

DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION &
ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE FOR
MISSOURI

DECEMBER 2011

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Waynesville, Missouri

PGAV PLANNERS



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND ECONOMIC
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SECTION ONE

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, PGAV Planners conducted three focus groups in Waynesville, MO. The purpose of conducting these focus group sessions was to learn more about community priorities and perceptions with respect to Downtown Waynesville. The three groups that participated in the sessions represented business owners, property owners, local residents, city staff and elected officials.

This section summarizes the responses to a series of questions which were posed to all focus group participants. The remaining sections of this report provide a summary of each focus group session's questions and remarks. Names and other identifying information have been withheld.

PGAV Planners developed a series of questions as a starting point for the group dialogue. With a few minor exceptions (for example, in instances where the conversation required directional questions not prepared earlier), the members of each focus group were asked the following questions:

3. Tell us about Waynesville's character.
4. What are some of the issues or challenges facing Downtown Waynesville?
5. What are some of the opportunities?
6. What would you like to see in Downtown Waynesville?
7. What does "Downtown Revitalization" mean to you?
8. If you had an unlimited amount of money to spend in Downtown Waynesville, what would you do?
9. When people come to visit you here in Waynesville, where do you take them?
10. What is the impact of Fort Leonard Wood on Downtown Waynesville?
11. How optimistic are you about Downtown Waynesville?
12. What is the issue that needs to be addressed first?

Each group described Waynesville generally as a homey, historic town where "everyone knows your name." The community's low cost of living and cosmopolitan feel - as a result of Fort Leonard Wood being nearby - were discussed as positive attributes of Waynesville, a City which has seen a lot of progress in recent years and, to paraphrase one focus group participant, is an "event waiting to happen."

People visit Downtown Waynesville for the Pulaski County Court House, which sits at the heart of Downtown Waynesville and for the restaurants, shops and services that ring the square around the Court House. Most major retail shopping - at national retailers - happens in neighboring St. Robert or on the outskirts of Waynesville, around the Lowe's Home Improvement Store on the I-44 Business Loop. While Waynesville competes with St. Robert for

retail activity, St. Robert does not have an historic downtown. As the county seat, Waynesville has an historic downtown square.

Downtown Waynesville: Describing the Present

Downtown Waynesville is an active downtown square with retail and commercial business lining the streets around the Pulaski County Court House. Businesses around the square are a good mix of commercial retail and commercial service. Service providers include bankers, printers and attorneys. Retail services include clothing, restaurants, musical instruments, jewelry, gifts/curios and antiques.

There are a few places (such as The Drynk) in Downtown Waynesville to which participants take visitors. However, there are no lodging options in Waynesville. All area hotels are in neighboring St. Robert, which also has most of the national retail chains. Participants spoke generally of the ways in which St. Robert and Waynesville compete with one another for businesses and customers; one point in particular where participants felt Waynesville especially prevailed was the fact that St. Robert has no “downtown” area and that Downtown Waynesville really serves as the traditional downtown for the whole area.

Participants touted the friendly atmosphere in Waynesville, particularly as it is a homey, neighborly place where, “everybody knows your name.” This sentiment reflects the perception of the business owners, staff and full-time/long-time residents of Waynesville. What gives Waynesville a bit of a “cosmopolitan” flavor is the population related to Fort Leonard Wood, which turns over on a regular basis. This population keeps retailers on their toes as they have to “start over” with respect to the cultivating repeat customers from those folks new to Fort Leonard Wood, new to the area, and new to Waynesville.

Streetscape and façade improvements along Front Street make this quadrant of the square very attractive. While recent developments, such as the newer businesses along Front Street, new sidewalk and streetscape improvements, new buildings and apartments, are all viewed favorably, participants indicated that more needed to be done to keep the momentum going. Challenges were cited with respect to certain land owners asking above-market prices for their land and presenting obstacles to improvement; with a finite amount of downtown square property available, this challenge seemed particularly vexing to participants.

Participants noted that the Pulaski County Court House brings a lot of traffic to Downtown Waynesville, and that it is a double-edged sword as it brings a lot of folks to Downtown Waynesville, but employees use a lot of the parking on the square. From a supply perspective, Downtown Waynesville has just added a lot of parking space in a new lot just west of the square. From a management perspective, there are challenges with respect to employee parking (i.e. who gets what space(s) and for how long). Suggestions for improvement included requiring County employees to park off the square and relocating the jail. The idea of jail relocation also came up in another context with respect to improving the perception of

Downtown Waynesville from the casual visitor by removing the chance they may see a line or orange jumpsuit clad prisoners being walked into the Court House.

Vehicular traffic in and through the square also poses challenges. Old Route 66 (aka Front Street) is the street at the south edge of the square. An adequate and appropriately designed safety crossing needs to be established at at least one, preferably two spots along this side of the square. At the intersection of Front Street and Benton Street needs an improved crossing situation for pedestrians, as does the intersection at the opposite end of the square, where Front Street and Lynn Street intersect. Students from Missouri University of Science and Technology are investigating strategies for solving traffic flow and parking issues in Downtown Waynesville.

Participants generally voiced an opinion that they feel Downtown Waynesville is heading in the right direction but that its full potential has yet to be achieved; describing Downtown Waynesville as a “diamond in the rough,” whose aesthetic strengths and recent improvements set it up well for success. They raised concerns that Downtown Waynesville has not been a focus of attention on the part of elected officials and residents as much as they feel may be needed.

Downtown Waynesville: Looking to the Future

The primary concern of participants in the focus groups was “maintaining the momentum.” When asked whether things in Downtown Waynesville were on the “right track,” one group responded with a unanimous and synchronized, “yes!.” However, a cautious optimism was observed in each session, reflecting a sense that the participants are aware of the potential, but also aware of the challenges in the way.

One of the major challenges has to do with the “user-friendliness” of Downtown Waynesville, which is an issue that combines parking and traffic pattern concerns. Ideally, the resolution of parking management and traffic flow concerns will result in a downtown square that is easier to navigate, less dangerous for pedestrians, and where convenient parking is more easily had.

The other major challenge is overcoming the relative obstinacy of property owners content to hold their property, defer maintenance, and keep it as an empty storefront in Downtown Waynesville. Buying out such property owners has proven to be difficult, but is viewed as necessary in order to keep the development momentum happening.

Participants were asked which issues they felt needed to be addressed first. Among their answers were:

- Parking issues,
- Encouraging more retail businesses to locate on the square;
- Putting electric lines underground;

- Establishing building design guidelines;
- Creating things for teens to do;
- Finding a reuse for the old middle school building;
- Fix-up the bridge west of downtown; and
- Have more events
- Promote use of the gazebo.

SECTION TWO

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION AND ANSWER SUMMARIES

This section includes questions and answers from each focus group. The answers are not organized by focus group session, rather answers from all sessions are included below each question.

Tell us about the character of Waynesville.

- Homey and historic
- Quiet hometown attitude
- Cosmopolitan due to Ft. Leonard Wood being nearby
- Business owners know you
- “Everyone knows your name”
- Low cost of living
- Friendliness
- Hire retired military
- Easy to do things here
- Different because of military, always getting new people
- As retailer, always starting over.
- Family connections to other places like St. Louis or Chicago
- Military and civilians work well together
- Progress in a few short years
- Pride in buildings Downtown
- Ordered lights for City Square, match Downtown lights
- Loved Third Thursday events
 - Expand in the future
 - There were safety issues from traffic
 - Connected military folks to Waynesville

Tell us about the character of Downtown Waynesville

- Neglected and under-appreciated
- Lots of potential
- Improving
- Was dirty
- Was dead, now resuscitating
- Would like for it to be more quaint
- Like to see more businesses, particularly retail
- A diamond in the rough
- There hasn't been a focus on Downtown
- Though things are moving in a positive direction

- It is an event waiting to happen
- Economic troubles recently have hurt development
- There are developments that would go in, but need more parking to be built
- Parking is a major issue
- Downtown is handy
- A lot of law firms and bail bondsman
- A good restaurant is needed
- Overpriced parcels owned by obstructionist owners
- Will's - used to be Blue Bird Café
- Teen crowd needs a place to go
- Have stuff for younger kids
 - Arc
 - Tiger Typhoon
 - Putt Putt
- Lack of entrepreneurs for new businesses
- Crowded

What are the issues and challenges facing Downtown Waynesville?

- Parking
 - County employees should be assigned spaces in a parking lot off the square
 - Employees should park off the square
- Owners content to keep vacant buildings and not sell
- Terrain is the biggest issue - limited land available
- Drainage is the biggest issue
- Mold issues in Big Wills
- Lack of space Downtown
- Lack of buildings and developable sites available
- Fix bridge as soon as possible
 - Sound, but ugly
- Old school building
 - Turn into a mini mall
 - Has black mold
 - Missouri S&T bringing businesses to area - use old school for business incubator
 - Satellite campus idea
 - Webster or other University
- Need better signage and safer crossing at Old Route 66
- Traffic around the square should be one-way
- Traffic flow downtown - Rolla students are looking at this issue
- Criminals hang out in orange jumpsuits outside. It would be better to have them go out the back. It scares people off.
- Small recreation yard out back of jail
- Could Sheriff's Department be relocated?

- Downtown is landlocked, you have to utilize what you have

What are some of the opportunities? What would you like to see Downtown?

- Bookstore and coffee shop
- Bait shop like Bass Pro
- Yogurt shop
- Shoe store
- Tourism and historic site development
 - Trail of Tears
 - Signage on the bridge
- Retail, repeat boutique-like
- Theatre on the Square
 - Movie, comedian night
 - Is a 50 seat theatre
- Hoppers does a good business
 - Trivial pursuit on Thursdays
- Most folks come from Ft. Leonard Wood
- Will's Place is an opportunity
- Farmer's Market has been a draw
 - In the park previously
 - Put it on the Square
- Coffee shop would do well on the Square
- Donut shop
- Place that sells simple food, like ham and cheese sandwiches and soups
- Ice cream place

What does Downtown revitalization mean to you?

- Waynesville did not have a positive image to outsiders
- Has really changed radically
- No more storage units wanted
 - Especially along Main Street
- No bending ordinances for developers
- Retail
- Parking
- Foot paths from middle school to Downtown
- Replacing trees
- How user friendly is Downtown?
- Not very
- Not enough parking spots - have to circle
- Avoid post office
- Sidewalk crossings are dangerous

- Hard to get out of parking spots
- Zigamine Road is an issue
- Tough to shop with kids

Should the Square be one-way?

- Yes!
- Need to be more pedestrian friendly
- Would have more parking spaces
- What types of businesses?
- Quality place to eat - Restaurant
- Café
 - Like Café Italia or Benton Street that closed
- Retail
 - Gift shop
 - Route 66 memorabilia
- No more lawyers / bail bonds places
- Coffee shop with wi-fi
- Need more sales tax revenue!
- Bed & Breakfast
- Mixed zoning with apartments
 - Need parking
- Payless Shoe Source
- Lodging
- Gift Shop
- Businesses for visitors
- Businesses for kids
- Food
- Jump zone like in Springfield, Missouri
- Candy shops - fudge - visitors always want fudge
- Vick's 5 & Dime like in Branson
- Where to take visitors?
- Drynk
- Historic Places
- Branson
- Play in June
 - Need to market theatre better
- Visitors stay in St. Roberts
- People go out of town
 - Branson
 - Other Places
- Need lodging
 - Space issues

- “Stay on Route 66” slogan could be used

Where do you take visitors?

- Stage Coach Junction
- Frog
- Ft. Waynesville
- Roubidioux Springs
- Route 66
- Museums - are volunteer driven

Is there a unified marketing effort?

- No, would like to get this from the DREAM Initiative
- Frog
- No signage from Interstate 44
- Having the museum open in the evening would be a possibility
- Chamber welcome packets
- Need a Hallmark Store
 - Didn't market it well
- Need a scrapbooking business on the hill

What is the Ft. Leonard Wood Impact on Downtown?

- Folks from the Fort don't know, there is turnover there
- Get a lot of folks here from the Fort
- Third Thursday's event
- Route 66 Festival planned quarterly
- Don't come through Downtown normally

How optimistic are you about Downtown?

- Very optimistic
- One day we will wake up and Downtown will have arrived!
- Have been streetscape improvements, need to build on this
- Need investment in Downtown
- DMV is close by
 - Will be better experience for visitors to Downtown
- The Spanish church has been great, a good neighbor, cleaned up the property
- Pottery shop doing okay

What is the issue that needs to be addressed first?

- Parking issues
- More retail
- Put electric lines underground - would be expensive
- Design Guidelines for façades

- Façades and south side of the Square was improved – should see old photos of how bad it was
- Something for teens to do
 - In old middle school
 - Also land around the school
 - Putt putt, rock climbing wall
 - Fields do flood behind school

If you had an unlimited amount of money, what would you do Downtown?

- New Court House
- Move Court House
- Move jail and inmates
- Create parking high rise
- Coffee shop
- Build a Casino
- Put in a steak house overlooking the river
- Bring in a park in-between buildings/amphitheatre
- Renovate school and turn to business park
- Recreational center
- Parking
- Turn Stage Coach Inn into Bed & Breakfast and more shops and restaurants
- Keep businesses here for the long term.

Why do businesses close?

- Businesses have stagnated and not catered to customers. Need to expand.
- Poor marketing, or don't have the money to do it
- Need to offer deals
- Parking
- Older business people not wanting to change business habits

In your opinion, is Downtown Waynesville moving in the right direction?

- Yes! (Unanimous)

Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to share with us?

- Gazebo should be used more on the Square
- Bands should use Gazebo
- Place with siding is an eyesore on Route 17 near bridge
- Old gas station is also an eyesore
- Lunch time restaurant is needed