

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY REPORT

FINAL SURVEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

CITY OF SIKESTON, MISSOURI

July 2008



D·R·E·A·M
I N I T I A T I V E

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FOR
MISSOURI (DREAM) PROGRAM SPONSORS:



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SECTION I FINAL REPORT

As part of the research for the DREAM Initiative, UNICOM-ARC conducted four focus groups in Sikeston, Missouri. The purpose of these groups was to learn more about the priorities of the Sikeston community in regard to the downtown area. The four groups included the following: 1) city council and administrators, 2) longtime residents, 3) downtown business owners, and 4) new residents. Participants of all four groups were from a variety of backgrounds.

This report summarizes the responses of the members of all of the groups to the posed questions. Attached are the complete transcripts of the four meetings.

A. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE BUSINESS GROUP:

The following questions were posed to the business group:

General Questions about Sikeston

01. Generally speaking, how would you describe this area to someone visiting from another city? Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?
02. What are the main shopping areas for area residents? From how far away do people come or go to do their regular shopping (groceries, household items)?
03. What about dining and entertainment options? What are popular choices for local residents? When friends or relatives visit from out of town, where do you take them?

Downtown Specific Questions

04. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Sikeston is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?
05. Why did you choose to locate your business or make an investment in property downtown (or not in downtown, for other business owners)?
06. From what you hear from your customers, how “user-friendly” is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they’re looking for? Is there a need/demand for more housing downtown?
07. How do you communicate to your customers about information about what’s going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation) or with your own business? How would you like to be communicated with regarding what is going on downtown from the City of Sikeston?

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

08. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Sikeston. We'd like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...

- Additional/types of businesses would you like to see downtown?
- Dining and entertainment?
- Parks and outdoor recreation?

09. Now, we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do you think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?

- Street repair?
- Landscaping/beautification?
- Green space?
- Building repairs, renovation, upgrades?

10. Of all the potential improvements we've just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the City?

11. What could the City do to help your business thrive or keep your property values strong over the next few years?

12. Would you be willing to support a "special business district" in which an additional sales tax would be collected that would provide services specifically for downtown?

B. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE GENERAL GROUPS:

The following questions were posed to the general groups:

General Questions about Sikeston

01. Generally speaking, how would you describe this area to someone visiting from another city? Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?

02. What are the main shopping areas for area residents? From how far away do people come or go to do their regular shopping (groceries, household items)?

03. What about dining and entertainment options? What are popular choices for local residents? When friends or relatives visit from out of town, where do you take them?

04. What kinds of recreation are popular with local residents? What kinds of opportunities are there to participate in these activities in Sikeston?

Downtown Specific Questions

05. Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Sikeston is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?

06. What are the major reasons you visit downtown? How often do you visit downtown Sikeston? Is there anything that you used to do downtown but now do elsewhere or vice versa? Why?

07. How “user-friendly” is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they’re looking for? Is there a need/demand for more housing downtown?

08. How do local residents and visitors get information about what’s going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation)?

Questions Regarding the Future of Downtown

09. As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Sikeston. We’d like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What...

- Additional/types of businesses would you like to see downtown?
- Dining and entertainment?
- Parks and recreation?

10. Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do you think there needs to be improvements in the following areas?

- Street repair?
- Landscaping/beautification?
- Green space?
- Building repairs, renovations, upgrades?

11. Of all the potential improvements we’ve just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the City?

12. What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* Sikeston to resemble?

C. THE SIKESTON AREA

Generally speaking, how would you describe this area to someone visiting from another city? Would you say things are moving in the right or wrong direction?

The groups described Sikeston as a friendly small town with an agricultural history, a population of about 17,000 people, and good healthcare, education, and recreation opportunities. Sikeston is famous for the restaurant Lambert's, which sits just off Interstate 55. Sikeston is also the halfway point on the drive between St. Louis, Missouri and Memphis, Tennessee.

Participants explained that the area is more economically depressed than it once was, which poses a challenge. Another challenge to the area is the proliferation of social services in Sikeston, which is perceived by some to be a hub in the area for welfare, Section 8 housing, and other similar social services. The people who come to Sikeston for these services often do not have the means to spend money in the community and to contribute to development.

Sikeston is approximately a 30-minute drive away from Cape Girardeau, Missouri, which is a larger city with diverse shopping, entertainment, and education opportunities. The groups felt that Sikeston loses a lot of business to Cape Girardeau, which entices Sikeston residents to spend their money outside of Sikeston.

The participants had a mix of feelings about the direction Sikeston is moving: some felt the direction is positive, some felt that it is negative, and some felt that Sikeston is not moving at all. The positives included the City's renovation of the YMCA, the commitment to downtown development, and a number of new festivals to bring people downtown. The people who felt Sikeston is moving in a negative direction or not moving described the vacant and dilapidated buildings downtown, the lack of businesses, the economic depression, the declining population, and the improvement of Cape Girardeau drawing more Sikeston residents to spend their money in Sikeston. Another challenge to Sikeston as a whole is the fact that Lambert's is actually located in Miner, which is a small but separate city, so Sikeston does not get tax dollars from Lambert's and finds it difficult to draw visitors from Lambert's to other areas in Sikeston.

What are the main shopping areas for area residents? From how far away do people come to do their regular shopping (groceries, household items)?

The main shopping areas in Sikeston are the major chain stores, such as Wal-Mart and Lowe's, and a few specialty stores scattered around town. While people do much of their day-to-day shopping at Wal-Mart and other stores in Sikeston, when looking for higher-end items or a larger variety, they often go to Cape Girardeau to do their shopping. These items include a variety of men's, women's, children's, and young adults' clothing, shoes, craft and art supplies, and other specialty items.

People from south of Sikeston come to Sikeston to shop at Wal-Mart, which is a hub for many towns in the Bootheel.

What about dining, entertainment, and recreation options? What are popular choices for local residents? When friends or relatives visit from out of town, where do you take them?

There are a few restaurants in Sikeston, including casual dining, Mexican restaurants, Chinese restaurants, and fast food. Most residents travel to Cape Girardeau for a wider variety of restaurants or for a fine dining option. The participants felt that a fine dining option in town, a wider variety of restaurants, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating would be welcome improvements.

The biggest dining option in Sikeston is Lambert's, the famous restaurant which draws tens of thousands of visitors per month. Lambert's, "Home of the Thrown Rolls," is a destination and is well known across the country. While Lambert's is a draw for visitors, residents do not often eat at Lambert's, according to many participants.

For recreation and entertainment, Sikeston has a YMCA that is undergoing expansion, a number of parks, a community theater, a movie theater, sports opportunities, and many festivals that take place annually. Some people stay in town for entertainment and recreation, but many travel to Cape Girardeau for more options in dining, recreation, and entertainment.

D. DOWNTOWN SIKESTON: DESCRIBING THE PRESENT

Generally speaking, would you say that downtown Sikeston is headed in the right direction or wrong direction? Why?

Many in the groups cautiously felt that downtown Sikeston is moving slowly in the right direction. They felt that the renovation efforts downtown so far have been positive, and will eventually help draw more business downtown. Special events, such as the Sikeston in Bloom, draw people downtown, as well. Those who felt that downtown Sikeston is not yet moving in the right direction cited dilapidated buildings, a lack of businesses, a lack of aesthetic cohesion, and crime as challenges downtown will have to overcome.

General Public: What are the major reasons you visit downtown? How often do you visit downtown Sikeston? Is there anything that you used to do downtown but now do elsewhere or vice versa? Why?

The groups mentioned a few reasons that they visit downtown, including City Hall, the banks, the post office, a few restaurants and stores, and special events. Special events such as Sikeston in Bloom attract a number of residents downtown, and participants felt that those special events provide a great opportunity for businesses to advertise and to draw people in.

How "user-friendly" is downtown? Are business hours and locations convenient? Is there enough parking and is it convenient? Is it easy for people to find what they're looking for? Is there a need/demand for more housing downtown?

Participants had a few major concerns about user-friendliness, including navigation and signage, business hours, safety, and streets and sidewalks. Parking, according to many in the groups, is not currently a concern but may become one as downtown develops further.

The groups felt that navigation to downtown is a problem: there is inadequate signage directing people downtown, there is a lack of transportation to bring people from Lambert's or the airport to downtown, and the downtown is not clearly marked as people enter it. While the City is making some strides in signage, the participants felt that more signage that has a cohesive aesthetic is important.

The business hours downtown, according to the participants, are problematic, especially regarding evenings and weekends. Most of the businesses are open only until 5:00 on weekdays, which makes it impossible for people who have jobs with a regular weekday schedule to patronize these businesses. While those who work downtown are able to shop over their lunch hour, those who do not work downtown cannot. The problem is compounded by the fact that the chain stores in Sikeston and many businesses in Cape Girardeau are open during evenings and weekend. The participants also felt that restaurant hours are inconvenient, and that having more restaurants open late would be assets to Sikeston.

Partly because of the business hours, safety is perceived to be an issue. Because not many businesses downtown are open at night, many residents feel unsafe downtown at night. There is, according to participants, some petty crime downtown and some—though not much—violent crime. The groups suggested a stronger police presence downtown, more businesses open late and nighttime events, and housing. All three of these things, according to participants, would help deter crime downtown.

How do local residents and visitors get information about what's going on downtown (about shopping, special events, other entertainment and recreation)?

The participants mentioned the radio, the newspaper, the Chamber of Commerce, the Internet, the public access cable channel, flyers and church bulletins, and word-of-mouth as the major ways they get information about downtown business and events. They suggested a free newspaper to be distributed around downtown and at Lambert's, to specifically advertise downtown businesses, events, and successes.

E. DOWNTOWN SIKESTON: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As you know, the city is in the process of developing a master plan for downtown Sikeston. We'd like to ask you what direction you would like the downtown to take in a few different areas over the next few years. What additional types of businesses would you like to see downtown? Dining and entertainment? Parks and recreation?

The participants suggested a variety of new businesses downtown, focusing on independently owned specialty-type shops and restaurants rather than larger chains. For apparel, they suggested men's and women's clothing, a children's store, and a shoe store. For food, they suggested a grocery store, the expansion of the farmer's market, additional restaurants, coffee shops, candy and ice cream shops, and an old-style soda fountain. Specifically, they felt that a fine dining restaurant, some outdoor dining options, and a variety of food are all important. In other types of businesses, they suggested high-end antique stores, a drugstore, art galleries, craft stores, a new movie theater, a bookstore, an ice rink, activities for teenagers, and any other specialty store.

They also focused on adding to the residents of downtown, suggesting that second-story condos would help fill the buildings, keep a number of people downtown to patronize businesses, make downtown safer, and appeal to young professionals. Fire safety issues associated with second-story residences were a concern for some, though.

The groups suggested that improving the park space downtown would make the downtown look nicer, provide gathering spaces, and provide spaces for special outdoor events.

Participants felt strongly about bringing more events downtown. Events, they felt, would help draw people downtown, generate excitement, and show residents of Sikeston that the downtown is improving. They suggested instituting a summer concert series in the gazebo in the downtown park, making the farmer's market a consistent event, and creating ideas for other special events. Some participants also explained that bringing people downtown at night is important, to allay fears that downtown is unsafe and to encourage businesses to stay open later.

Many participants felt that the downtown's purpose is not to compete with Wal-Mart and the other large chains, nor is it to compete with the more mainstream shopping in Cape Girardeau. Instead, the purpose is to offer a unique experience to customers. For this, the groups felt strongly that small specialty business should be encouraged, and the City should find and offer incentives to potential business owners.

Now we would like to talk about the look and feel of downtown. Do think there needs to be improvements in the following areas: street repair, landscaping/beautification, green space, and building repairs, renovations, and upgrades?

The participants suggested that building repair, renovations, and upgrades should be of the highest priority. Sidewalk and street repair, lighting, and green space were also important. Furthermore, giving the downtown a cohesive aesthetic should be a high priority.

In discussing streets and sidewalks, the participants explained that the original streets and sidewalks were brick. They were in favor of restoring the original look, but realize that the restoration will require a lot of resources, because the streets and sidewalks must be smooth and easy to navigate.

In discussing green space, the groups felt that the current park is a good addition to downtown, but should be further developed. A few groups also mentioned some sort of fountain, a statue, and other similar aesthetic improvements.

The participants emphasized that the downtown should have a cohesive aesthetic, focusing on a quaint and historical look while still being modernized. In order to create this aesthetic, some dilapidated buildings may need to be torn down and rebuilt. Others will need to have the aluminum fronts and awnings removed, and the original façade restored. The larger spaces within buildings may need to be split up, in order to create room for smaller shops. Finally, the empty buildings will need to be filled with businesses, to give the downtown a bustling feel.

Of all the potential improvements we've just talked about, what do you think the highest priorities should be for the city?

The groups considered attracting businesses, building repair and renovation, safety, aesthetic improvements, and transportation to be the biggest priorities. In attracting businesses, the

priorities were to attract a mix of specialty retail, to attract residents for higher-end second-story condos, and to attract professional services to fill the second stories of buildings. For building repair, the priorities were façade repair and removal of aluminum fronts and awnings, structural repair or complete tear-down of dilapidated buildings, and rebuilding viable buildings. In increasing safety, the participants suggested a stronger police presence, perhaps an officer walking around downtown or riding a bicycle. The groups felt that aesthetic improvements downtown will help the community take pride in downtown, which will attract businesses and customers. Finally, the participant felt the need for easy transportation between Lambert's and the downtown, and suggested a trolley as a transportation option.

General Public: What downtowns or areas of other communities would you most *like* Sikeston to resemble?

The groups named the following small towns and larger cities as places they admire for various reasons: Independence, Kansas; Columbia, Missouri; St. Charles, Missouri; Westin, Missouri; Paducah, Kentucky; Bardstown, Kentucky; Lexington, Kentucky; Hot Springs, Arkansas; Oxford, Mississippi; Clinton, Missouri; Washington, Missouri; and Kirkwood, Missouri.

Of all of these downtowns, the participants in most groups mentioned and spent time discussing Paducah, Kentucky as a model. They admired Paducah's atmosphere, mix of businesses, outdoor events, attraction of artists into the community, nightlife, and status as a destination.

Many admired other downtowns for the cohesive look and feel and the mix of businesses that draw people in.

F. KEY POINTS

Key points about the Sikeston area:

- ◆ Sikeston is a friendly small town with an agricultural history, a population of about 17,000 people, and good healthcare, education, and recreation opportunities.
- ◆ Sikeston, the halfway point on the drive between St. Louis and Memphis, is famous for the restaurant Lambert's, which sits just off Interstate 55.
- ◆ Lambert's is technically located in Miner rather than Sikeston, so while it draws people to Sikeston, Sikeston does not benefit from tax dollars from Lambert's.
- ◆ The economic depression and the proliferation of social services are challenges for Sikeston.
- ◆ Sikeston is approximately a 30-minute drive away from Cape Girardeau, Missouri, which is a larger town with diverse shopping, entertainment, and education opportunities, many of which attract Sikeston residents.

- ◆ The participants had a mix of feelings about the direction Sikeston is moving: some felt the direction is positive (citing the YMCA expansion, downtown development, and festivals), and some felt that it is negative or stagnant (citing vacant and dilapidated buildings downtown, the lack of businesses, the economic depression, the declining population, and the tendency of Sikeston residents to shop in Cape Girardeau).
- ◆ The main shopping areas in Sikeston are the major chain stores, such as Wal-Mart and Lowe's, and a few specialty stores scattered around town.
- ◆ While people do much of their day-to-day shopping at Wal-Mart and other stores in Sikeston, when looking for higher-end items or a larger variety, they often go to Cape Girardeau to do their shopping.
- ◆ People from south of Sikeston come to Sikeston to shop at Wal-Mart, which is a hub for many towns in the Bootheel.
- ◆ There are a few restaurants in Sikeston, including casual dining, Mexican restaurants, Chinese restaurants, and fast food.
- ◆ Most residents travel to Cape Girardeau for a wider variety of restaurants or for a fine dining option.
- ◆ A fine dining option in town, a wider variety of restaurants, longer business hours, and some outdoor seating would be welcome improvements.
- ◆ Sikeston has a YMCA that is undergoing expansion, a number of parks, a community theater, a movie theater, sports opportunities, and many festivals that take place annually.
- ◆ The biggest dining option in Sikeston is Lambert's, the famous restaurant which draws tens of thousands of visitors per month but is not frequented by residents.

Key points about downtown Sikeston in the present:

- ◆ Downtown Sikeston is moving slowly in the right direction, because of renovation efforts and festivals, but still has a long way to go.
- ◆ Dilapidated buildings, a lack of businesses, a lack of aesthetic cohesion, and crime are challenges downtown will have to overcome.
- ◆ Residents visit downtown for City Hall, the banks, the post office, a few restaurants and stores, and special events.
- ◆ Major concerns about user-friendliness included navigation and signage, business hours, safety, and streets and sidewalks.
- ◆ Parking is not currently a major concern but may become one as downtown develops further.

- ◆ There is inadequate signage directing people downtown, there is a lack of transportation to bring people from Lambert's or the airport to downtown, and the downtown is not clearly marked as people enter it.
- ◆ The business hours downtown, according to the participants, are inconvenient, since most businesses are not open past 5:00 on weekdays or open on weekends; this makes it difficult for people with regular day jobs to patronize downtown businesses, and downtown Sikeston loses business to chain stores and to the stores and restaurants in Cape Girardeau, which are open later.
- ◆ Many residents feel unsafe downtown at night.
- ◆ A stronger police presence downtown, more businesses open late and nighttime events, and more housing would help deter crime downtown.
- ◆ The radio, the newspaper, the Chamber of Commerce, the Internet, the public access cable channel, flyers and church bulletins, and word-of-mouth are the major ways people get information about what is happening downtown.
- ◆ The participants suggested a free newspaper to be distributed around downtown and at Lambert's, to specifically advertise downtown businesses, events, and successes.

Key points about the future of downtown Sikeston:

- ◆ Downtown Sikeston should focus on independently owned specialty-type shops and restaurants rather than large chains; the participants felt that downtown's purpose is not to compete with large chains, but to offer a unique experience to customers.
- ◆ For apparel, men's and women's clothing, a children's store, and a shoe store would be welcome additions downtown.
- ◆ For food, a grocery store, the expansion of the farmer's market, additional restaurants, coffee shops, candy and ice cream shops, and an old-style soda fountain would be welcome additions downtown.
- ◆ In restaurants specifically, a fine dining restaurant, some outdoor dining options, and a variety of food are all important.
- ◆ In other types of businesses, high-end antique stores, a drugstore, art galleries, craft stores, a new movie theater, a bookstore, an ice rink, activities for teenagers, and any other specialty store would be welcome downtown.
- ◆ Small specialty business should be encouraged, and the City should provide incentives and information to encourage small businesses to come downtown.
- ◆ In residential space, second-story condos would help fill the buildings, keep a number of people downtown to patronize businesses, make downtown safer, and appeal to young professionals; fire safety is a concern, though.

- ◆ Improving the park space downtown would make the downtown look nicer, provide gathering spaces, and provide spaces for special outdoor events.
- ◆ More special events would help draw people downtown, generate excitement, and show residents of Sikeston that the downtown is improving—suggestions included a summer concert series in the gazebo in the downtown park, making the farmer’s market a consistent event, and creating ideas for other special events.
- ◆ Bringing people downtown at night is important, to allay fears that downtown is unsafe and to encourage businesses to stay open later.
- ◆ Downtown’s purpose is not to compete with Wal-Mart and the other large chains, nor is it to compete with the more mainstream shopping in Cape Girardeau; instead, the purpose is to offer a unique experience to customers.
- ◆ The highest priorities for downtown Sikeston should be building repair, renovations, and upgrades, sidewalk and street repair, lighting, green space, and giving the downtown a cohesive aesthetic.
- ◆ The streets, buildings, and signage should all have a historic, “quaint” look to them as they are restored and created, and empty buildings should be filled to give the downtown a bustling look and feel.
- ◆ The biggest priorities for the City should be attracting businesses, building repair and renovation, safety, aesthetic improvements, and transportation into the downtown from the airport and Lambert’s.
- ◆ Other downtowns the participants admire include Independence, Kansas; Columbia, Missouri; St. Charles, Missouri; Westin, Missouri; Paducah, Kentucky; Bardstown, Kentucky; Lexington, Kentucky; Hot Springs, Arkansas; Blytheville, Arkansas; Oxford, Mississippi; Clinton, Missouri; Washington, Missouri; and Kirkwood, Missouri.
- ◆ Paducah, Kentucky, according to participants, would make an excellent model and inspiration for Sikeston because of its atmosphere, mix of businesses, outdoor events, attraction of artists into the community, nightlife, and status as a destination.

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SECTION II

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATION TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Tell me a little bit about Sikeston as a whole. Describe your community to me.*

That's what I do, is sell this city. We're a town of 17,000, old town, agriculture, railroad, highways, pretty diverse population, big in agriculture, some industry. But quality of life, we've got the outdoors. We've got the most famous restaurant in this part of the world. Being a newcomer, this is the best bunch of people I've ever been around.

Another thing, I think we have an excellent school system, hospital, parks, sports complex, YMCA. There's a lot for younger families.

My family moved here in about 1827. I don't know the history, though. We're a farming community, we're going to celebrate our sesquicentennial in 2010. Agriculture-based economy. Famous for the Cleo Wright lynching in 1942. Have lost in the last 10 or 15 years most of our good part of our manufacturing and distribution jobs. Three primary employers. That's about it.

The city's not too far off... (unintelligible)

I think it's fair to say that there's a racial divide in the community. We got higher than average crime.

Well, higher than average public housing.

I'd agree with the public housing, but not with the amount of crime.

A lot of litter.

Well, the other great attribute is that the City owns and operates its own power plant and sells power all over the Midwest. That is a tremendous marketing tool to attract new industry, new jobs, to our community. I don't know if it's fully utilized, but it is citizen owned.

We have a museum, a live theater...

It's located on I-57, 55, 60. Major roadways. An outstanding fire and police department, with 80 state certified fire and police officers. We have a criminal investigation team, Hazmat, all types of areas of expertise.

We never need them, though.

I'll tell you something else, on a positive. 3 or 4 years ago, we put together a proposal on a 1% tax increase to clean up, support public safety and also SEMO, and it passed overwhelmingly. The citizens are not afraid to step up to the plate. Tax increases in today's world are almost unheard of, but our citizens stepped up and did it. There's a lot of community support for change.

Did anybody mention the new YMCA?

I didn't mention the addition to it. I think our community's taken a turn for the positive in the last 5 years. We used to have a lot more problems. We don't have the problems...we tore down some old houses and improved the looks, and I think there's more community pride.

Back in the 90's, our call load was a lot higher. That's progress.

I think Sikeston is very progressive with technology. We have fiber optic cables that serve our university, we're starting to divert call center locations. We're progressive, but we're just at the very beginning of exploring technology.

Moderator: Where do people shop?

We've lost a lot of retail, mom and pop stores are closing. Wal-Mart dominates, I'd say. Retail in the downtown used to be vibrant until about the early 70's, when we got a mall 4 blocks south of us, but it's no longer. A lot of retail trade that Wal-Mart has picked up, but we go to other towns.

We have some leakage.

We're not the center of commerce we once were.

We stay in town for medical services. We don't have a lot of leakage in things you can get at Wal-Mart. And we have a men's store. Ladies' dresses probably not. We have a movie theater, but it's old and run down, so we lose a lot of entertainment and food. There's a sizeable mall 35 miles north of us, too.

Moderator: In Cape?

Yes.

Moderator: What else do you lose revenue from?

We have trouble recruiting and keeping doctors, and most of the supervisors and bosses of companies live in other towns besides Sikeston. Kelso, Jackson, Cape...they don't live here. That's a problem. A lot of our teachers don't live here, a lot of our nurses...

The upside of that is usually if you work here, you shop here.

We have two satellites here... Three Rivers Community College and SEMO.

Moderator: Where do you go for most of your shopping?

Cape or St. Louis.

J.C. Penney's is here, but they have a high percentage of shoplifting, which doesn't speak well.

People leave town for ballgames.

We could get the Cardinals to move to Sikeston.

(laughter. Many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Do you have good dining?

We support fast food. If a nice restaurant comes, it doesn't get support.

We have more options that we used to.

We've got the largest tourist attraction, Lambert's, but no one from here actually eats there. You can only handle all that greasy stuff once in a while.

We've got Chinese restaurants...

Ruby Tuesday's.

And a point about Lambert's that needs to be made is that we don't get sales tax from it. It's in a sister community. The mayor has talked about working towards a merger of those two cities. We lose that tax base. And the downtown group has been focused on catching the traffic from Lambert's and bring them downtown for specialty shops, a local museum. Trying to spin off of Lambert's as best we can, because we don't get a lot of benefit from it.

We've got an abundance of payday loan places.

Within our city limits, we have one large motel and that's it.

We have 9 banks in town.

We don't get much leakage out of the bank.

We don't have a children's store in this town, where you can buy kids' clothes.

What she's talking about, whatever goes outside city limits is leakage.

We have a Penney's, a Wal-Mart, and a Goody's. That's pretty much it.

And Lowe's, and Orscheln's.

Moderator: So do people leave town to dine?

Well, you go up to Cape. The other thing we're missing...as a comparison, I looked at Farmington...they had a water park and all these different things. We don't have anything for entertainment, like mini golf. We'll have a new pool at the Y, but that's a year off. We need things for kids to do other than just hang out or go to a party.

We have a huge number of people in Sikeston on government subsidy, whether welfare or social security. Many of our citizens are on a fixed income. And they're generally not receptive to new projects.

We tend to attract those individuals because we have the unemployment office, the local hospital, the probation and parole...we have a lot of services that the folks in the surrounding counties need, and there's public transportation here...I think it's a growing sector in our community.

We have high teen pregnancy, high unwed mother situations, high minority high school dropout rate, and we have few that go off to college that move back here.

We have 333 government subsidized housing units in Sikeston, and out of that 229 are female head of household with children.

There's got to be some positive things to say.

Nobody's mentioned it, but we host 2 events here every year. One is a rodeo. Top 5 in the nation. And in November, we have a soccer tournament that brings a couple thousand people to town.

The rodeo runs a week long and brings thousands of people in.

It's one of those unifying things that we have.

Moderator: What do people do for recreation?

We have carnival every year, too.

There are events throughout the year that people stay in town for. I think one of the issues, and I don't think a 6-plex movie theater would solve all our problems, but that's something we can't provide for locally. People go out of town to see movies, and they have their dinner and shop out of town. And, people jump in their car and go to St. Louis or Paducah to shop. That may change with \$10/gallon gas.

Sikeston's a good town. I was born and raised here, and Sikeston's got good people, hard-working people. We need more jobs. Jobs will bring opportunity for younger people, where they'll stay. Young people with technical skills and higher education. Sikeston's very diversified, and we've had a lot of challenges the last 10 years and we've hit them head-on. There's a lot of communities that are in worse shape than we are, dealing with the same problems. It's not all doom and gloom.

We made a lot of progress in the last 5 or 6 years. We're doing a good job changing our direction.

We have a great park system, and if you have a child that wants to be involved in an activity, our parks are full in the evening. That's for the kids. But as you get older, there's less to do.

We have 2 golf courses and a bowling alley, but that's it.

The lakes. And some of the best hunting in the US. I think this area's the duck hunting capital of the world.

Moderator: *Let's shift focus to downtown. Do you feel it's moving in a positive direction?*

Yes. A few years ago, Accent wasn't downtown. There's a couple other nice stores. But we need more businesses like that.

We got rid of our blacktop streets, went back to the brick.

And we're going to finish repairing those.

We're getting ready to have a big expansion downtown, building a new building.

I guess, and this is all part of this DREAM initiative, there's a commitment to restore the downtown. That group got together 2 or 3 years ago, and the membership's grown...we've tried to broaden that to the entire community. There's some frustration that we keep seeing the same faces at the meetings, and how to we take what we're trying to do and get everyone else to buy into it? If your downtown's vibrant, everybody's going to benefit. We've made a lot of strides, but we're at a plateau with the community. We need some way to energize to go to the next level. I see a lot of commitment, but I wish I saw new faces.

Moderator: *What do you do downtown?*

In the spring and summer, they'll have certain Saturdays, Sikeston in Bloom, a bluegrass band, an ice cream social...it is really enjoyable.

A farmer's market in the summer downtown, on Saturdays.

As part of the downtown group, we've set up a promotions committee, and they're trying to generate activity downtown, and when you go to the events you see a lot of activities. There are older people that really appreciate that we restored the brick on the streets, and they're excited because they remember what downtown Sikeston used to look like. They remember coming down on Saturdays and staying all day. It would be great to see people on their lunch hour walking around.

There's a hamburger shop downtown.

You have City Hall down here, we have a post office. We have some of those core things. But we're not the county seat.

Susie's... a little restaurant.

Jeremiah's, and Kirby's.

We have a men's store.

A jewelry store.

The Stamp Company.

(laughter.)

That's been here forever.

Oddfellows.

We've got four bridal shops downtown. A lot of bridal stuff downtown.

A library, a catholic school, Catholic Church.

Moderator: What did people used to do downtown in the past?

JC Penney, Starling's, Ragsdale, Morris Hardware...

It was the retail hub.

Barbershops, drugstores, jewelry stores.

Dunn Hotel, a theater, the bars, shoe stores, liquor stores.

Gas stations.

(many people talking at once.)

Shell station.

A lot of small towns have lost our retail. We lost it to Wal-Mart and to Cape.

A lot has relocated in town, but is not downtown. It's out on the South part of town.

We used to have a furniture store downtown.

Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? Is it easy for people to find downtown?

No. You have to know where it's at to find it.

Did you see the new Dexter sign out on the Interstate? And they don't even have a good downtown.

And they advertise it as historic.

It's not bad. I mean, I don't shop there. But a lot of places have nicer downtowns than we do.

But they don't have much business.

They're just not burnt down.

Moderator: Are business hours downtown convenient?

They close up at 5:00! But could they justify being open later? Probably not.

They do extend their hours during the Christmas season.

That used to be a big draw downtown, Christmas.

Christmas used to be an exciting time in downtown Sikeston. The decorations go up...

In 1906, they took pictures, and it's crowded and draped in flags. It's sad to see a town that was that vibrant... and we're much better off than other towns, but we're not where we want to be. You still have... that movie...

1939. Which was probably Sikeston's heyday.

We've got 2 subdivisions, so we're growing. There's new houses going up. But there's also stuff being torn out.

I don't think you'll ever see downtown like it was. I think there could be a lot of improvement, though.

Moderator: Is there ample parking downtown?

Yes.

The BMU is moving their headquarters downtown, and City Hall and Public Safety are here, so we have jobs downtown. I think there's room for another restaurant downtown.

The place down here did an excellent lunch business, but they got a divorce and the business folded. I think we could support another restaurant.

I think we've learned that we're not going to have Penney's back down here, but we can have specialty shops and restaurants. We were in an old downtown in Kentucky, and the restaurant we were in had a great business going. We just need to find a way to get those entrepreneurs to do that, do something. But we just haven't got there yet.

I think we need to address that the owners of downtown businesses are older. They're our age. We need young people to come in and develop or take over businesses.

That's very true. They all could retire tomorrow.

Well, gee. That's a happy thought.

Moderator: Do you have any second floor living downtown?

A little bit. Some above Susie's, and a little on Front Street.

Moderator: Would there be a demand for more?

I think so.

We've got a lot of older buildings that need a lot of work, and the values of these buildings are less than they used to be, and it's going to take the land owners to invest money in them or sell them.

There's no incentive to do it right now.

We've got a couple folks that own property that don't have the resources to do something, but they won't sell either. White Elephant's a good example. They want to sell it, but they couldn't do it. And you've got another woman that owns 3 or so buildings, and the roof leaks, and she doesn't even live here, and she won't sell. We got facades from the 70's on Front Street.

We try to discourage loft apartments. We had a couple fires from them, and after that...

Do you remember when they painted these couple buildings? If we ever get started, it might...

We had several, with the old hotel and office building taken down. We've had several large buildings that have been demolished, and that's where BMU is going to build. There are some vacant lots, and people would build if there was a need. A painter has a canvas, and we have an open canvas to create a new town. Like a Blazing Saddles!

(laughter.)

Moderator: How do people find out what's going on downtown?

We have a visitor's bureau.

A city website.

A little newsletter that goes out.

I'm pretty sure they advertise in the local paper, and it serves this area of Southeast Missouri.

Moderator: Let's focus on the future of downtown. What type of businesses do you think would be nice downtown?

Clothing. Shops for teenagers. If you have a teenage girl, there's nowhere to dress them in this town. And there's not a clothing place for me. We need something for... people who want to have something to wear that's professional.

We need shoe stores.

Restaurants.

Moderator: What type of restaurant?

A deli.

If somebody had a nice restaurant, there's a restaurant 20 miles north of town in Kelso that has done exceptionally well. If you had a nice dinner restaurant, an upscale restaurant, people would come into downtown at night. You could cater to those people.

I think a home-grown deli, not a fast food place. We had one and it had a small bar in the back, and it did exceptionally well.

We don't have a normal antique store downtown.

If we're talking about something that's nice, yes. But we don't need another junk store in this town.

We do have a nice ordinance scrapping the type of businesses we won't allow downtown, such as mechanics shops.

And we don't need any more flea markets.

The City has had the foresight to plan what they do not want to see downtown, and to encourage more offices and shopping downtown. So they scrapped mechanics, storage, manufacturing. We wanted something that was going to enhance the appearance and not distract with used car dealer or something. More of a business type appealing... we have plenty of room for restaurants, doctor's offices... but we don't want a veterinarian downtown.

We have a sporting goods store here that caters to the schools, and a music store that caters to the schools. They do pretty good business. Neither of those owners participate in the downtown organization, which is a problem.

Another aspect of our downtown is that we have professional offices. Dentists and attorneys...

Engineers.

We do need a floral shop downtown.

And we don't have a drugstore downtown.

(many people agreeing.)

We used to have drugstores and hardware stores and paint stores.

(side conversations.)

Moderator: What about entertainment downtown?

Skate park.

We haven't talked about the possibility of a new movie theater. That would attract a lot of people.

We have a performing arts theater here that brings in people.

Your plays are sold out. They're all sold out.

They bring in a lot of out of town people.

Just not enough shows.

Hell, they're all volunteer...

We have a park that has a bandstand. It would be nice to have a community band or a visiting arts program...

(many people agreeing.)

It would bring people down.

People could just bring their blankets and listen.

We have 2 funeral homes downtown.

YMCA.

Moderator: What would your downtown look like?

Paint on everything.

Rip those sides down, tuckpoint, paint, put some new roofs on

Make the signage all similar, and get some signage downtown and directing people downtown.

Period lighting and landscaping—we got a grant to do that.

And we're going to put a fountain downtown.

Do we have a grant for the historical markers?

The historic homes?

There's so much history.

We have a lot of historic homes surrounding downtown.

I'm not really a design person, but I'd like for things to be consistent, so that the signs are in similar styles.

Some uniformity to it.

Historically, we had some beautiful buildings, and I'd like to see them painted up and emphasized.

On this building here, there's an old painted sign on the brick, and we could get an art class to restore that.

I like the murals on the old buildings. I think that's a nice look.

We do have some artists. It would be nice to bring some of the arts into downtown. We couldn't compete with Paducah, but...

That would be a nice little store, too.

A little incubator!

I think you're going to have to have a draw downtown, whether it's a real nice restaurant where you can go out and dine...I like to eat and I like to shop and I like to visit. I want the buildings to look different from each other...to get this downtown going, people are going to retire and they're going to have to pass their hats. As people start coming downtown for specialty shops... specialty fishing equipment... just food for thought.

(side conversations.)

I would like to see, and I'm not an artist, but I do hear people say that they cannot find nice art supplies. They have to go some of the bigger places to find nice art supplies. Even some of the art teachers. They have to go to Paducah.

You're exactly right.

That's a big need.

A good craft store.

He mentioned Hobby Lobby or those types of places. We don't have anything like that.

But if we had a little art shop that had supplies but also featured artists...

We have a framing shop and a photography shop downtown.

We have a specialty gift shop.

I think the other problem is that the buildings are so big that you can't get these niche markets. You can't go in and rent 1000 square feet. There needs to be a smaller building, or a cut up building, for a small shop or restaurant.

Moderator: Something I've heard discussed in other communities is what the focus should be of downtown.

It's nice to have visitors, but your survival is everyday business. You need a mix of both.

There's talk of getting a trolley from Lambert's to downtown. But you have to have something for them to do downtown.

A candy store...some draw for them down here.

Moderator: *I have one last question. What other downtowns would you like to emulate?*

Bardstown, Kentucky. It's a neat little town.

Independence, Kansas has a really nice downtown area. It's 6 to 7 blocks long, and I can't remember seeing any empty stores in it. Clean, period lighting, seating, trash cans. It's just immaculate.

I like to stroll through downtown St. Charles, with the little shops and the outdoor restaurants.

They really have building codes.

Moderator: *Are outdoor restaurants something you'd like?*

I would love to see them.

We do have beer gardens.

Yeah.

We ate on the sidewalk in Lexington.

Hot Springs has a nice downtown... I think Cape beats us in a lot of things, but I don't think their downtown is anything to sing a song about. Their buildings are deteriorating too.

(many people talking at once.)

Paducah, Kentucky's really nice.

Yeah.

They have outdoor restaurants and a really great Saturday night program, where they block off the downtown area, and all the stores are open until 10 or 11 at night. They have bands playing on every other corner, different kinds of music, antique shops, restaurants with seating outside. It's really organized. Carriage rides...

Shoplifting and drugs and gang bangs... we can't do that.

But if it's well-lit and if it's populated, you won't have that, though.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

SECTION III

LONGTIME RESIDENTS TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Describe your community to me.*

We used to call it God's Country. We have everything here to sustain a community.

Gateway to the South.

I'd echo what you said. I talked to a lot of groups, and I tell them where I'm from, and it's God's Country. Southeast Missouri.

(agreement.)

I would say that we are a good community, we have a good public education system, good teachers, good hospitals and medical care, two private schools, we're very close to Cape Girardeau, we're in farm country, and we're trying to bring industry and people, and we're into our community.

We're a small town, good place to raise a family. People leave the big cities and come here.

Many of our children wish they were back.

And we're 155 miles to Memphis or St. Louis. Paducah's close, and we've got rivers and lakes.

I'd say Sikeston is a very good city, and I think there's a need for better jobs and more opportunities. The rich is rich, and the poor is poor, but there's a need for more jobs for minorities and to inspire people to get an education and to be more motivated to be an asset to our community.

Midwestern hospitality.

We have a very good church system. Many different denominations to choose from.

We have 60 churches.

I think also, as a concert musician, Sikeston is very supportive of any need. They've supported everything I've ever done.

We have a lot of civic groups who do whatever is necessary. VFW to JC's...

Moderator: *Do you think Sikeston is moving in the right or wrong direction?*

Sikeston is a growing city and we have plenty of room for locations for new businesses, especially on the west end of the city. All businesses are located on the east end. I would like to see something for youth of the community. I hate to see our youth leaving because there's nothing to do. I'd like to see the city build a skating rink or a big sport place where they could include bowling and all sorts of recreation for our youth. I always Sikeston's between St. Louis and Memphis.

What put us on the map initially was that we're the halfway point between St. Louis and Memphis.

Our education center is a real asset, and it tells a lot about our community.

We have a YMCA that's undergoing a huge expansion, supported by the community, and it serves Southeast Missouri.

We have a little theater, a museum...a lot of art and culture, and we're moving towards that. We just need jobs.

We have a very good library, and that is very adequate. We also work to have children's programs and summer reading programs, and we're working on a Friends of the Library program for funding. And we have housing of all different types.

I think _____ mentioned about the education opportunities and the need for jobs...other than social drag, there's no reason a person could not have 2-year vocational education. Three Rivers has programs. The people, black and white, that most need that opportunity won't even apply for the scholarship program, and that's because their peer group is telling them not to get educated. It's our job to reinforce education.

If you put something exciting downtown, something the youth would gravitate toward...if we could do that...

We're all the same generation here. I've got 3 boys, two are in the University of Missouri and one's a 6th grader. I spend a lot of time in sports activities, and the difference in the last 19 years is very distressing. I don't see the same thing as everyone else. There's a large group of Sikeston that's missing what we know is here. My heart gets broken every year. 2 of my former students went to jail this year. They're missing the YMCA connection. Bad families, broken homes...fewer minorities are showing up to school each year. It troubles me. These are not the YMCA teams, but we need something to help keep kids busy and out of trouble. Kids used to show up to practice, and now they show up 1 out of 3. What are they doing the other times? And the parents don't have jobs or don't get decent wages, or they work in Cape. It has nothing to do with downtown, but it's an issue...I'm seeing things at school I don't understand. My 6th grader came home with pictures they drew in history class of his baseball team. Other kids were working on tests day after day, and the rest of the kids were drawing. I don't know what's happening there. I think we're losing kids to Cape and Jackson for schooling. Those need to be addressed.

I saw something downtown the other day, during Sikeston in Bloom. It was set up for young people... the kids weren't there. There was no ballgame going on. The parents just didn't get them there.

I think it's a national thing.

(many people talking at once.)

When it comes to downtown, there's very few empty buildings, and a lot of them do need work on the fronts and décor, and I do know we got a grant to redo lights and sidewalks, but we need to redo buildings. We don't want downtown to dry up. You've got to keep it vibrant. But there's very few buildings downtown that... the BMU's next to the new building where the Dunn Hotel was, and it's going to be old architecture outside and modern inside. I spend a lot of money on my buildings to make them look better. But I think this fall is going to make a difference. People want to see something, and they'll see lights and sidewalks and trash cans and park benches. That'll make a difference.

Moderator: What are the main reasons people go downtown?

City hall.

Post office.

Personal Expressions to buy a gift, or Kirby's to eat. You go for a destination, not to just walk around.

You don't come down to socialize like you used to. This event they had down here, 20 years ago it would've been packed.

When I came here 20 years ago, it was a big deal to come downtown. We had some meetings that focused around different parts of the community. All of you here probably got a letter from _____. I put on there that parent involvement is important. We can talk all we want about involving kids, but unless you get parents involved...you've got to take it to them, not expect them to come to you.

We're not the only town that's faced with that.

But I'm saying, sometimes you have to take it to the people. That's awfully important.

Don't you think if the parents don't care, the children don't have the same attitude?

That's why you have to take it to them. And I grew up when my parents were boss. What I'm saying is that we have to help those families, and we can. Some of them are working, and it's all they can do to make ends meet, but if we go to them, there's a chance.

As far as I'm concerned, it's a good starting point. You have to get your kids doing things and be proud. We've lost our pride.

(many people talking at once.)

Having served on that board, and having watched it, in my opinion, the housing project is one of the worst things that Sikeston has done. It started out good, helping good people. Then they changed the federal law, and they said, "if you're a drug addict or alcoholic, you're eligible for this housing." It used to be senior citizens' housing, and now it's drunks and druggies right in the middle with them.

They've changed that law now.

At any rate, that's when they moved them in there. It being in there, the housing authority. I know people need help. But what we have now is people coming from out of town, all the bad folks, and flopping. In my opinion, it's brought bad people in. That is very much a part of our downtown.

They have changed, though. If you've read about it, the housing authority is working to get the bums out of the houses, and they're doing a good job of it.

The one thing we're overlooking is that Sikeston is still listed as a rich city, and the poorer people and people with records, they're God's children too. We haven't mentioned where the rodeo was moved to the suburbs. They wanted to get away from the inner city factors. But the minorities are just as good as majority people. People are scared of the inner-city people. I think the police have been vigilant, but you have to create better jobs for people to solve this problem. You can't survive on minimum wage. It leads to drugs and crimes.

Moderator: Do you think there's a need or demand for more or different housing downtown?

We think downtown housing would be viable, but we don't expect any program housing.

You mean, condos?

There are a lot of second-story that are empty, and we think there's a market and a need, and you get people living here, and if there's a restaurant here...there's no restaurants except one, and...

I'd be happy to talk about housing. We had a guy here, and he stood up there for an hour and a half, and he charged \$250,000 for it, and the conclusion that we needed more no-rent or low-rent housing in downtown Sikeston. We're going to have to renovate, but he didn't understand our needs. And he's in charge of these things, he takes rat-infested properties, and they tear the properties down, but if he'd have looked around, he'd see that we had shrunk our section 8 vouchers. He would've seen our demographics, there's a minority in kindergarten, but it's a distinct minority graduating. I'm in the business of building single-family real estate. I think people need to own their homes. Renters are bad for Sikeston. The more subsidized or rental properties, the worse the quality of life is. I know a lot of people leave Sikeston, and people inherit homes and rent them out. Entire neighborhoods are rental house neighborhoods. It seems as if we're turning neighborhoods unsafe because of renters. A community is built on housing, retail, and job opportunities. That's what builds your population. We're renovating schools and the enrollment is declining, we have a hospital that is 15% commercial pay. Cape is about 70%. You get people that come here to pay their bills. It's very frustrating. We need entertainment in this town. I've been trying to develop all the retail that I can possibly develop...the problems are demographics. We don't have enough people to get retail folks interested in developing in this area. We need 25,000 people. We're just a couple thousand people from the next level, and if we could get there through housing and jobs, we could develop critical mass. We just don't have the volume. We're within 1000 miles of 200 million people. We've somehow brought every single social program here, and I understand that people need services, but we have lots of free stuff for people, and nobody has to give anything back to be

part of this community. It's very frustrating. People come in to get services, but don't give back. This has to be built from within. We need private money back into downtown, not just public money. Maybe we do tax abatements to get started, maybe sales tax abatement on renovations...something has to happen where a guy gets to make a nickel. If you have restaurants, you've got more regulations on every single thing that it's very difficult for a mom and pop to get anything started. We've lost 7 restaurants since the beginning of this year, and a liquor store.

(agreement, unintelligible.)

As I recall, all of our section 8 housing in the area was located in Sikeston for the whole county. A lot of that goes with the cotton carnival, which was wonderful down here... and there was so many people coming in that people are afraid to go downtown, and I think section 8 contributed to that.

Moderator: Thinking about downtown, what kind of housing would you like to see?

Lofts.

Second-story lofts.

But if you look back at those buildings, it would cost so much money to renovate them into comfortable living space... it's very challenging.

(agreement, side conversations.)

We have a bank building with a dry cleaning dump in the back room. We can't just turn a bunch of these into condos. It takes private sector money, and somebody has to back off...

I'm just thinking, you could build something nice with condos, but a lot of these little downtowns that have been redone, they have, people are empty nesters and they buy the condo, and they walk to the market, the bookstore, Starbucks. You're just not going to get people to come down here to live. I'm sorry, but that's just it.

Every apartment downtown gets rented. There's at least 20. Everything that's been redone gets rented. They're all rented. And you talk about the cost of renovating, I just rehabbed a building, and it cost me 20,000 dollars for 400 square feet.

First we need the jobs, and then when we have more people, we'll have the entrepreneurs. I just hate to throw a whole bunch of money into the downtown.

Have you driven through Blytheville lately? Anyway, you drive through there, and they spent a lot of money, but the town moved north. All the businesses north. It's attractive until you look at the stores—they're empty. The downtown is dependent on the area around downtown. We need to talk about bringing the stores in, but we need more jobs to bring people in.

You can rent downtown property cheaper than anywhere else.

What just blows my mind is that they won't walk from the parking lot down here to a store, but they'll walk from the end of a parking lot to a mall.

If there wasn't so much trash...

Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? Is there enough parking downtown?

Yes.

There's going to be more.

I think there is.

There's a big parking lot.

It just needs a little decorating, some trees and benches and grass.

Maybe a statue and fountain.

If people can't park in front of the store...they'll walk 300 yards to a mall, but they won't walk 50 yards downtown.

I walk.

Do your children?

No. They go to the mall. Because of the type of stores they have in malls. We know that some of the good stores are downtown. We have a great men's store downtown, and we know that. But the kids want all those different stores. Gymboree for the little kids and the JC Penney's. And the Penney's gets broken into all the time.

The Penney's isn't anywhere near the low-income housing.

It isn't. I used to be poor when I was growing up... it's not that, it's good people that we have to work to get in there.

I think it would be surprising to find out how many people don't really know what's down here, maybe never even been downtown, or people that would never dream of living downtown. And it's the neatest place in the world to live. There's activity, there's trees...it's wonderful. I think there's a number of people that have never taken that look at it, that don't see it as a place to live or place to shop. They're used to going to Cape and going to the mall. You've just got to get people down here to see.

For transportation, getting to downtown... in the big cities, people charge money to give people rides. Our cabs are dirty and are poor quality. They do have a county bus. But is there any plan for a transit system? People can't get to downtown if they don't own cars.

New Madrid has that.

We need a transit system.

There have been some conversations about putting a train on the track, going both directions, possibly with wheels so it could go off the track.

Like a trolley.

That would be neat.

(agreement.)

A trolley all the way out to Lambert's, that would be great.

Do you know how many signs are up to point to downtown? Only one. Paducah has signs on the Interstate. Why can't you do that here?

Moderator: What about business hours? Are those convenient?

People come from all around into work, and they all leave at 5, and it's deserted in the evenings and on weekends unless you can bring people in.

Everything downtown, you go directly there.

But even if you put new sidewalks and building fronts, and when you get there... what the hell am I going to do down there? It's not that interesting.

A theater would be nice.

Who would want to live up there? We need restaurants, a movie theater... got to have a draw.

If you can start generating some traffic downtown, a restaurant would be great...

Little shops.

Maybe a shoe store.

In Gatlinburg, we were driving around, and they have multiple million dollar revitalization downtown, and they had shops...they had made the streets narrower so they could plant trees. They had a little waterfall type thing... they made a walkover bridge that had corporate sponsors, and it was about 15 feet wide, and they had some old campus of a school back this way, and it was different tiers, and they had an open-air amphitheater, and they had flower gardens, restaurants, ice cream shops, there was probably 500 people walking around on Sunday afternoon. I guess people either knew it was there or just went down to check it out, but it had kind of a focal point. If you're looking for something to do, the shops and restaurants were close at hand, and retail. But they had office space there too. These places probably had huge lunch crowds. Lots of open-air seating.

You know, St. Charles has the same thing. They've got their little shops and restaurants. In the daytime, there's not a whole lot going on.

You try to do business in this town, and it's very receptive to getting stuff started. People are very good at working with new businesses.

(agreement.)

The City built an industrial park here... we provide jobs, but the jobs are all somewhere else. It's strange. They turn around and go to Cape after work.

(agreement.)

Going back to Sikeston in Bloom. I have one grandchild here, and they really enjoyed it downtown. Do you all remember Thanksgiving last year, at night? That drew people from all over, and it was one of the finest things we've done to bring people together. I saw people I hadn't seen for years.

We had Halloween fall festival.

Ice cream social.

Paducah does First Friday, and they close the streets off, and you'd have a band and vendors...that would be a way to get people down there initially.

(noise, unintelligible.)

Moderator: How do people find out about what's happening downtown?

The newspaper.

Radio.

The newspaper.

Stores.

The website that keeps you up to date is great. If more people knew about it, they would download it...

(many people talking at once.)

Working mothers don't have time, and they don't see these events and get their kids there. Is it the churches we need to go through?

Most churches put out bulletins. That would be helpful.

Most churches have a youth person...

Why not have placards up to welcome people to Sikeston, and have a place to put upcoming events up...

We were talked out of that over our sign.

Why?

It should be noted that we have a free paper on Wednesdays. Many people can't afford the paper other days, but the Wednesday paper is a good paper to advertise.

Related to young people...this is an old group. We need young people to come here and participate, even these young mothers. We need an under-40 group that gets together once a month and talks, because they're going to be our leaders. We've got to cultivate these folks, bring them on. We have to let get. We old folks have to let the younger folks move in here, even if we don't like what they have to say.

Have you looked at the YMCA board? A lot of young people on there.

That's a very good young board.

And I think you can't just wait for volunteers. You have to go and say that you've developed a position, and ask people to head it up and recruit others. I was sitting in church Sunday, and we looked at the bulletin, and there was this little thing that said... "the school will be cleaned on this date. So-and-so is in charge, and she'll call you to tell you which room you will be cleaning." This wasn't in Sikeston.

Moderator: Let's talk about the future of downtown. What kinds of businesses would you like to see downtown?

I think it's going to have to be specialty shops.

And small offices. If you're wanting to sell stuff, then offices won't work, but if you want to combine the two of them?

What about a really good small night restaurant?

A good steak?

A good steakhouse.

Keep it simple, make it good.

More restaurants, yes.

After 6, there's nothing to do. The town dries up after 6 and everyone goes home.

When you go to Cape, you see everybody from Sikeston up there eating.

(many people talking at once.)

Barbershop.

Beauty shops.

A Target type of store.

Downtown needs to be specialty shops.

A nightclub, dining.

Something after hours, anyway. Keep the town vibrant.

Would there be incentives for a restaurant so that they could get a building and get open and survive. Then let them come check you out after you're established.

In Paducah, every night of the week looks like a weekend. There's restaurants and bars...

They have a good population, too.

A grocery store downtown would be great. We need a grocery store.

This fella that's a schoolteacher that does hydroponic lettuces and stuff, he's getting a deal with Schnuck's. Maybe he could do a store.

A specialty foods store downtown. That would be great.

I want to agree that we need to bring the kids down and the parents will come with them. We've got to have parents who have kids to organize it, to get them in there. They have to be the soccer moms...if you want a parent to bring their kids down here, we've got to get those parents involved in it.

I've been out of a certain segment for a few years now, but you've got a lot of parents who have kids in sports—practices, games, throughout the week. Your life is that facility if you've got kids.

There's a lot of travel teams, now, too. We were at a baseball tournament in Jackson... in Cape, in Jackson, they'll have sign-ups for little league or soccer, and they give them 1 day to sign up. We'll do it weekends in a row and beg them to come, just to get people to sign up. 30 miles can't be that much different. And it can't be the money. Maybe we're just far enough South that we're too slow.

One of the things I jotted down, I'm all for sports, but can we not set the calendar for these downtown events and tell people to work around these downtown events? It's become really big-time, and it should be involved, but maybe it's overdone.

Moderator: What else would you like to see downtown?

Coffee shops.

Movie theater.

Grocery store.

Drugstore.

(many people talking at once.)

Bookstore.

Restaurants.

Movie theater.

A game room for kids.

Movie theaters, restaurants.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: What about parks and recreation?

(many people talking at once.)

We have two parks down here. One's very well-equipped. We just need to use them. We had, years ago, a quarterly meeting of all the city club presidents, and we talked about the activities in town so that we wouldn't buck heads with each other.

You don't want a whole bunch of stuff on the same day, competing.

I like athletics, and I coached here...but we tried to stay away from too many traveling team. Those seasons go long, and parents don't have time for vacations. I think organization would help us a lot with our young people. I sat between two coaches 30 years ago, and they talked about... players in St. Louis burn out by the time they get to high school, because they have too many activities. And the other coach was the same way. They start early and end late... they do too much. And I think if we could organize ourselves better.

(side conversations.)

The kids didn't have anything to do here, but now that they're playing ball, they're traveling to tournaments.

Something in music, a once-a-month music event, whether it's a talent contest...maybe gospel, bluegrass, blues, rap... do all of it. Don't...

Is there any building with a stage down here?

The little theater is part of the area.

Cape's had a program called In the Park, and once a month, somebody comes in, and you throw your blanket down and listen.

Maybe you start with once a month getting people coming, then fix up the sidewalks, and then maybe you'll attract business.

There's solid traffic on the highway.

When I worked in Cape, I'd do all my shopping there. But people who come here don't do that.

It might be time, because of gas prices, to bring people in from really nearby rather than over in Cape.

Maybe you could have somebody do some kind of themed birthday party facility for mothers and their kids.

Moderator: What about the look and feel of downtown? Are there improvements you'd like to see?

The storefronts.

I like traditional, myself.

If we're going to a historic downtown, we need to make things look historic.

We need trees.

I think they're putting the lights up, too, and they're putting in trees.

We need park benches.

We're going to have them.

Have we mentioned a Burger King or McDonald's downtown? That attracts people.

That takes a big population, though.

It's pretty close to the Interstate.

I'd like to see a statue or fountain or something like that. A founding father...

The City does not want a fountain downtown.

Something that people will look at.

(many people talking at once.)

The desire is to redo the park. Some people have talked about a small amphitheater in there, or a fountain, but the City says we can't afford it or don't want it. It's very frustrating. You go to Fredricktown, which is a few thousand people, and they've done some dynamite things to their downtown.

Moderator: What other downtowns do you admire?

Oxford, Mississippi. The town Square, and we don't have a County courthouse, but... Oxford, Mississippi has managed to grow and maintain the downtown Square in its traditional feel.

Clinton, Missouri; Washington, Missouri.

St. Charles.

Kirkwood.

Oxford's built around a University, though. We walked that a couple years ago, and it looked a lot like Gatlinburg, and you walk out of one shop into another.

And they have condos down there, and they're very expensive. I mean, Eli Manning was living there.

Did you interject about transportation? Trolleys, or transportation.

A small bus.

A little train.

(agreement.)

We need to help get people downtown.

Maybe like street vendors, like a custard stand...

(many people talking at once.)

...If you were thinking of bringing your business to Sikeston, and you came to our airport and called a cab, and you saw the cab, you'd probably go back where you came from...

...Like the farmer's market, we need to push that.

That needs to be promoted in a big way.

Maybe if we could get people with crafts, or someone selling tamales.

Another thing nobody wants to have is public restrooms. We need them. But everyone's like, "Vandalism and crime and filth." But we need something by the farmer's market.

(People agreeing. Many people talking at once.)

Moderator: Thank you very much.

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SECTION IV

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Tell me a little about your community.*

Sikeston is the north end of the delta. In Missouri, this is more southern. It's kind of the start of the South. (people moving chairs...)... our economy changed, agriculture diversified, our population has grown, but now we're in a period of losing population and jobs.

I don't see a lot of young people who have gone off to college come back to Sikeston. Most of my classmates did not. There's a void with attracting young people and young professionals here. But I don't want to say bad things, but that is one negative.

I think the next 10 years down, though, a lot of them are coming back. Several of those young folks are coming back because it's a great place to live.

That's typical of a small town, though. It's just the kind of life you want to live. A lot of kids when they go off to school, they're not going to come back.

A lot who do come back come back for business, for a family member or a farm. There aren't a lot of upstarts coming in.

My two children didn't want to come back here because they didn't want to do what I do for a living. They didn't want to own a funeral chapel. You can't make people do what they don't want to do. When it comes to looking at the job situation...several years ago, _____ said to me that the new plant out there that they didn't have a source in Sikeston that was large enough to hire. When those people do come into town to work, they're spending their bucks somewhere else. I think those things are... and I guess, I think it's too bad that over the years there are lots of federally mandated programs that have been headquartered here. Sikeston became a Mecca for the disenfranchised, and those people...there are many people that milk the system.

I agree.

From a visitor's standpoint, what we at the economic development office... my kids' friends love it. Someone commented that the town is friendly. We here are friendly. We're very open. And she's from Pennsylvania.

From a retail standpoint, this had more retail downtown than it does today. Now it's more out. Hopefully we can redevelop downtown and make it more retail. It'll never be what it was. The independent retailer isn't going to be around, not like it was.

Moderator: *Do people in this area stay in Sikeston to do their shopping?*

Some do, some don't. We get a lot of businesses from outside the area. My store is kind of a destination store.

But you know why they do that? Because you're there. You're there after hours and you're there early.

If they were all like him, we'd all be in better shape.

Yeah. You have to have service. We have some merchants that might come in on any day.

Changes of times and people, people shop different. Money goes to Wal-Mart Supercenter. The high-end money goes to Cape Girardeau. A tremendous amount of money for entertainment, retail, medical, and professional goes to Cape. If we were where Poplar Bluff is, it's hard to get somewhere else, but we're very close to Cape Girardeau.

(agreement.)

The market in between is stuff that Wal-Mart doesn't have.

People stay here for groceries and everyday stuff, though.

People go up to Cape for Schnuck's sometimes, too.

With retail, there's a tremendous amount of leakage.

In the 70's, when the mall opened, it was a first. There were merchants out there... there were people that, they let the dog slip away from them. They didn't promote. They might not have won the battle, but they let retail slip away.

If you take a group of merchants and try to get them to work together, it's very difficult.

Merchants here never worked together.

We tried, but they didn't want to cooperate.

It had an effect on what happened, and Cape did capture quite a bit.

Clothing, electronics.

They have bigger retail.

Moderator: Do people stay here to dine?

No.

Not really.

It depends. At lunch, you can get heartburn in any direction. The fast food places are loaded. We go to Cape, but some people from smaller towns come here, but sometimes they go to Cape. There's a lot of restaurants here, but it's not high-end.

We don't have any high-end. We've got Lambert's, which is famous, and it draws people, but we don't eat there. All of your major chains go to Cape, though. It's very difficult trying to find somebody to come in and put in a chain restaurant. Cape County is probably 50, or 75,000 people.

I think that people...generally a lot of people went to the restaurants that were higher end and didn't stay supportive, and they turned over so many times, they couldn't charge enough money to pay for it...these restaurants keep bailing. People who are looking for a nice restaurant immediately go to Cape.

There was an Italian and a Mexican restaurant over there.

The reason that failed is that they had so much debt. If they had been downtown, and they had less overhead, they would've been a success.

Look at Kelso.

I'd rather stop there than go to Cape.

If you look around, the labor situation in this town is strongly poor, and the Chinese and Mexican restaurants do the best. They have good labor. You see Hardee's and people like that, and they fail because they cannot get quality people.

You know there's a shortage of labor when there's a Mexican working at the Chinese restaurant.

Jeremiah's is mostly known for it's bar rather than restaurant.

I thought with the college situation as it is, we might have more servers and stuff, but...

There are a lot of young people in this town that don't want to work. You drive around in the middle of the day, and we see tons of young adults doing nothing.

That's a fact.

Moderator: What about entertainment and recreation?

We've got a complex out there that's busy, and it's a plus. But they shouldn't have sold it for the golf course up there, because it fills up. It's fabulous.

Sikeston's number one retail event is a soccer tournament in the fall, and the restaurants do more business that weekend than anytime else.

And some baseball tournaments.

And the rodeo.

As far as sports go, we're in good shape. We've got two golf courses.

Good park system.

YMCA.

As far as nightlife, though, no.

Or something else for the kids to do besides play baseball. There's a lot of teenagers out there who have nothing to do but drive around, hang out in parking lots, and do drugs.

We don't have a monopoly on that, though. That's everywhere.

You've got to have something for the kids to do.

Most that have a little money go to Cape.

To the theater.

They spend their time and money in downtown Cape.

Our theater here is very poor.

But it is the same price.

That's one thing we've talked about is getting a decent theater down here. But talking about it and doing it...

When you compare going to the movie here, you're paying a whole lot less for the movie, plus the drive...it's a better value, but you sit in the seat, and your feet are sticking.

(agreement.)

If you want to watch a movie in comfort, you're going to drive to Cape. You can make it a night out.

Here, you're just there for 2 hours.

You do have a good little theater group here, that's outstanding in my opinion. They put on good plays about every 2 months.

There's another one coming.

Moderator: Let's talk specifically about downtown. Is it moving in a positive direction or negative direction?

Positive.

(agreement.)

Slowly positive.

St. Francis, we've just gotten two new neighbors. A photo studio and a specialty cookie place. It's good to see those places filling empty storefronts. People look at these places, and they're not empty storefronts. And the park here, people are in the park all the time. It's constantly being used.

One thing that could help downtown is...something real basic. Years ago, we had a lot of cobblestone streets downtown. Then they covered them up. Where I'm going with this...some of this has been uncovered. It should continue, but it should be made smooth. I don't know how possible that is.

They can do it. They're working toward it.

I think that will help.

I think it's in the plan.

It would be nice to have some night, some attractions. We went to Paducah for a wedding last year, and they had the reception in their theater, and then we just marveled at all the things that were going on downtown. It was just a Mecca for young people and older people. They had something for everybody, eating, theaters, plays, antiques... a lot of things.

I want to tell you how that got started, but the guy with the carriages traded for the carriages, and he started running them on Saturday night, and he sold the downtown people on it. That's one of the things that got it going. The next thing you know, they brought in restaurants...a lot of things have been done there, and it started with the carriage ride.

When we have the carriage ride, it's great. At Sikeston in Bloom, they did it, and it was great.

One thing in Cape was concerts in the park. We've got a beautiful gazebo, and if we had someone down there once a week or once a month, people would come. I've never seen anyone do anything organized like that there.

We're going to try it in June.

And the high school.

The quartet.

Strings for an evening. Something that would draw people.

I remember the first festival of the Arch back in 99, and we had a stage out there in the street, and that was pretty good. It hadn't been every year, but...

Was that at the park?

I think we need to have something going on, and we have plenty of talent. The little theater has their live music and talented folks that could help put that on, but they've got to be helped along.

When I lived in St. Louis, I lived near Francis Park, and there was something going on every other week. They'd have a high school band come and play. It wasn't big names. It was always a big crowd, and people brought their blankets and their kids and their dogs. That's not going to just happen, but if you had a schedule for three full months, and whether people show up or not, just keep going. On a Sunday evening or afternoon...

Even a one-act play in the gazebo.

This is wonderful, but it's labor-intensive.

How did last weekend's thing go?

It was great.

A bunch of people played.

I don't think it's something that one group would head up. It would have to be a community group, with historic development and the City of Sikeston and the Key Club and property owners...

You could ask people to take a few months in the summer and help sponsor. We'd need to do it first.

Yeah, we'd need to be the force behind all that.

But we'd need to work on it for next year.

One time I went to Morehouse, and there was an old-time drugstore and soda fountains, and on Saturday nights, they had to run them out of there until the day that Gunsmoke started, and that began a different era. And that's something that interferes...

There's so much crap on TV...

A skating rink or something would bring people in, kids and parents. We had Skate World when I was a kid.

We used to go... it was a little different then. There was not any stabbings or fights... It was, the liability got so bad that it just, you couldn't control it. That's the reason they don't have that. I don't know if it would be possible in a community like this.

Murray has one that's very successful.

These lawsuits and stuff like that has killed a lot of things.

You have to figure out some way to have a family atmosphere rather than a bunch of individuals. It has to be something to draw mom, dad, and the kids. I don't know how you go about it. A skate rink draws one crowd, but it's kind of shifted. But there's not an ice rink between Memphis and St. Louis. If we had an ice rink, we'd have something that's offered nowhere else. There used to be one in Cape, and they had hockey teams practicing and figure skaters...now they travel all the way up to St. Louis. Everyone has a skate rink, but an ice rink is something different, and it will draw a different crowd. You're not going to have a certain strata of folks at the ice rink that might come for Stab World.

(laughter. Many side conversations.)

...I don't know what it would take to run one, but the old Wal-Mart building would be perfect. That would be a place that you wouldn't have to start from scratch.

You'd draw from other communities, and there'd be so many people that would benefit from this.

Soccer is huge now here, but it wasn't always. That may be a fringe thing, to say, "build it and we'll have a hockey team."

That would be very expensive.

Moderator: How user-friendly is downtown? Is it easy for people to find downtown?

No.

Not really.

We just put out one sign. And there's another coming up.

If you're visiting and you don't know where it's at, and you don't know where to look.

We need more signs, more historical-looking signs.

The new one by the corner is really nice.

We need to get something out...

(many people talking at once.)

I think this MODOT grant is going to make a difference on Front Street, and that's going to be a start. I think our mayor would like to see a trolley.

I agree with the mayor.

Those things like in Branson... you need something to move people from Lambert's to here.

People fly into Sikeston and eat at Lambert's.

More people fly into here for the health facilities and nursing homes that bring people in, and you have the military that comes in for fuel...and everyone eats at Lambert's.

If there was something downtown that would capitalize on Lambert's, maybe some other type of food, a big food place...it could be a draw.

If you had a shuttle or a trolley that runs between Lambert's and downtown...

I stopped last night in front of Lambert's, and there were 7 tour buses out there. And I looked across the street, and I thought, maybe we could have something that would work on the track, but it's useless. All you can do is come in and go back out. You'd need to be able to have a trolley that could make turns.

We were in Tampa eating at a place called Capital Grill, and the guy asked me where I was from, and the guy at the next table said, "That's where they throw the rolls."

Moderator: So Lambert's is in Miner, though?

They advertise that they're in Sikeston, though.

Has there ever been an old-fashioned candy shop here?

If you did that with ice cream and fudge, that would really work.

And Cape does not have a candy-fudge type of place.

We need some entrepreneurs to start some businesses.

That are willing to put out the effort and stay with their businesses and stay there.

Most people expect to see the owners there.

Yeah.

Moderator: Do you hear complaints about business hours?

Yeah.

_____ 's always open after everybody else has shut down.

We all used to be open Friday nights or Saturday nights, but now my employees don't want to be down there at night if we're the only ones there, if no one else is open.

I understand that.

Moderator: So it's a safety issue?

Yeah.

But if you had restaurants and other things going on, you'd see things open.

In 1962, the real highlight of the week was for us to watch the folks up and down the road.

(reminiscing...)

Sikeston used to be the hub.

It still could be, with the rural areas around here, if we had the retail...

And the recreation.

If there was a variety of stores, it would bring people here.

With the price of gas...

That's going to make a lot of difference.

Moderator: Do you have housing downtown?

Yeah.

Building codes restrict a lot of that.

There's people that live over shops.

Moderator: Do you think there's a need or demand for more housing?

There are a few buildings that could be renovated.

There's lots of people that want to live downtown. They would love it. They would love going upstairs, having no grass...they're used to doing that in other places. But one concern for public safety is fires. The buildings are so close together, and a fire would demolish a whole block. Fires are why we have all the vacant space down here. Putting more apartments in these buildings, yes that would be great, but it also increases the odds of something bad happening.

I agree.

Most of the buildings on Front Street, if anything were to catch on fire, it could jump from one roof to the other, and it could take all of downtown.

Cape is that way, too.

Do you have sprinklers?

I don't. There wasn't a code then for sprinklers.

You brought up safety concerns about being open late. One thing that Springfield did when they revitalized their downtown was to have a cop walk the beat, and they moved to cops on bicycles. If we could get the police to agree to do that, that might make people more comfortable at night.

I agree. That would help. But if you do that, you have to have something in the park, have something in both parks.

If you provided that security and opportunity, they would play off one another.

This is something that's going to come down the road if people are willing to put out the effort. It takes effort, coordination, and money.

Do you have any safety issues?

Not really.

But he's got a different clientele.

It's pretty well-lit. We never had any problems. We pretty well... try to speak and be nice to the neighbors. I just never had any trouble. We've been there since 1970, and one time, a kid threw a rock through the window, but that's it.

Last year, we had 3 smash-and-grabs with cars during in the day. They broke windows and grabbed purses.

No one should leave a purse laying out in a car.

But they do.

That's an open invitation.

We get unsavory crowds at the park, but for the most part, I walk around downtown at all hours, and I've been okay. Sometimes the folks that live in the apartments next to us have raised some serious concerns...

If you have residents not just in apartments, but if you develop residents around downtown and make it safer, have police who live there, people will be able to walk around at midnight and be safe. If you bring people who care about their homes with pride of ownership, and draw people in, branch it out a little bit, you're going to have police officers who live here. I keep talking about St. Louis, but a lot of my experiences have been there.

There are police officers that have to live in the housing units for a little while, and they've stopped the stuff going on down there. Just the presence of the police car. But part of our problem is that we've got too much free housing, too much subsidized housing.

Section 8 has killed this community.

Or substandard housing.

The damage has been done.

You've got to crack down on absentee landlords who don't give a care about these places. You've got to get rid of them. Take over their buildings.

(agreement.)

For the most part, they try to keep better people in there, and I have a good relationship with a lot of them. But I also try to keep an eye on them. But we got rid of some that weren't... but I don't have any trouble.

We're fortunate to have the police department down here.

And the board of utilities is going to build a new building downtown.

And city hall is downtown, and the post office.

We should do something with the old post office building.

A little theater. It would be neat to make it into a downtown theater.

Moderator: *Let's talk about the future of downtown. You've mentioned some businesses you'd like to see downtown. What else would you like to see?*

Little shops.

A nice movie theater.

Restaurants.

Ice cream shop.

Candy shop.

Bardstown, Kentucky still has the drugstore soda-fountain, and people come just to see that.

(agreement.)

It's like walking back in time. That's a unique thing. You don't see that very often. People would be drawn to that.

Some sort of a barbecue shop, a Super Smokers or something. A barbecue restaurant...

(many people talking at once.)

Any kind of store you put in there has got to be something that you can watch and keep it from walking off. Wal-Mart came into Charleston and closed every store in Charleston. And now there's nothing over there. You can't even buy a hammer.

(agreement.)

I'd love to see a small bookstore.

Coffee shop.

A farmer's market would be great.

Produce.

A place like in Soulard, on the weekends.

That wouldn't be hard to do, but the farmer's market was very hit and miss last year. If we could get people from the area... if you could get them to bring their produce. You could invite people to commit to the farmer's market.

About 10 years ago, we tried doing all of this, and it blew up.

You folks have some land down there next to the parish center... Paducah has a permanent quarters for the farmer's market.

Is it an expensive structure?

No, it's a concrete slab and a metal roof. That's all it is.

Farmington did the same thing, on a parking lot downtown.

We need public restrooms.

It's in the plans, I think.

We've talked about them for the last 40 years, and the City is always not in favor of it...

I think it's close this time.

It's a nightmare, though.

Vandalism.

They would need to be shut up after a certain hour.

Yeah.

Years ago, we talked about putting a fountain in the park, and they were afraid that if we did, the kids would put soap in there.

And they would.

One or two times.

(many people talking at once.)

One thing that Cape does is that they advertise their farmer's market, every week in the paper.

I go there if I'm in town, and I feel good about buying stuff from the farmer's market.

They need to advertise.

They've got Amish people coming to Cape with bread and stuff.

Ours is on Saturday, and Cape's is on Thursday. It's a different day.

Someone needs to go up there and get business cards from people and advertise.

(agreement.)

There's people working on this. I think they're looking into this.

(many people talking at once.)

Moderator: What would your dream downtown look like?

They would need to be updated to look like the old downtown.

Lights and sidewalks. I don't want you to see, for instance, the bank over here...if you take the cheese grater off of there, you've got two separate buildings, and you'd end up losing the bank.

I hope we don't lose the bank.

Until they get on the ball and want to do something...

We've got a bunch of empty lots, and we want them to have buildings that match, that kind of portray the past. We've got a vast amount of open space.

We've had urban renewal by those fires.

We've had urban. We need the renewal.

(laughter.)

More landscaping.

Things like benches and trash cans that are solid. And cobblestone streets. Bringing the historic look back, that would attract that type of specialty stores.

Street signs that are different.

Trash cans are a really good point. Sometimes on a Sunday morning, there are trash cans knocked over. If we could get substantial ones...

(many people talking at once. Side conversations. Agreement about trash cans.)

...I would love to see a Civic Center down there, with catering with clubs when they meet... the Rotary Club meets at Cheers, and it's okay, but the food's good, the parking's bad, and the acoustics are terrible. And Qantas and Lions meet at the Mongolian place. If you had a Civic Center, you could have caterers rotate through each month. People would be interested in that. The Clinton Building's booked up for 2 years. You can't have meetings there. I don't know if we need to build a meeting room, or get one of these empty buildings to do it. We need a place with a lot of parking.

If a place was going to be built downtown to accommodate some of those things, wedding receptions too... a big wedding reception.

But the problem is, it's all money. Who's going to spend the money? It's not going to be all government. This is an economic distressed area.

I bought a building, and it's not the best investment, but I still believe in Sikeston, and I am glad to be part of downtown. Really, I'll never get my money out of that. I don't expect to. But I'm there, and I like downtown, and I want to be there. My son wants to be there. We like it there, and yes, we've got a significant investment there, but somebody's got to take it and get started.

See, but what I'm saying is, those are buildings that we work in. This would be buildings that is not your place of business, but a speculative building...

(many people agreeing at once.)

The price of rebar this week is \$10 a stick.

Moderator: We've talked about all these great things. What is your top priority?

The real powerful thing that we have is cheap, land. We also have cheap rents. Anyone that rents retail downtown pays 25% of what they'd pay somewhere else. And these vacant lots, if somebody wanted to build on them, they're not sinking a million dollars in the land before even getting started...the cost of materials has skyrocketed, so building new is expensive...but buying something that exists is a great deal, but then you get into building codes and fixing things up and asbestos, things of those natures. I don't know how many buildings are down here that we could buy...(unintelligible)...there are 2 or 3 buildings that once they clear, could be bought really cheap, but most of the money would be spent on remodeling.

(agreement.)

I think the trolley idea is maybe the most reasonable, expense-wise. You could rent it and run it on the weekends in the summer. Once you get people down here, you'll get people to invest in the area.

Also, you've got to fill up the vacant buildings. They've got to have something to come to.

I think some of it is the...as far as for morale, some of the social and cultural events would be easier to pull off, and would build momentum. It's more than anything sweat equity. It's not a big dollar item, but it begins to draw people down here. As well as consistency, we can have one or two events, but we need to have consistent events. A farmer's market or the bandstand. Create a habit. Do things in a pattern to develop that habit. This is one of those feel-good things, but if we could feel good about ourselves, we could work on some of these things.

Do you think anybody could approach Lambert's, would they consider building a steakhouse or something like that down here?

They had Fitzgerald's.

But the man is dead, though. That's the problem.

There's no one else there that would even care.

They don't need to care.

It goes back to something, we may be looking in our own backyard, but _____ received something from Perryville asking him if he'd be interested in opening a second store in Perryville. I sometimes think that we need to think a little beyond our own fences. Where would we go to find some of those unique dining experiences to say, "we've got a community that would support you." Those are big words, but...how do we sell someone and get someone that has another unique experience to come to Sikeston.

(many people talking at once.)

If you create the visual of downtown, that movement will maybe interest people, who you can contact with their stores and restaurants to come in. We can say, "We've got low rents for you, a stationary farmer's market, bands in the park..." We're not just going to put one thing in, but visually is the key. We need to get people inspired to think that there's something going on.

A restaurant would have to be a focal point, but there needs to be other things established.

Maybe inspire people to do a place for the service clubs.

With a limited budget, what our group can do is to follow up and do the farmer's market and music right. The easy part is to make the activities. Let the entrepreneurs follow the activities. That's the tack we ought to take. Let's make this an area where there's a lot of stuff going on. We've got a lot of great ideas, and if we could focus on the use of that gazebo and work with the other groups in town... it'll help everything. Ultimately, the guy that wants to take the chance will be here.

I think a lot of people would be willing to help.

Moderator: Thank you for coming.

There are three things we've got to remember. Patience, persistence, and perspiration.

You forgot prayer.

And prayer!

(laughter.)

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SECTION V

NEW RESIDENTS TRANSCRIPT

Moderator: *Tell me a little bit about Sikeston as a whole. Describe it to me.*

Quiet.

I don't want to be completely negative, but economically we're in bad shape. We don't have any industry around here. I've lived here all my life, and I love it, I like the school system, and I think a big plus that we have is the YMCA that's enlarging. That's one good positive.

I just moved down from St. Charles five years ago, and everybody knows about Lambert's. That's what it's known for.

I would say it's a wonderful place to raise children.

I would say it's the capital of the Bootheel meaning that everything south of here focuses on Sikeston. It's had a large middle class compared to some places, and a lot of wealthy people, but lately the middle class is shrinking and there are more poor people here. It's an area where people come to work but live elsewhere, they live in the small towns around here. Sikeston swells about 5000 to 8000 during the day. There are a variety of reasons why they don't live here.

Moderator: *Would you say the city's moving in the right or wrong direction?*

The 1980's and 90's were awful for this town. Bad demographic trends and industry trends. There have been good things happening lately. We have an excellent mayor who's got guts, and we've got a technical college and it's a saving grace, and law enforcement is stronger, the town is cleaner and safer... but compared to Cape Girardeau and Jackson, we don't have nearly the growth they have, and I bet our population will be at best flat and probably lower in the next census than it was... we had no growth in the 1990's.

I don't think there's any doubt it's going down.

What's the deal with all the houses being bought out by Lowe's?

My thought is, those are people who are moving out of our neighborhood that are moving into not the high-end homes around the 7th and 8th grade center, but they can step up into a nice home.

But it's a wash?

It's a wash. And we're losing other people.

Moderator: *What are the main shopping areas for residents?*

I gotta say, Wal-Mart. Obviously. I meant to say this initially is that the biggest problem we have is that residents don't take enough pride in our city. They'll drive all the way to Cape to go to Sam's. I think the downtown group hasn't capitalized on going to people, when we have ball

teams and fundraisers, it's not Cape businesses that support that. But people don't spend their money here in town. They'll drive to Cape for groceries, clothing, everything. Sikeston people don't support Sikeston businesses. It's sickening. I've done everything I can to support businesses here. People don't understand that. They don't understand that we, as shoppers, have to support our local businesses to keep them going.

That is the absolute truth. That is the absolute truth.

I'd rather spend 5 dollars more here than going to Cape.

There's a huge problem, and I don't know how you tackle it... people don't take pride in their own community. Whether it stems from the town not looking pretty, whether it stems from, you know, we have nice homes, that's great, but it's got some kind of stigma to it, that people just don't take pride. If they did, they'd be selling it to other people.

Let me just say, I'm not from here, and I live here, and my friends and family that travel on 55, they will stop here, eat at Lambert's, they see Miner, and they say that I live in a terrible town. The appearance from the Interstate looks terrible. And I don't know how you change that, because there are lots of people who come to Lambert's.

To the outsider, Miner looks like Sikeston.

Yeah, they don't understand that it's a different community. We don't have any control over them.

To put this in perspective, up until around the mid-70's to the late 70's, before Wal-Mart became a powerhouse, Sikeston was an incredible economic powerhouse, because if you lived in the Bootheel south of Cape, you came to Sikeston to shop. Charleston, Poplar Bluff, and all the way south to the Bootheel. But then, it's not my intention to beat up Wal-Mart, but when Wal-Mart started driving out local businesses, you had less choice, and it wasn't as appealing. We had many stores downtown which was so vibrant, which have closed. And some buildings are coming back, and are looking nicer, but the downtown hasn't come back. I don't know if you can.

That's a national problem. But on a smaller scale, we can't even support our own mom and pop restaurants. Everybody goes to Cape. When I moved to Sikeston, there was hardly anything that was decent in Cape, and it's just exploded, and so much of it is that Sikeston residents are taking money to Cape.

You're not a typical person. We don't have anything here that can compete.

Because we don't support it.

Since I have been here, I've never eaten at a good restaurant here.

Jeremiah's, Cheers... Joseph's was good when it first opened. I've gone to those places, and they were empty.

We just need something that can compete.

Even our own Chamber of Commerce does not support Sikeston the way it should. Some of the handouts were bought from Cape businesses. Forget it.

I'm on the Visitor's Bureau, and we get our brochures printed in Kentucky.

I know, it's a problem.

Moderator: *Let's talk about downtown specifically. What are the main reasons people go downtown?*

Banking and city government.

Susie's.

Post office.

The Depot. People come to the Depot.

Kirby's.

The festivals, like Sikeston in Bloom and the Cotton Carnival.

My son goes to school in Cape, and a lot of the mothers will come to this town and shop, but they need to know what's here. They'll stop and shop here. People say that people from Cape will never come here, but I think they would if we had a draw.

A lot of businesses are moving to Cape.

(many people agreeing, talking at once.)

You know, we did a survey two years ago, with a marketing research company, among stakeholders. Their number one reason why someone would not locate a business here is lack of cultural and community activity. Lack of shopping, cultural activities...they don't have any problem with cost of living, availability. The school system is a problem, too.

Moderator: *Would you say that downtown is moving in the right or wrong direction?*

I'd say right.

Absolutely.

Are they moving?

There's movement.

They're trying to have all these festivals, though...

And in my lifetime, it seems that there is movement, but I wouldn't call it forward or backward.

Or a cohesive sort of city plan.

Moderator: *Let's talk about the user-friendliness of downtown. Is it easy to get to and around downtown?*

I don't know that downtown is advertised at all to outsiders.

We have a new sign coming West...

If you know how to get that far.

But also, there's not a visual architectural style or something that sets it apart as you're driving down Malone. You wouldn't see it coming down Main Street. On Malone, you might not be able to distinguish it. The Depot might be the only visual landmark.

Moderator: *What about business hours and locations?*

I'm sure they're convenient for stay-at-home spouses, but if you both work, I don't know that you can make it to the businesses.

There might be more of an opportunity to bring in people, but I don't think people would do that. Our CBB person kept saying that there wasn't any kind of activity downtown at night.

Open stores, not bars.

You go to Cape, and it's really active. And here, it's dead. And I never go to downtown Cape at night, and I went there, and people were everywhere. And not just college students.

One thing we could use is more restaurants downtown, more activity at night.

And with other retailers being open, too... if I worked during the day, I'd have to go to Cape to shop, because I need to shop in the evening.

People are closed at 5:00 even at Christmas. They say it isn't safe.

Seriously?

Maybe that was just one incident.

Another thing, when you go down the street and you see the pawn shop, that's scary.

(agreement.)

One year, I chaired a committee, and we got a lot of the downtown businesses to spruce up their place, planting pots, landscaping...and it didn't take a lot of effort, and it was cohesive looking, and we talked about maybe doing it at some of the major intersections in town, but there was no resources to keep them watered.

In downtown Kansas City, it's well-landscaped, and they have the theme of the fountains all over, and it's always busy. I know we can't duplicate the scope, but...

... It doesn't matter if you're big or small, Chicago and Baltimore and Cleveland, they've revitalized their core waterfront, but there are small towns like Westin that have little boutique specialty antique shopping. That's what I'd see as the niche for something like Sikeston, because there is a lot of traffic going through here, either on 55 or the Branson highway, and just 2 weeks ago, I saw someone driving down and they asked where all the shops were, and they wanted to antique shop. Trying to make downtown a vibrant place for the locals will be a harder sell than to make it a curio place for tourists.

Washington, Missouri's done the same thing. They've really modified their downtown.

Or you even might be able to capture the Cape folks looking for something quaint.

Maybe they go to Paducah or St. Genevieve...

Look at what Paducah has done...

Yeah. They have a riverfront, but maybe we could make use of our railroad. What about a trolley from Lambert's to downtown. But there has to be something to bring people downtown. You have all these buses coming through Lambert's, and if there were shops and antiques and coffee downtown, high-end antiques...

Not blue glass mason jars.

Well, you could do the collectors of farm implements, but it's not a junkyard.

Moderator: What kind of businesses do you think would work in downtown Sikeston?

I think antiques. I think nice antique area.

Not practical, but more entertainment than...

I talked to a lady over in Dexter, and people really go to the antique place there, and the owner said she was surprised that we don't have antique places.

I'd like to see a hardware store.

We need to try to capture the Lambert's crowd.

(agreement.)

There's a lot of other repro stuff...

You could have a number of different niches. One store for repro, and one store that's more curio, and...

Yeah, that would be cool.

One store's not going to get it for that drive-through crowd.

You have to create an experience.

We need a good bookstore.

Chocolate stores. St. Charles has done a wonderful job with their downtown.

Or an artist. Get all the artist studios in there, and divide up those...with some of the stores downtown, you're thinking it's quaint, but then the stores are huge. Those spaces need to be more intimate.

I'd like to see a nice bookstore that sells coffee.

We need real businesses. No loan places, pawn shops, or any more government assistance. We don't need more welfare folks. We're the welfare capital of the Bootheel. We've got every government entity, and it's been a disaster. I think you need professional offices, stores, restaurants... part of the problem is the buildings are nasty. They're old, and they're nasty. If somebody built a new building that was more modern and cleaner looking, you could rent apartments on the top.

You couldn't do apartments on the top because of parking. We wouldn't have parking for apartments. Unless we're going to raze some area...

You've got a zillion parking places by the Depot that no one ever uses.

But you wouldn't have enclosed parking.

I view apartments as secondary. I think we need retail space, and there just isn't any. The buildings are nasty. They've got no curb appeal, they've got aluminum siding... I think if you had decent spaces...

It's going to be tough to build new and still be quaint.

They do it all the time. You could build some buildings on vacant blocks. I think you could try to put something up, but if there is no good professional office space in Sikeston. Maybe you think there's too many lawyers and doctors, but we need these people downtown.

Maybe that's what should be used for the 2nd floor.

But parking's an issue.

But sort of like New Orleans, they've restored the downtown, and you're going from restaurant to boutique to photo shop, but there's a lawyer, and there's an office. All of that adds to the charm. Maybe there needs to be a barbershop... We could sell that cohesive image that this is an active downtown.

I don't know that the demise of downtown came when Wal-Mart came. I think it's when the shops left downtown for the mall and along Malone, eastbound and southbound. The same businesses were in town, but there was no cohesiveness. But if they came back together again, that would certainly help.

To your point, there are some buildings that need to be demolished.

But we don't need any more arson fires...

We haven't had an arson fire in years.

But that's not going to get renovated, the old Piggly Wiggly. Some of the old buildings that have interesting architectural detail beneath the awnings might be a restoration project.

But I don't think any of that will happen until Sikeston residents take pride...

We have pride in Sikeston.

What good is pride if you don't spend your money here?

But if you build it, they will come. Where are they going? They're going to Molly's in Cape, and that's an old restored building with the dark wood and the interesting lithographs.

They're creating atmosphere, which no one here has it.

I think Joseph's and Jeremiah's...

(many people talking at once.)

The other thing downtown Cape has is that you can walk from one shop to the next.

There are no trustworthy workers in Sikeston. People say that they have to bring people in from Cape.

Retaining and identifying talent.

And Cape has college kids that want to make money.

We're not competing against Cape...

We can't.

We're going after the tourists.

What we have here that Cape doesn't have is traffic from all direction. We need to sell the story that this is a quaint little cotton town with a cute little downtown out of Norman Rockwell. Washington and Westin recreated themselves...

They're within a few miles of big cities.

But that Branson Highway. Lambert's can't be the only place in town that captures all that traffic, and they market it like crazy.

(many people arguing at once.)

There are over 30,000 people per month that go through that door.

Why aren't we capturing them? If we get new money into town...

Get Lambert's to move downtown.

Why don't we have a Lambert's West? A smaller place... they couldn't move, but maybe a spinoff of Lambert's.

Like having in a mall, having your anchor store, and Lambert would be the anchor store for downtown, and that would pull people in. That's the idea behind a trolley. Get that out-of-town new money to stay in town.

Get doctors offices downtown, because Sikeston serves as a medical center for many small towns.

I think part of that, make it Mayberry. Put all the doctors and lawyers, but also do little curio shops... create that sort of charm.

There is a lack of charm.

But there's a lot of work involved in running a little shop. You have to be dedicated, and we don't have people that want to work that hard.

It's got to be more than one shop. It's got to be a group, like a developer creating a mall.

Somebody's going to have to have the money to loan it to people to start these shops, because it isn't here. I think it would be great, but it's a lot of work.

I get Memphis Magazine, and in Memphis Magazine, every month, they feature a quaint little town that you can go from Memphis to eat and shop. That's priceless. I'm sure St. Louis has a magazine, Nashville has a magazine...some cultural magazines that people read. I'm sure there's half a million people that'll come up I-55 to go to St. Louis or Chicago, and they stop here to go to the bathroom and grab a Coke.

(agreement.)

People go from Jonesboro to Sikeston, stop on the way, and then go to St. Louis for Cardinal games. It's there, it's just going out and being there for those people, and having something to snag them, and then building on the opportunities to build word of mouth.

Moderator: What about dining and entertainment options? What would be a good fit for downtown?

A nice restaurant.

The only options in town are fast food.

Susie's isn't fast food, but she's only open for lunch. She closes at 5.

And not on Saturdays, either.

So you've got a hamburger shop.

And Jeremiah's is excellent.

But you've got to get past looking at that nasty building on the front corner.

(agreement.)

Put up lights and paint a frog on it...

I think they've got butcher paper in the windows.

I think you need retail and restaurants. People love to eat out, and you run out of options. You can have a candy shop, but you need a real restaurant.

I agree.

Could also use a hotel there, or someplace to stay. They can't stay in Sikeston. The Sleepy 8 is the only place in town.

That Days Inn, they're in city limits, but we don't collect bed tax from them.

(many people talking at once.)

If you did want to stay in Sikeston, you couldn't. You wouldn't stay at the hotels we have.

Isn't there a bed and breakfast?

No, that closed.

It was nice, though. Wrong part of town, though.

Moderator: What about parks and recreation?

We're lousy with parks.

I think that's an asset downtown, Malone Park with the little bandstand.

It's not appealing. It's a stepsister to the complex.

I took my Girl Scout troop there to clean up, and there was a lot of undesirable items in our park.

I would think for that quaint...it's there. You've got it off of downtown. And folks like Paducah have a concert series. Sikeston in Bloom was nice, with the bluegrass band, people down there, the little arts and crafts stands, and I think that would be something the downtown could do to attract visitors down there on a nice evening.

I agree with that, but the park itself is just very tired. They made some half attempt to landscape. Instead of tearing out every piece of sidewalk around there, they patched it up.

Did the City pay for that?

They look better, but...

It's private money.

There's a great effort there, but really punching it up is going to take some money.

(many people talking at once.)

I think that not growing up here, there's a stigma to downtown, and you just... one block south of downtown and one block west, 80% of the town won't consider walking in at night.

We need some night events there. Sikeston in Bloom was shutting down at 4:00. Columbia had an event where the whole downtown stays open at night, and Paducah does that too. Places that have been successful are open in the evening. I think our downtown organization has made progress in terms of adding activities, but they're always day activities. Well, we have the Christmas thing at night...

People will do it if there's an activity. But downtown, for the last 2 years, is just as ugly then as it is now. I think what makes those events attractive is the people and the buzz... I think maybe a music series... and all these places that have revitalized have done it, and they're surrounded by poor districts. If you create an activity, it will overcome people's fear of mingling with subsidized housing.

I'm not saying this is a problem, but people are being shoplifted. People will come in and get robbed.

That problem is going to need to be solved, and that's a City problem that they need to figure out if we revitalize downtown to be attractive to locals and visitors.

You need bicycle policemen or horse policemen...

St. Charles is a great example. You take what you have and you create a story.

If you had a bicycle policeman in the morning, if you just had that when people are opening, that'll help.

And the flipside is traffic, and lighting, and nice shops. If there's a broken window, it's going to attract a criminal element. I think just fixing up the buildings, lighting them right, and having cohesion will help the police.

Moderator: Do you think there's a need or a demand for more housing downtown?

No.

I've always thought that there ought to be, especially for young people, a place to live where they can also shop. I suspect that a lot of people that are on their own would like to be right above the grocery store. I think housing would be attractive down there. There's someone from Illinois looking at St. Paul's, and he said he'd move here if he could live downtown.

I think there are some old, grand houses that are south of downtown...like the Victorian Café and down Main Street, and if you could recapture that neighborhood or have a ring of attractive housing around downtown, I think it would provide a buffer and make it more attractive.

Moderator: Where do local residents get their information about what's going on downtown?

Paper.

The paper.

Yeah.

Might be a flyer somewhere.

Well, and the public access channel.

Yeah.

Our paper is totally owned by Cape Girardeau residents...some people feel that our newspaper capitalizes on more of our flaws than our assets. Some people have quoted someone as saying, "You can't put lipstick on a pig." When you're in control of a huge communication tool, you might want to have a better attitude. You need car dealers and healthcare providers and grocery stores tell the writers that you're running off customers. Reading the paper is exacerbating the attitude that our town is going downhill.

Beautifully said. But bad stories sell more papers.

That's happening with local news everywhere.

Sensationalism is the key. Hey ain't worried about selling more papers.

(many people talking at once.)

...those stories sell more papers...

If you ever read Charleston's paper, it's rosy and glowing.

You don't have to close your eyes, but let's have a balance. But his subscription rates aren't going up and have not gone up... and if he thinks he's selling more papers reporting stabbings... and Sikeston in Bloom, and the Cotton Parade, they report on kids picking up candy in garbage cans off the street with a grocery sack. We could start an online blog kind of a newspaper.

You should do that.

Well, to your point, you could do it as a marketing tool. In Chicago, there's The Chicago Reader, and it's a newspaper of what's going on... it was a throwaway free thing. If you put this free paper at Lambert's, and you could just pick it up, and you could throw in the stories to promote the town.

We need a paper downtown to promote good things in Sikeston. If there's an article about sodomy anywhere in the globe, it will be in our paper.

You're looking for a paper that markets stuff.

Why do we need it if we have a paper? He doesn't need to cover John McCain coming to Phoenix, Arizona.

But it's our newspaper. He has to report the news.

But you can't get them to print something that's a community event.

(many people talking at once.)

It's going to be hard to change the culture of media, so let's not do media. Let's do marketing. Tell people what's going on in town, and throw in some stories. The churches in town will have visiting choirs...most stuff gets out by word of mouth. If someone's driving through town, and they ask me about stuff...

Our Chamber did a lovely job on that publication of historic homes. That was excellent.

(agreement.)

We need more...

So, the lighting... there's going to be a historic walkway with historic lighting?

They are working on that.

That's nice. What that does is create architecture cohesion. Someone comes in from the outside, and there are visual cues to know, "This is where stuff's happening."

We need more publications like that. We need something locating our shops downtown, and that wonderful book about Sikeston's history... We don't have anything like that.

We do have that. The stuff from the CBB.

But it's not downtown. It's sent out to people, but there's no vast distribution points in this town.

25,000 of those brochures went all over the state.

You know where to put them. Lambert's and downtown.

They are at Lambert's. And at the hotels in Miner.

We're getting a group of bike riders that booked hotel rooms in town, and they're creating avenues for them to have activities. That's an opportunity to have people in the area...they're coming here. Nobody really knows about it until they show up.

It was in the paper.

Yeah, maybe a monthly free paper. It's bigger than downtown. All the festivals can have a spillover effect here in town. Stuff like Sikeston in Bloom or the 5K run... sort of a calendar of events type marketing tool, because that's what the newspaper isn't doing.

Who's going to do this?

(side conversations.)

Do you think that brick streets have improved our downtown area?

No.

I hear lots of complaints.

I feel the same about them as I do about the park sidewalks. The concept is great, but the execution...

It's patchy.

(agreement.)

I think it's charming when it's done right.

Washington, Missouri.

Poplar Bluff.

As they're peeling off the asphalt, they've got to peel off all the other architectural mistakes—the awnings and the tuckpointing. It's going to take an architect.

Moderator: Thank you very much.