Kansas City's Botanical Gardens. Powell Garden's is located just 20 miles west of Warrensburg along State Highway 50. Many of Powell's visitors may find a stay in Warrensburg more economical and convenient than Kansas City. The City should be able to leverage this kind of regional activity to become known for a wide variety of reasons.

Powell Gardens and Knob Noster State Park are examples of regional attractions near Warrensburg.

The fundamental strategy of this report lies in improving the communication and collaboration of the interests involved in the Warrensburg tourism market. A thriving and active Downtown Warrensburg will improve the visitor appeal of the City and region and if the draw of the City and region is improved, Downtown should benefit. Additionally, the attractions and businesses in the City rely on each other and Downtown as well. A successful Downtown will combine shopping, dining, and entertainment to serve visitors and residents alike. With a proactive attitude by local leaders, business people, property owners Downtown and the City will develop into a positive experience which visitors will want to share with others.

Warrensburg can reach its destination potential by implementing recommendations focused on the mid-levels of the "Hierarchy of Needs". Having met the basic level of functionality, Downtown Warrensburg is well-situated to develop strategies that encourage visitors to leave their car behind and spend the day walking around. Effective tourism strategies will include the coordination and efficient use of existing resources to engage and inspire visitors. The recommendations listed on the following page fall into the categories of organization, physical improvements, events, and retail operations.

ORGANIZATION

IMPROVE COLLABORATION

The initial Destination Assessment Kickoff Meeting was organized by Warrensburg Main Street, Inc. (WMS), but had to be rescheduled due to lack of interest. When the rescheduled meeting was held in October, it was still lightly attended and there were no representatives of UCM or of the Chamber. Those in attendance representing various attractions in the City and region were very helpful. However, there were some meeting attendees that seemed to feel that a Downtown Warrensburg Destination Assessment was too narrow of a focus. There also seemed to be misunderstanding regarding the purpose of the DREAM program and a general lack of knowledge about the tasks conducted to date. Additionally, the Team noted a lack of information regarding some events and felt that this may be a symptom of communication or collaboration issues between the various Warrensburg organizations.

Downtown Warrensburg is a critical component to the area's visitor industry. As noted at the Kickoff Meeting and included in this report, the overall ability of the Warrensburg area to draw visitors is considered. However, the recommendation in this, and other reports, are focused on Downtown improvements.

WMS should continue to work with the Chamber and Visitor Center to plug Downtown in to area events and attractions, as well as to help promote all activities in the City. The groups should meet periodically and work together to grow the Warrensburg visitor market. However, WMS needs to make certain that information on Downtown events is dispersed outside of Downtown. WMS should also maintain connections with the appropriate departments at UCM to develop ways that Downtown can better serve visitors to the college. Downtown merchants should be encouraged to cross-promote other areas of the City to customers.

CAPITALIZE ON EXISTING VISITORS

Warrensburg enjoys a significant tourism draw from the University. Visitors to UCM and other regional activity centers may be interested in what Downtown Warrensburg has to offer, while visitors already heading to Downtown attractions may want to know about other activities elsewhere in the City.

As noted, UCM provides billboard advertising, primarily along State Highway 50. The University also has a significant internet presence. Both of these outlets afford the City some visibility that it may not otherwise enjoy. Attendees at the Destination Assessment kickoff meeting estimated that UCM draws a significant number of visitors more than all other Downtown attractions combined; possibly to a factor of twenty times more on an annual basis. Unfortunately, there was not a UCM representative in attendance to confirm these figures. However, with this many visitors in the City, Downtown needs to make a special effort to

connect Downtown businesses and events with the University students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Downtown already provides various events and promotions centered on the University, such as Homecoming, "Paint the Town Red", and a Parents Night. WMS and the Chamber need to build and maintain a close relationship with the University to everyone's mutual benefit.

As the City implements the physical improvements found in this assessment, more UCM students and visitors will be encouraged to explore Warrensburg and Downtown.

PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

INSTALL GATEWAY SIGNAGE

It is important that Downtown Warrensburg define its boundaries. Existing signage is attractive and helps visitors get to, from, and around Downtown. However, gateway signs are needed to let the visitor know they have arrived in Downtown Warrensburg. These signs should be substantial, attractive, and may include an information panel to list events occurring in Downtown. A different level of gateway sign could be designed for the primary student entrances to Downtown from UCM.

An illustration of a Gateway sign.

The map on the following page suggests two locations for vehicular gateway signage, such as is illustrated at right. The locations proposed are at the intersections of North Holden and West North Streets and East Gay and North College Streets. These areas provide the entryways into the Downtown core. While there are other routes from Maguire Street into Downtown, such as via Market Street, the existing wayfinding directs travelers along these paths.

The map on the following page also suggests two locations for "pedestrian" gateway signage along the rail line at South Washington and South Holden Streets. While there are some businesses and City services south of the rail line, the primary commercial area begins just to the north of the tracks. Between the UCM Campus and Downtown there are some businesses, but this area is primarily a governmental district; with City Hall and other institutional uses being prevalent.

Of these locations, the easiest property to obtain may be for the pedestrian gateways near the rail line. The City owns property near these areas that may facilitate the construction of the gateways.

IMPROVE WAYFINDING TO EXISTING PUBLIC PARKING LOTS

As noted, UCM is a major activity generator for Downtown. Visitors arrive at the various campus parking lots, which are well-maintained. However, for visitors not stopping at UCM, a Downtown public parking lot can be difficult to find. There is a significant amount of vehicle traffic in Downtown that may be improved with better routes to available parking. There is often adequate parking along Holden Street and there are a few lots behind the Downtown commercial buildings. There are some Downtown lots that require improvement, but most are in fair condition. However, private parking conditions can be considerably worse and the City should consider requiring stricter parking standards.

Downtown should improve signage and lots that serve the businesses along Pine Street. Many of these businesses are restaurants or drinking establishments and have a high turnover rate for their patrons. Ease in getting to and from their vehicles is important. Specific sites may include the depot area if the rail crossings are also upgraded, as noted below.

Proposed vehicular gateway sign locations indicated in yellow, "pedestrian" gateway signs are shown in green.

ENHANCE RAIL CROSSINGS AND DEPOT AREA

As noted, a Union Pacific (UP) rail line separates UCM and its student housing from Downtown. This situation results in a high number of pedestrian crossings, primarily at South Washington and South Holden Streets, and primarily by UCM students. Additionally, more student housing is planned on-campus to meet the University's increasing enrollment.

The City has worked with UP on numerous issues; most recently attempting to obtain property just west of the Warrensburg Depot for an Events Pavilion; as proposed in the DREAM Building and Streetscape design concepts report. Warrensburg is a "Train Town USA", a registry maintained by UP that commemorates the company's 150-year history across the country. This designation is a demonstration of the City's pride in its relationship with the railroad. The City should continue to build this relationship and work to enhance the crossings and depot area.

A committee should be established to continue to pursue a use for the property around the Depot, as well as to look at innovative ways to enhance the pedestrian crossings. Along with the Downtown Gateway signage, attractive iron fencing and swing gates can help insulate the pedestrian traffic from the rail line and clearly define the area. The safety of these pedestrians is a top-priority for the City, UCM, Downtown, and UP. This is a joint project in which all parties should have a vested interest.

EVENTS

CONTINUE TO DEVELOP DOWNTOWN EVENTS

Most events in Warrensburg are related to UCM. However, the City and WMS provide some activities and events for the community that are unrelated to the University. The Downtown events include:

- The First Friday Art Walk
- Seasonal Farmer's Market
- The Summer Concert Series
- The Burg Fest in September
- Tailgate with the City in October
- Downtown Trick-or-Treating in October
- Dickens Christmas in December

Events tend to be resource intensive and Downtown has several that are already unique to the City. There doesn't seem to be a need to develop a new signature event, but the existing events can be enhanced, expanded, and promoted by all City agencies, including the Chamber. Downtown also has some important elements that help make events successful. With a high traffic count and numerous supporting businesses and restaurants, event-oriented tourism plays a significant role for Downtown. Additionally, with the proximity of UCM, many events benefit from the student population, even if it is not a University event.

ESTABLISH AN EVENT VENUE

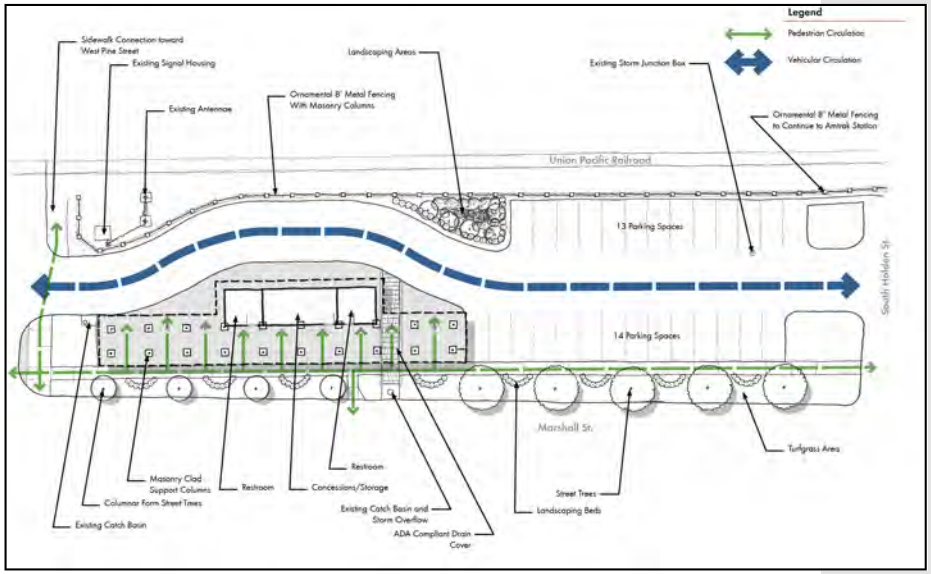
Although Downtown Warrensburg hosts many events, Downtown does lack a central event venue. Most festivals are held along Pine and Holden Streets; which are then closed to vehicular traffic. This situation can be beneficial to certain merchants, such as restaurants and drinking establishments. However, closing the street can hurt other shops.

WMS and the City have pursued the idea of an event venue near the UP rail line, just west of the depot. As shown in the illustrations on this page, a project has been proposed that would provide a facility to include a covered event space. The proposed concept would also double as parking, provide a small building for restrooms, and includes parking lot improvements. While the location next to the depot may not come to fruition, the City should continue to seek a location for this project. Many of the design elements conceptualized can be used in another location, depending on the site available.

RETAIL OPERATIONS

IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

Warrensburg has the beginnings of a healthy and diverse mix of attractions and businesses. However, it is critical that existing businesses are visitor and customer oriented. The Team visited several Downtown shops, but were greeted in only a few. In one shop, a Team member overheard the owner complaining about the UCM student market. The restaurants and bars were better-prepared and some owners were very friendly and knowledgeable about the Warrensburg region.



Illustrations of the potential event pavilion concept as developed in the *Warrensburg DREAM Building and Streetscape Concepts* from July 2013.

Downtown merchants need to work together to provide visitors with a positive experience. Cross-promotional efforts and knowledgeable clerks can keep visitors in town longer, with the potential to spend more money that all Downtown businesses can tap into. Retailers could also modify or expand their product offerings to address the needs of visitors, taking into account both basic needs and higher needs. Cooperative advertising, attractive displays, and coordinating themes will help create a positive shopping experience which visitors will seek to repeat.

WMS, working with the Chamber and Visitor's Center, should continue to strengthen ties with the owners and operators of Downtown entertainment, events, shops, and restaurants to help cultivate an atmosphere that improves the visitor's experience. Customer service should be a frequent seminar topic at the meetings of the various groups. Additionally, WMS should work to keep Downtown businesses informed regarding upcoming events being held anywhere in the City. In this way, Downtown can be prepared to attract and serve the increased visitors.

ENCOURAGE REGIONAL PROMOTION

The City of Warrensburg needs to continue to cooperate with regional attractions to expand its visitor market. As the Team visited the region, it was clear that the draw of Warrensburg was primarily UCM and associated activities. However, the visit was enriched greatly by beginning their visit in Kansas City, and touring the region from approximately Liberty, Missouri south to Warrensburg. While the City is promoted throughout this area, there were few brochures for Downtown Warrensburg noted.

WMS should consider expanding the marketing reach of Downtown events and businesses overall. Promotions that focus on collectively advertising the Downtown merchants should be more economical to develop and implement. WMS makes effective use of social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter. However, individual businesses can learn to use these tools to help inform area customers and visitors of Downtown activities.

Examples of brochures from the Warrensburg region.

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Appendix
Inventory of Attractions

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Inventory of Attractions—CITY OF WARRENSBURG AND REGION		
Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
Entertainment	The Original Johnson County Courthouse	This historic 1838 courthouse is one of the few remaining examples of Federal Style architecture west of the Mississippi River, and is on the National Register of Historic Places.
	Mary Miller Smiser Heritage Library and Museum	A library housing a collection of materials concerning county history, family genealogy and newspapers.
	Culp Building	A large collection of farm machinery and artifacts concerning the development of farm machinery is housed here. The building also contains artifacts pertaining to grain elevators from all around the county and a general historical view of agriculture and industry in the county.
	One Room School	This building represents a long tradition of rural education in Johnson County.
	Powell Gardens	Also called Kansas City's Botanical Garden; Powell Gardens features an Island Garden, Rock and Waterfall garden, wildflower meadow, a chapel, conservatory, restaurant and gift shop.
	Wineries	Arcadian Moon Montserrat Vinyards Bristle Ridge Winery
Higher Education	University of Central Missouri	The University of Central Missouri is a four-year public university with 150 degree programs. The University consists of 452 full-time faculty members, 2,195 graduate students and 9,683 undergraduate students.

Inventory of Attractions—CITY OF WARRENSBURG AND REGION		
Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
Lodging	Hotels/Motels	Comfort Inn Holiday Inn Express University Inn Days Inn Belmont Motel Super 8
	Bed & Breakfast Inns	Gelbach Manor Cottage on the Knoll at Cedarcroft Farm
	Campgrounds	Knob Noster State Park Campground
Shopping/Antiques	Downtown Warrensburg	This shopping area includes a music store, art gallery, antique stores, arts and craft studio, photo studio, screen printing shop, carpet store, home décor stores, beauty salon, shoe store, various restaurants, coffee shops, bike shop, an edit and copy center, a furniture store and several banks.
	Glasscock Plaza	This shopping center includes a jewelry shop, a chiropractor and various restaurants.
	Hawthorne Plaza	A recent retail development in Warrensburg with small, locally owned shops.
	Midtown Connection	This shopping center includes several cellular phone stores, a donut shop, a dry cleaners, and various restaurants.
	Northpark Shopping Center	This shopping center includes a hardware store, athletic store, and a nearby grocery store containing a banking facility.

Inventory of Attractions—CITY OF WARRENSBURG AND REGION		
Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
Parks	Cave Hollow Park	Cave Hollow Park includes two ball fields, six volley ball courts, sled runs, paved nature trail, playground equipment, concession stand and an outdoor shelter.
	Knob Noster State Park	A State Park located just southeast of Warrensburg. The park contains camping, hiking horseback trails, mountain bike trails, fishing boat ramps, playgrounds and interpretive programs.
	Hazel Hill Lake	Hazel Hill Lake is a conservation area that allows for bird watching, hunting, fishing and boating.
	Ralph and Martha Perry Memorial State Wildlife Area	This area contains hiking trails and fishing lakes.
	Maple Leaf Lake Conservation Area	Maple Leaf Lake allows youth group camping, fishing and some boating.
	Blind Boone Park	Blind Boone Park is an ADA approved park that features a reflexology walkway, roped pathways, brail and audio information signs. The park includes a 20 foot gazebo with electricity.
	Grover Memorial Park	Grover Park includes an outdoor pool, skate park, eight tennis courts, playground equipment, a gazebo, and a ball field.
	Hawthorne Park	Provides playground equipment and a walking trail.
	Lions Lake	Lions Lake Park contains numerous picnic tables, a covered shelter, fishing and a youth ball field.
	Marr Park	Marr Park has a walking trail, basketball goal and a shelter.
	Shepard Park	Shepard Park contains a pavilion, several picnic tables and the largest playground in the city.
	West Park	West Park contains a nature trail, soccer complex, playground equipment, and ball fields.

Inventory of Attractions—CITY OF WARRENSBURG AND REGION		
Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
Downtown Warrensburg Bars & Restaurants	Local/Independent Incomplete Listing	Café Blackadder Checker Tavern Fitter's Pub The Garage Heroes Restaurant & Pub Java Junction La Sous Terre Old Barney's Bar & Grill Old Drum Coffee House & Bakery Sip Bar and Grill The Granary Tap House

Inventory of Regular City Events	
Name of Event	**Month Held**
Children's Literature Festival (UCM)	March
Old Drum Day Festival and BurgDogsUnleashed Public Art Project	April
Independence Day Celebration	July
Johnson County Fair (Fairgrounds)	July
Get the Red Out	September
Parent's Weekend (UCM)	September
Burg Fest	September
Homecoming (UCM)	October
Tailgate with the City	October
Downtown Trick-or-Treat	October
Dickens Christmas	December
Recurring	
WMS Summer Concert Series	June, July, August
First Friday Art Walk	1st Friday each month