

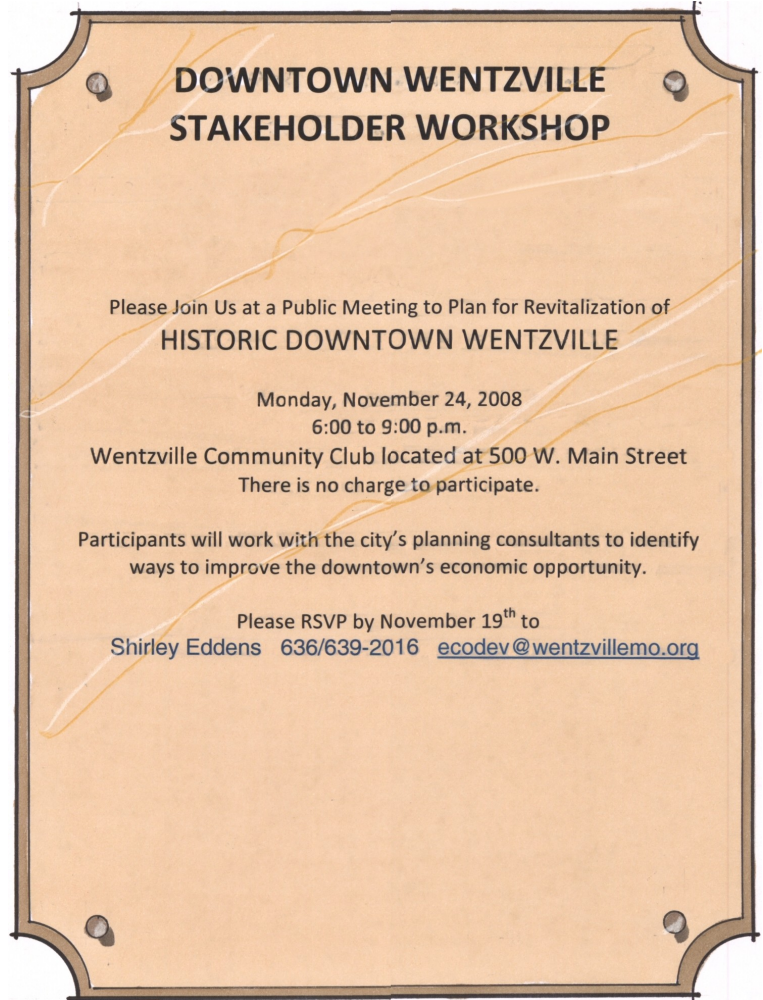
Wentzville, Missouri

PART 1

FIRST DIRECTIONS STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

November 24, 2008

The first workshop took place with the goal of attaining initial public input on a vision for the downtown area. Preliminary economic development information and goals and schedule of the study were first presented. The 75 attendees divided into eight discussion groups to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The final report will include the results of such questions as “What brings people to downtown today?” and “How can people be attracted to downtown more often?” Responses were positive, with civic uses, restaurants, community facilities, and business and medical services rating high on why people come downtown today. Civic uses, retail, entertainment, and accessibility ranked high on attracting more people to downtown.



First Directions Report

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN

Wentzville, Missouri

Prepared for
City of Wentzville

December 2008

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1.0 PROJECT OVERVIEW

Cities across America are striving to develop a unique sense of place that sets them apart from other communities. People want to belong to a community where they can live, raise their family, make a good living, easily access services and entertainment, and experience the stages of life with safety, good health, and relaxation. The City of Wentzville has set a goal of creating and implementing a vision for downtown that could incorporate these desires for the city's future.

The 2002 *Downtown Revitalization Phase One Program Summary Report*¹ suggested a need for substantive solutions, such as economic and functionally-based decisions, rather than reliance on cosmetic approaches for downtown improvements. The 2008-09 planning process for Downtown builds on that earlier evaluation by involving the residents and businesses of Wentzville, and particularly those who are direct stakeholders in Downtown Wentzville, in a public process to identify and come to consensus on ways and means to revitalize downtown.

This interim report on "First Directions" attempts to combine initial economic development research conducted by the consulting team with the outcomes of the first Stakeholder Workshop held November 24, 2008. That workshop had some 75 participants representing many perspectives in Wentzville. The participants worked in eight small groups to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the potential for downtown change. This report is not intended to be definitive, nor does it make recommendations. Instead, it is meant to inform the planning process so that creative and implementable solutions emerge from Wentzville, itself.

Still to come are workshops to identify marketable themes or brands for Downtown and to devise physical, or design, alternatives so that Downtown can become more attractive and functional. In the end, a set of strategic actions will become apparent which will be incorporated into an overall Revitalization Plan.

¹ Cunningham, Vogel & Rost, PC, in association with East-West Gateway Coordinating Council. Prepared for the City of Wentzville, Missouri (2002).

2.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC FORCES AFFECTING GROWTH AND CHANGE IN WENTZVILLE

2.1 Metropolitan Context

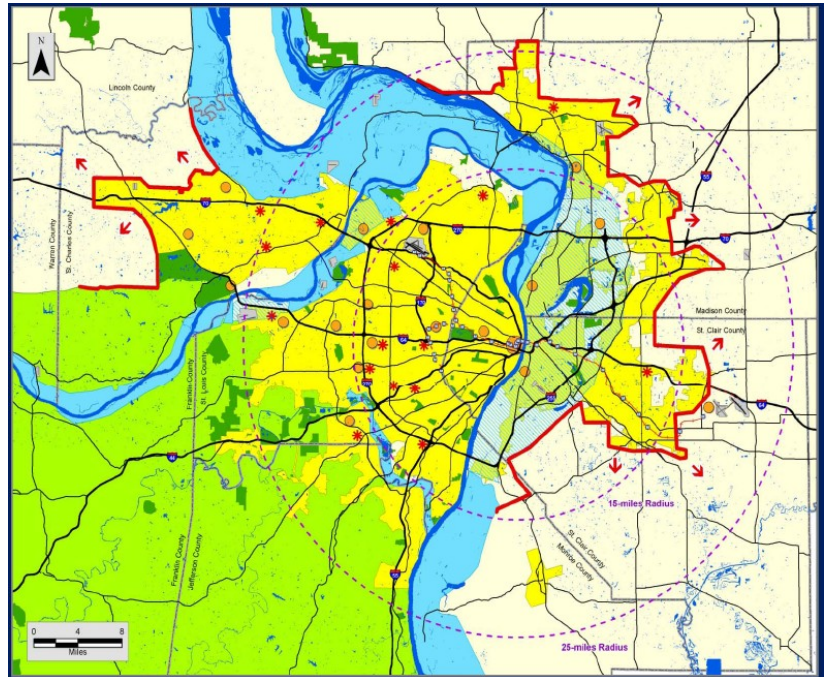
It is wise to place Wentzville in something of an economic context, since it is not a stand-alone community but, instead, is part of a larger whole. Typically, an economic analysis starts at the metropolitan level, then narrows to the county, then zeroes in on the subject community in order to identify forces and opportunities that the community might exploit for growth and development.

In this case, the geographic analysis goes one step further to identify forces and opportunities affecting, and affected by, Downtown Wentzville.

A metropolitan overview of development patterns actually puts Wentzville in something of a catbird seat. This is a map of the core of the metropolitan area with downtown St. Louis in the middle, the Mississippi River more-or-less bisecting the region north to south (with the Illinois River in the upper middle of the map), and the Missouri River coming in from the west. Wentzville is found in the northwest part of the map near the edge of the yellow area.

Those yellow areas highlight where this region has developed in what might be called urban and suburban densities. As growth moved westward, the paths of easiest development from St. Louis County were the I-70 and I-64 (Highway 40) corridors into St. Charles County. As we all know, the front edge growth has recently reached and is going beyond Wentzville. For all intents and purposes, the red arrows pointing west and northwest indicate this continued path of urban and suburban densities in Metro West.

The green areas south of the Missouri River show the beginnings of the Ozark Mountains and related topographical problems. With too many rocks and steep hills, these areas are difficult to develop with suburban densities; so we tend not to see much growth in those directions in Franklin and Jefferson Counties. The green areas of southern St. Charles County, just north of the Missouri River, illustrate dedicated open space, for the most part, including the Busch Wildlife Preserve, where suburban development will not be allowed.



Blue areas are floodplains, also difficult and probably inappropriate to develop at suburban scales.² Indeed, just over 40 percent of St. Charles County is technically flood plain and the scale of flood plains in St. Charles County exceeds that of the well-known “American Bottoms” that comprise the western part of Metro East in Madison and St. Clair Counties, Illinois. The American Bottoms are depicted in a lighter shade of blue because it, and some smaller flood plains, did not flood during the Great Flood of 1993. Those levee systems, designed for urban densities, survived and protected Metro East (though they were effectively decertified in 2007 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and repairs are presently underway).

In contrast, the areas east of American Bottoms (cities such as Belleville, Collinsville, and Edwardsville) sit above the flood plain and have an enormous amount of readily developed land to their east, depicted by the red line and arrows pointing eastward. This land is not affected by rocky slopes, deep ravines, or even serious flooding.

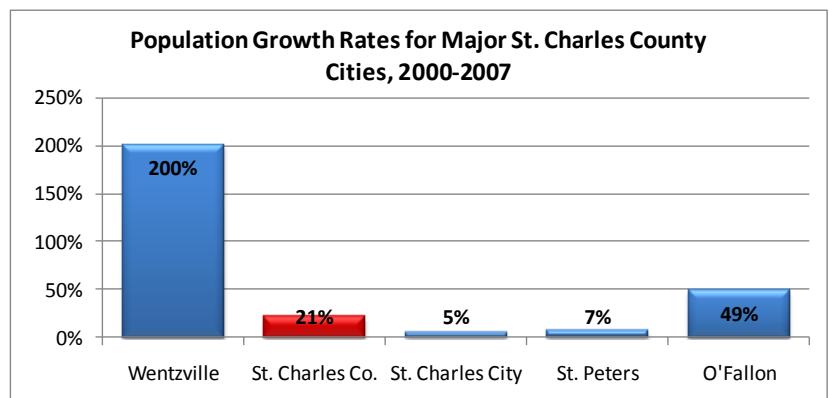
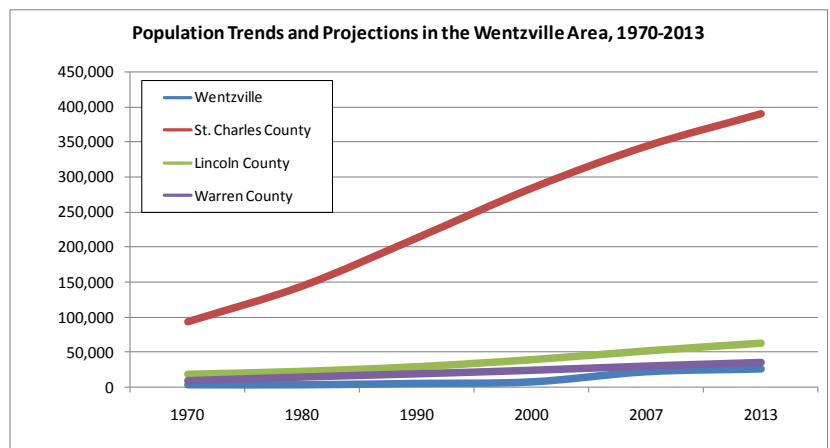
As the greater St. Louis region grows, therefore, the map shows that Metro East has a great deal more readily developed land than Metro West, particularly if Downtown St. Louis is considered something of a regional fulcrum. But western St. Charles County, and on into Warren and Lincoln Counties, also show much promise for continuing the growth patterns so prevalent in the many suburban cities of the region.

A crucial issue for Downtown Wentzville, if not for all of Wentzville, is how to capture and/or re-direct some of the natural westward expansion of St. Charles County into the downtown area, thus revitalizing downtown using natural growth trends.

2.2 Population Growth

A measure of that growth is shown on this graph, starting in 1970 and looking out to a few years from now. St. Charles County has been among the nation’s leading growth counties for a long time, as the slope of the red line suggests. Based on trends, St. Charles County could have 400,000 residents by 2015, certainly by 2020. The county is just now passing the City of St. Louis in population.

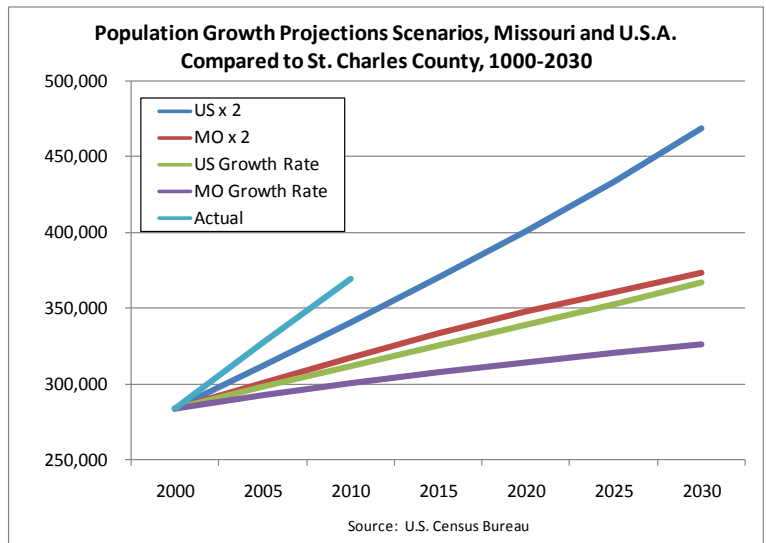
Where is this county growth taking place? In no small way, right in Wentzville. Since the 2000 Census, Wentzville’s rate of population growth has been ten times that of the county as a whole (200% vs. 21%). Wentzville has grown four times as fast as O’Fallon. Three out of ten new residents in the county since 2000 live in Wentzville.



² That said, there are many strong levee systems in the metro area, especially those protecting Metro East, St. Louis, and St. Louis County from the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Levees are far less prevalent in St. Charles County which, in many ways, constricts the county’s growth potential. But it also is more environmentally sound.

So far, Lincoln and Warren Counties are relatively small in terms of population. Indeed, Wentzville’s population almost approximates Warren County’s! There’s no reason to believe that the flattening of Wentzville’s curve over the next five years is a “given,” however. With continued regional growth and with opportunities created in downtown Wentzville, a steeper curve might even be possible.

To get a better picture of the powerful growth forces in St. Charles County, the graph to the right shows alternative scenarios for growth projections for St. Charles County. The U.S. Census Bureau regularly projects the populations of the states and the nation as a whole, typically right after the most recent census count; that was in 2000. They don’t do it for counties or cities, however. The actual growth rate between 2000 and 2007 for St. Charles County is shown on the aqua line, or the short line on top of the other four.

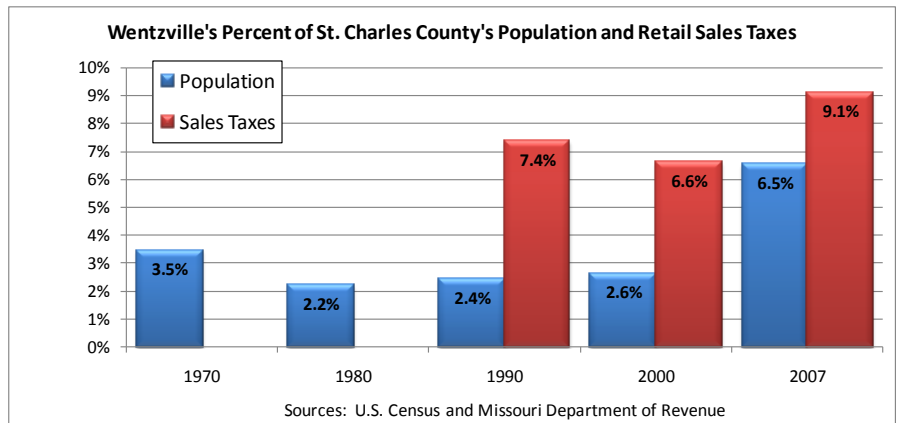


If the projected growth rate of St. Charles County, starting with the 2000 Census, is compared to the anticipated growth rate of Missouri, the population of the county would be along the lower purple line out to 2030. Obviously, St. Charles County has grown a lot faster than that. But Missouri doesn’t grow as fast as the nation as a whole, so if the county would grow as fast as the entire U.S., the green line would be the population. Still, that does not approach the actual experience. If the state and national rates are doubled, the red and blue lines emerge. Again, these do not reach the actual experience of St. Charles County.

Wentzville has certainly been a major part of absorbing this rapid growth in the current decade. Again, this suggests a substantial opportunity for downtown Wentzville to reach out and grab some of that growth—perhaps before it moves further west and north.

2.3 Retail Trade Growth

Another measure of growth and success is retail trade. The graph to the right shows Wentzville’s share of St. Charles County’s population in blue, and its share of the county’s retail sales taxes in red. Until 2000, Wentzville was not much of a population growth center, but it was able to establish itself as a relatively significant base of sales taxes, at least as of 1990.



Wentzville captures more than its “fair share” of retail sales taxes because of the incredible concentration of retailers along Wentzville Parkway. This retail expansion clearly shows that Wentzville has positioned itself to serve its own growing population as well as the retailing needs of nearby growing communities. As a result, Wentzville has increased from 2.6% of the county’s population in 2000 to 6.5% in 2007, while increasing its share of retail sales taxes from 7.4% of the county to 9.1%.

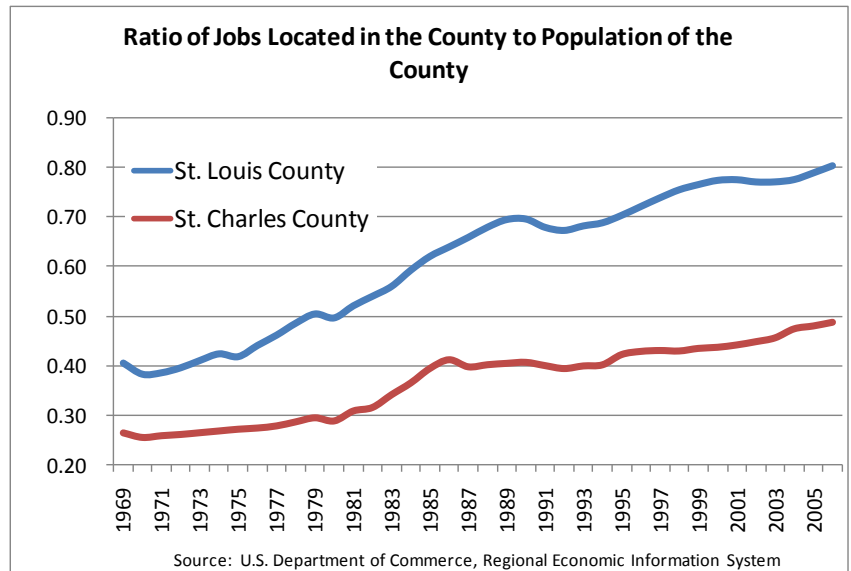
This suggests that Downtown Wentzville could be instrumental in attracting more residents, perhaps in some kind of “new village” setting with the nearby convenience of much of the retail they would ever need, while adding specialty merchants and restaurants in a downtown environment that could also serve as a unique destination for residents from many miles around.

2.4 Job Growth Potential

With population growth comes an increase in the labor force—that is, more people who have jobs or are looking for jobs. Thus, Wentzville has a vastly increased number of workers. The history of suburban development generally follows a pattern that more jobs follows larger labor forces. In short, it should be expected, and planned for, that Wentzville can attract more non-retail economic development because it has a growing and relatively prosperous labor force both within the city and nearby.

The graph to the right compares the ratio of jobs located in St. Louis and St. Charles Counties to the number of residents of each county. The database goes back to 1969 when St. Louis County encompassed about 0.4 jobs for every resident.⁴ By 2006, this ratio had increased substantially to over 0.8 jobs per county resident.

In the U.S. today, the ratio is about 0.5. That is, for every two residents of the U.S., there is one job in the U.S. So St. Louis County has been able to increase its economic development to a point where it contains many more jobs than the residents of the county would be able to hold. This is net economic development growth.



St. Charles County has at last reached about the national average. While there are still many residents of St. Charles County commuting to other counties for jobs (witness the crowded bridges over the Missouri River at rush hour), the proportion of out-commuting has declined over the years because more jobs are available in the county. The experience of St. Louis County, however, suggests that this net economic development could go even further in St. Charles County.

While the number of jobs in Wentzville and its environs is unknown, it is likely to be relatively small relative to population, other than the effect that the General Motors plant has. That plant is an anomaly, of course. It was constructed in the early 1980s because GM needed a great deal of land that was still convenient to its larger number of employees. But the plant preceded residential growth—not the usual pattern—and relies heavily on employees who commute relatively long distances.

The implication for Wentzville is that the downtown area might be partially positioned to attract office and/or industrial types of development in order to provide work space for an increasing labor force. Positioning certain parts of downtown for, say, an office campus or a business park can encourage employers to locate in Wentzville in order to capitalize on the conveniently situated labor force.

⁴ This doesn't necessarily mean that every member of the St. Louis County labor force held a job in the county. Many held, and still hold, jobs in other counties, particularly in the City of St. Louis.

3.0 DOWNTOWN WENTZVILLE’S STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

Many of the facts described in the previous section of this report were presented to a public meeting of downtown stakeholders on November 24, 2008. The 75 participants then broke into eight smaller groups to address several questions about Downtown Wentzville:

- What brings people to downtown today?
- Why don’t people come downtown today?
- How can more people be attracted to downtown more often?

These topics were addressed in groups of eight to ten people, facilitated by members of the consulting team and some members of the Wentzville city staff. After about 40 minutes of discussion and note taking, each group reported out their findings. These findings are summarized here.

3.1 What brings people to downtown today?

The responses to this question fell within six broad categories noted below. In no small way, downtown Wentzville appears to serve the purposes of a vibrant downtown. It is a center of many public services, there are places to eat, shop, and conduct business. It is a place for community events and gathering places. And people live downtown. It also appears that downtown is something of a “relief route” for times of congested traffic elsewhere in the city.

Civic Facilities	Restaurants	Community Facilities & Events	Retail Goods and Services	Business and Medical Services	Miscellaneous
Post office Public works City hall School License Bureau Fire department Parks First Vietnam Memorial Veteran’s Hall	West Allen Grill Pete's Drive In Old Town Pub Papa John’s Goodies Ice Cream Parlor	Flea market Parades Churches Senior Center Wabash Days Festivals Community Club	Auto Services Carpet Tattoo parlors Florist Hair salon Gas stations Antiques Western Auto Barber Shop Dale’s Lock n’ Key Dog groomer Chic Hardware	CPA Chiropractor Dentist Insurance Sign company Grain elevator C&S Heating & Cooling	Congestion on the parkway Meetings Residences

These responses, however, say nothing about the scale of downtown and the diversity or competitiveness of its businesses. A quick observation indicates that all of the above is true, but downtown seems not to be vibrant. Could it be that there are too few businesses? Too few residents? Too little civic activities?

3.2 Why don't people come downtown today?

Leading the complaints are issues of accessibility. Downtown seems hard to get to and hard to get through. This is exacerbated by a perception about parking problems and, importantly, an inability to walk conveniently among multiple venues.

People also don't like the way downtown looks. Words like run-down, tired, unattractive, etc., emerged quite often. Who wants to conduct business in an aesthetically displeasing place when better alternatives conveniently exist?

Aesthetics	Accessibility	Attractions	Advertising
Not visually vibrant Run-down Tired Worn down Not aesthetically pleasing (not pretty) Unattractive MFA Mishmash of styles and building materials Empty lots	Not accessible No thoroughfare Only one railroad crossing Main Street dead ends Streets are narrow, utilities are all over the place Lack of parking Park and drive from shop to shop Traffic congestion on Pearce Not walkable Hard to ingress and egress core (especially with trains)	No draw Lack of attractions Limited number of restaurants Limited entertainment Limited specialty shops Not enough shopping No nightlife/entertainment No focal point Parkway competition	No promotion of downtown Lack of awareness/knowledge No defined gateway

Despite the previous list of reasons to visit downtown, there is consensus that downtown lacks sufficient attractions. And downtown could use a lot more promotion if only to make Wentzville residents more aware of the diversity and opportunities that already exist downtown.

Thus, while downtown exhibits diversity of activities, people think that there simply isn't enough of that diversity, that downtown is difficult to get to, and that it is unattractive. But greater promotion of the downtown might have immediate effects are attracting more patronage if only to make downtown more visible. Longer term actions can then address aesthetics, accessibility, and a greater number of attractions.

3.3 How can more people be attracted to downtown more often?

Consensus on directions for improving downtown’s attractiveness and vitality was the primary goal of the public workshop. Participants did not disappoint. The following table lists a wide range of uses and actions that emerged from the workshop. Among the most important is a broad desire to keep downtown the center of local government. Relocation of city hall and or the downtown fire station should be within the downtown, not elsewhere as happened with the police department.

This desire to at least partly brand downtown as the city’s civic center is complemented by ideas to make downtown also the cultural center of Wentzville. This includes a variety of museums, indoor and outdoor concert venues, a celebration of the city’s railroad history, upgrades to parks and monuments, and the like.

Used as attractions, these civic and cultural uses would help to stimulate more private, commercial development for dining, retailing, and personal services. A challenge, of course, is to juxtapose such uses in a manner that helps to further the desires for improved accessibility and internal movement. Some suggest, for instance, that Pearce and Allen be converted to one-way pairs of streets (i.e., one westbound, the other eastbound). Would this improve traffic flow while also encouraging business development? Such questions need to be addressed.

Civic Uses	Private Uses	Aesthetics, Themes, Promotion	Accessibility	Regulations
Keep City Hall and Fire Station Downtown Farmers market Outdoor theater/concerts Children’s activities, children’s theater Cultural events, art, music Outdoor skating rink Town Square/Plaza area with activities – concerts Take advantage of history (railroad station) Library Museums, aquarium Park with “living history of Wentzville” Improve post office Special events – Street Rod Cruise, Wabash Days Pocket parks Taste of Wentzville Vietnam Memorial: Signs on I-70; landscape the area Community meeting space Renovate the caboose	More variety of food/restaurants Bookstore Business incubator Bank located in the area – Credit Union Outdoor seating cafes Pubs Bowling Alley Boutiques/Specialty shops Galleries Wine garden, wine district, bistro Drive In Theatre College campus extension Financial district Corporate park coming in at I-70 Mid America Raceways Aquarium Overnight stay places Banks 5 & Dime General store Mixed use – full time residents Work/live units Higher density residential	Sustained marketing campaign Create neighborhood identity Roll back time Downtown organization Spend a whole day downtown, meet your neighbors Appeal to young adults, seniors, entrepreneurs Chuck Berry theme Automobile theme; home of GM Commercial south of RR; residential north of RR Broaden the downtown footprint Front door Town Square: benches, fountain, park Places to park your car and spend an afternoon Information center Streetscape improvements Visual continuity Better Lighting Lindenwood University art, sculptures Uniformity Sculptures and fountains Sidewalk seating Landscape around the tracks Shop Wentzville First campaign.	Railroad crossings/pedestrian overpass Identify an anchor Improve pedestrian access Better exits from Flea Market (traffic patterns) More access Change circulation patterns (along tracks) Beautification & enhancements Walk ways parallel to the tracks Railroad crossing Bikes lanes and bike trails Need parking facility Light rail come out to Wentzville Need pedestrian crossings at railroad Underground railroad crossings On street Parking Convert Pearce/Allen one-way pair Improve traffic flow Carriage rides Public trail linking cities and parks	More relaxed regulations (easier rehab) Mixed-use applications Vertical growth Allow ease in older building restoration Public/private investment agreements Loop road system More direct connection from Highway 61 north and south Business – rent lower Strong associations – Downtown, Community Club, Historical, Enhancement Common building facades Common business hours

Private uses that are encouraged by the workshop also include residential opportunities, particularly in higher density configurations of mixed used developments or, say, townhouses and apartments/condominiums. Controlled properly, this would be an appropriate component of a diverse and walkable downtown environment.

Participants also suggested some broad themes for downtown or parts of downtown. Already mentioned are themes related to civic and cultural purposes as well as a celebration of the city's link to railroading. Wentzville also has close ties to the Rock-n-Roll industry for an entertainment theme and to the automobile manufacturing industry for a theme that relates to cars. A combination of these themes might enhance drive-in restaurants, summer concerts and "sock hops," and family activities like bowling and movie theaters.

In any event, the ideas emanating from the workshop appeal to the diversity and mix of uses that is already the pattern downtown. But there must be many more uses and they must be linked so that pedestrians can enjoy walking, shopping, dining, and recreating in a vibrant and clean downtown. A means for reaching these goals through mutual efforts is to organize downtown interests into an advocacy and management association as well as other organizations that can advocate for more narrow interests but all within the context of downtown, such as an arts organization or a history organization.

4.0 First Directions

4.1 Major Opportunities for Downtown Revitalization

There are many things the city of Wentzville can do to create a more vibrant downtown and attract businesses and visitors. Opportunities can be categorized into four segments:

- *Public or Community Infrastructure:*
 - Improve traffic pattern and create direct access from US-61
 - address flea market egress
 - create a more walkable environment
 - Improve lighting, streetscapes, and signage
 - Create pedestrian and bike paths; pedestrian path/tunnel around railroad crossing
 - Add parking
 - Create open spaces, such as parks and plazas, with benches, landscaping, sculptures, and fountains
 - Improve Vietnam Memorial: increase awareness; landscaping
 - Create a government center built around new city hall downtown
- *Shopping, Dining and Recreation:*
 - Expand flea market hours to include Fridays and Saturdays
 - Court specialty retailers (antique, wine, books)
 - New restaurants and cafes with special features, such as outdoor seating, wine or beer garden, local flavors
 - Increase number of public events and activities downtown, such as concerts, theater, carriage rides, and food and art fairs
 - Increase options for recreation and family outings, such as bowling, museums, art galleries, skating, and aquarium
- *Residential:*
 - Build new, higher density residences that target young professionals or empty-nester types.
 - Build new, higher density residences that target older residents that encourage them to stay in Wentzville even when they no longer need their single family homes.
 - Live/work units are typical in more urban settings.
- *Link to existing assets:*
 - Capitalize on growth potential of Lindenwood University
 - Capitalize on proximity to area wineries
 - Local wine shop featuring wines from those wineries
 - Attract tourists to extend their visits and spend time in Wentzville – marketing and advertising along routes
 - Exploit Wentzville’s history; make railroad an attraction
 - Capitalize on natural beauty

4.2 Possible Actions

The workshop and SWOT analysis provide very useful data with which to evaluate the direction of redevelopment in downtown Wentzville. Our initial recommendations enumerate the issues we think are top priorities; many may be addressed concurrently.

TASK 1: Improve road infrastructure: Priorities:

- Flea Market access
 - Local ingress/egress
 - Add parking
 - Access off interstate
 - Signage on interstate, within city and downtown
- Railroad Crossing
- Create bike and pedestrian pathways

TASK 2: Develop identity and marketing plan: Priorities:

- Utilize downtown business association to promote downtown Wentzville
- Highlight transportation/railroad history
- Highlight city history
 - Create attractions to align with identity (GM plant tour, museums, historical landmarks, etc.)
- Improve signage/tourism marketing to attract people from suburbs.
 - Targeted advertising so people know what downtown has to offer.
 - Get suburbanites downtown for events.
- Improve signage/tourism marketing to attract people from Katy Trail and wineries
 - Glossy marketing materials available in tourist areas, hotels, universities.
 - Need to make sure people know downtown Wentzville exists!
- Increase awareness among college students.

TASK 3: Community Infrastructure: Priorities:

- Keep City Hall downtown.
- Improve/add public green spaces, gateways, wayfinders, and lighting.
- Improve landscaping around Vietnam Memorial
- Consider satellite location for a college or university.

TASK 4: Improve Retail, Dining and Entertainment Options: Priorities:

- Open Flea Market on Friday and Saturday.
- Develop plans for additional community events (art fairs, concerts, parades, etc.)
- Explore relationship with area wineries for local wine shop
- Explore opportunities for bowling alley; one that could attract adults, college students as well as families.
- Attract specialty retailers and restaurants (attractive demographics and growth projections).

TASK 5: Build/renovate new residential products: Priorities:

- Higher density apartments and condos.
- Affordable options for students and young professional who may commute to work.
- Empty nesters
- Work/live units