

5. Other Community Development Needs

Brownfields Assessment

Riverfront Industrial Redevelopment Area

As with most communities, the urban core of St. Joseph has experienced the negative effects of urban maturity and growth. Its original vibrant metropolis of commercial and industrial activity has been replaced by empty, decaying and underutilized buildings, weeds, and blight. Many of the vacant structures are open to the elements; others are merely used for storage.

Travelers along Interstate 229, a tiered elevated interstate that serves as an important route to the City's central business district and historic downtown, are greeted with a negative foretaste of St. Joseph's commercial and industrial areas. They see derelict and abandoned buildings, once used for manufacturing purposes, now showing broken windows and gaping roof holes.

The City of St. Joseph has hired a consultant to prepare a plan for redevelopment of the Brownsfield Area.

Because the elevated highway provides an overhead view of seven-acres of scrap metal, that business has agreed to construct a barrier to hide the scrap metal. The Missouri Department of Transportation has agreed to install an enhancement along the elevated highway to change the viewpoint of those that travel Interstate 229. These efforts will change perceptions that the scrap metal business lowers property values and creates an adverse climate for business expansion.

The Riverfront Industrial Redevelopment Area consists of land just to the south of St. Joseph's historic downtown. It is bounded by Charles Street and the Central Business District on the north, the Missouri River on the west, Eighth Street and a low- to moderate-income neighborhood on the east, and the elevated Highway 36 on the south. There are approximately 244 acres available for commercial and industrial redevelopment. This redevelopment area is the only vacant land area in St. Joseph that has immediate infrastructure access, i.e. streets, rail, sewers, and other utilities. The area is not marketable, however, because of the unknowns regarding the extent of contamination and the absence of an economic redevelopment strategy. To overcome these unknowns, the brownsfield has been environmentally assessed, and a cleanup and mitigation plan is being developed for individual sites with confirmed environmental issues. The final product will be a community-oriented economic redevelopment strategy for the area.

St. Joseph's economic times have drastically changed. Economic growth is creating demand for industrial sites. Lack of infrastructure on the outer edges of the community, as well as inadequate rail service; have heightened interest in redeveloping the urban core. Recent revitalization efforts in the historic downtown and inner city neighborhoods are creating new awareness of the importance of reinvesting in the roots that feed the community, and the merit of controlling urban sprawl.

Revitalization and Enhancement of the Riverfront

There continues to be a need to create a riverfront environment that reflects the historic significance of St. Joseph and stimulates economic development through the creation of new recreation and tourism opportunities.

The City of St. Joseph is collaborating with the County of Buchanan, Missouri Western State Collage, the St. Joseph Area Chamber of Commerce, St. Joseph Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Missouri Department of Conversation and the private sector to develop the area. Several of their priorities have been accomplished: the Riverwalk or hike and bike trail is in place and a softball complex with adjacent parking and concessions is being heavily utilized. Other priorities that have not yet been accomplished include:

- Fairgrounds or open air arena for rodeos, FFA and 4-H livestock shows, and other agricultural events and outdoor concerts.
- Interpretive wetlands area, fishing area, and identification of natural plants along a boardwalk/nature trail.
- Living history area.
- Youth and family areas with park-like settings, playground equipment, fishing pond, skate park, arcade, games, and concessions.

Revitalization of Downtown St. Joseph

Downtown St. Joseph was developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of the buildings were constructed prior to 1925. Many stand vacant. Only a few have been renovated to meet present codes. Attempts to "modernize" the facades have destroyed some of the character and historic integrity of the structures. Development is stagnant and the buildings are underutilized.

The need to stimulate redevelopment and reinvestment in the central business district, to create adaptive re-use of vacant retail space and upper levels of the retail buildings has finally been recognized. Several of the former commercial and manufacturing buildings are being converted into loft apartments and other housing provisions for people who work in or want to live near the business district. The desire to connect or link the downtown to the riverfront and to enhance the area by creating attractive “gateways” at key locations and/or intersections can come to fruition.

Although there are many positive things happening in downtown St. Joseph, there continues to be a need for incentives that entice property owners of historic commercial structures to improve their building facades.

Although a downtown revitalization effort has been in progress for several years, there is renewed interest in redeveloping the area. Efforts to revitalize the Riverfront Industrial Redevelopment Area or Brownsfields, and the enhancements that are changing the Riverfront environment will provide the critical mass of individuals needed to spur the demand for special niche stores, restaurants, and housing that are sought in downtown St. Joseph. Redevelopment of the industrial, commercial, and retail urban core will bring new job opportunities in close proximity to the homes of low and moderate-income persons that reside in the historic and older residential neighborhoods that fringe the core of the community.

One planned undertaking is having a major impact on the revitalization of Downtown St. Joseph. Heartland Regional Medical Center has moved all of its health facilities out of the downtown area. It has targeted six buildings and surrounding parking areas, approximately 10 acres of property on the fringe of the Central Business District, for demolition. Heartland Health plans to create a Chapter 353 Corporation and utilize tax increment financing to redevelop the area which is roughly bounded by Powell Street on the north, Frederick Avenue and Jules Street on the south, Fourth Street on the west and 13th Street on the east.

Historic Preservation Activities

◆ *Façade Improvement Program:*

Like other communities, St. Joseph did not develop overnight. In the early 1900’s residential development spread in proximity to streetcar lines. Even after the influx of automobiles changed the design of residential properties and the development patterns of the City, most people walked and relied on public transportation to reach their destinations. Grocers, drug stores, bakeries, shoe repair, movie theaters, the neighborhood pub, churches, and other “mom and pop” stores were on the corner or a

few blocks down the street. Downtown was “the place” to shop. Most neighborhoods, and especially the Northside, Southside, and midtown residential areas, had a strip shopping area near the streetcar line. In the Northside, it was St. Joseph Avenue. The Southside had King Hill, Missouri, Illinois, and Lake Avenues. Frederick Avenue served the fringe of the central business district; Messanie Street and Mitchell Avenue provided conveniences for the midtown neighborhoods.

St. Joseph has a wealth of commercial buildings in its downtown that still survive and are worthy of preservation. Frederick Avenue and neighborhood commercial areas in Patee Town, North St. Joseph and South St. Joseph also contain a variety of periods and styles of commercial buildings. Many of the buildings are forever lost due to decay and demolition. Removal of the original elements through unsuccessful remodeling efforts and/or lack of maintenance have changed the character of many of the structures. Many can be saved and restored, with enticements provided to the owners. Sometimes the original use of the historic structure is no longer viable, but with assistance and the correct blend of incentives, the building can be restored and adapted to serve a new purpose. Low interest loans and other incentives will empower property owners to improve the appearance of their building facades and streetscape. The façade improvements and restoration/preservation activities will safeguard and enhance the community’s historic fabric, foster economic development through job creation and increased tourism, and augment the quality of life for now and the next generation.

Historic Preservation:

The community continues to need technical assistance and guidance pertaining to historic preservation and compliance with *The Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation*.

St. Joseph has many individual properties and several districts that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition to the honor National Register designation bestows upon a property, it also provides access to Federal and State tax credits for rehabilitation - an important component of comprehensive revitalization strategy. Residential areas in St. Joseph that are on the National Register include Robidoux Hill, Museum Hill, and the Hall Street Historic Districts. Nomination of the Cathedral Hill neighborhood to the National Register of Historic Places is pending. Grant funds have also been secured from the Department of Natural Resources to nominate the Harris Addition/Carter Addition and Clay Street neighborhoods to the National Register. Both Museum Hill and Hall Street are also local districts. This overlay-zoning tool requires Landmark Commission review of all exterior alterations, new construction, and demolition within the designated zones.

Incentives that empower property owners to preserve the exteriors of historically and architecturally significant residential structures help eliminate blighting influences and keep the neighborhoods intact. The Residential Historic Preservation Loan Program motivates the property owners into initiating exterior improvements that protect and preserve the character of the property at an affordable cost. These projects also serve as a catalyst for stimulating further private investment in the neighborhood.

Demolition and Code Enforcement

Removing dilapidated and abandoned structures that are cost prohibitive for rehabilitation improves the neighborhoods and eliminates blighting influences, fire hazards and other unsafe conditions that are harmful to children. Demolition or repair and securing of structurally unsafe structures will improve the streetscape and encourage or cause interest in redevelopment to be renewed.