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ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

As Olathe Mayor, I am so proud of the exciting progress and planning surrounding the future of Downtown Olathe. The City and our community partners— including the Olathe Chamber of Commerce, Johnson County, and our downtown residents and businesses—continue to build upon Downtown’s many strengths, and we’re eager to share about the update to our Envision Olathe Downtown Plan and what it means for our city.

Olathe’s downtown is growing ever more vibrant and diverse. It’s a center of government and professional services, with businesses and restaurants, unique historical neighborhoods, and cultural opportunities. It’s the focus of civic life in our community, reflected in beautiful Civic Center Park, which honors Olathe’s rich history and the noble service of Olatheans who have proudly served as state governors.

The investments we’ve made in the heart of our city all demonstrate a strong commitment to our downtown core, including our Santa Fe Streetscape enhancements, which form a gateway to Downtown and provide a safe and pedestrian-friendly environment. The new Johnson County Courthouse project and potential mixed-use developments will significantly shape the future and direction of Downtown, bringing new and creative opportunities and spurring additional growth.

This is truly an extraordinary time in the life of Downtown Olathe. I want to recognize our dedicated and professional City staff and RDG Planning & Design and Gruen Gruen + Associates for helping to guide our community through this visioning process. Most importantly, I want to express our gratitude to Olathe citizens for their participation in months of public meetings, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, surveys, and design workshops. The successes we celebrate today are because of our engaged residents and their involvement and support for our downtown revitalization efforts.

Downtown brings people together to celebrate our great community and proud heritage, Olathe’s rich and colorful past, and the promise of more good things to come. I speak for all of us on the City Council in thanking our downtown friends and neighbors for being part of our master plan update. Working together, we are casting a vision for tomorrow, ensuring that Downtown remains among Olathe’s most cherished places, now and in the years to come.

Michael Copeland
Mayor
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A Message from the Authors

We want to thank the hundreds of residents and stakeholders who invested their time and insight to help author the concepts and ideas in this plan. This plan is truly a document of the people. Plans like this can be a catalyst for new investment beyond the heart of the city, and help the community provide a more memorable experience for the people who live and visit Olathe.

Congratulations on your past accomplishments and thank you for the opportunity to help create a road map to your future.

Sincerely,

Mayor & City Council

Mayor Michael Copeland
John Bacon
Larry Campbell
Wes McCoy
Jim Randall
Ron Ryckman
Marge Vogt

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INTRODUCTION

OLATHE’S CITIZENS SHOW A STRONG COMMITMENT AND EXCITEMENT FOR THE FUTURE OF THEIR COMMUNITY, WHICH IS EVIDENT FROM THE LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT AT PUBLIC MEETINGS ABOUT DOWNTOWN. When thinking about cities across the country, Downtown is often the first image to come to mind. The same could be true for Olathe. A new vision for Downtown creates new opportunities to increase business startups, unite the district with its surrounding neighborhoods, create a unique shopping and business environment, and improve infrastructure, all while preserving its historic character.

What is a Downtown Plan?
A Downtown Plan describes a desired vision for the future of downtown and provides recommendations to achieve that future. Doing so establishes a framework to ensure that incremental policies and decisions help achieve those aspirations over time. More than a snapshot, the plan is a living document, used and updated by decision-makers, property owners, businesses, and residents. The Plan also aligns downtown’s priorities with general community goals.

Why Plan for Downtown?

To reinforce community commitment to downtown. The citizens of Olathe have long recognized the value, importance and significance of downtown. To that end, their commitment and devotion for the area and its future has been impressive. The vision and goals of this plan update reflect Olathe’s commitment to its downtown.

To stimulate investment and entrepreneurship. Injecting public dollars and programming into downtown incentivizes private investment by demonstrating the City’s commitment. An attractive and exciting downtown draws visitors, which in turn stimulates sales and additional profits that can fund improvements. Additionally, entrepreneurs and startups are attracted to exciting places that make collaboration easy. Making downtown accessible to these visionaries can set Olathe apart from other communities in the region and foster innovation and job growth.

To attract and retain new business, customers, and visitors. Improvements to parking, traffic, and public spaces creates a friendlier environment for people to visit, shop, and spend time downtown. Existing businesses will begin to flourish and new business will compete for potential profits.

To create a competitive advantage. Trends show people migrating to urban areas, both to live and shop. Olathe has grown rapidly, but its downtown has not. Economic growth is partially dependent on non-local visitors supporting retail in the city, so Olathe must stand out from other communities as they search for ways to attract non-local shoppers too. An active and vibrant downtown is key to becoming a destination for non-local shoppers.

To celebrate Olathe’s history and values. Downtown contains some of Olathe’s oldest buildings. The buildings themselves physically represent the historical development of the city. Residents are proud of the town’s atmosphere and Downtown exemplifies the history of the community. What better way to celebrate the Olathe’s history than to embody the framework of buildings that have been in place for years as living history.

To provide for necessary infrastructure. Maintaining a downtown requires that the City provides adequate services for businesses and residents. Streets and utilities need upgrading and replacement over time for public convenience, safety, and appearance. Maintaining and updating infrastructure simultaneously reduces the need to tear up infrastructure in a reactive, piecemeal manner.
EXISTING CONDITIONS

DOWNTOWN TODAY

"...planning is indispensable."

- President Dwight D. Eisenhower
Understanding the Past
The City of Olathe, located 20 miles southwest of Downtown Kansas City, is the seat of Johnson County. Covering over 60 square miles, Olathe is the fifth largest city in Kansas with an estimated 2015 population of over 131,500. Also, it is one of the oldest communities in Kansas, founded on the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California Trails where it hosted up to 600 wagons per week. Later, the Strang Trolley Line connected Downtown Olathe to Downtown Kansas City, and the business district thrived.

By 1957, Interstate 35 opened, allowing Olathe to boom with rapid suburban development. Urban renewal projects through the 1970’s emphasized suburban over downtown growth in Olathe, leading many historic buildings and neighborhoods to be demolished. The destruction of attractive older buildings, coupled with suburban commercial development on I-35, led to Downtown Olathe’s struggle.

Efforts to revitalize Downtown Olathe emerged in the 1990’s, culminating in the 2003 Envision Olathe Downtown Plan. This renewed focus led to public investments in downtown, including increased parking, additional small businesses, and streetscape improvements. Several upcoming projects will further reshape downtown for years to come, particularly the new Johnson County Courthouse and its environs. Envision Olathe builds on past efforts to continue improving downtown.
Study Area

Map 1.1 identifies the study area for Envision Olathe, based on those used for the 2003 plan. It includes several distinct areas with their own unique characteristics and challenges. These character areas include:

- Downtown Core
- Transition
- Santa Fe Corridor
- Kansas Avenue Corridor
- Kansas City Road

While the principal focus of the study is to consider strategies for improvement in the downtown core and transition area, the plan considers possibilities for the important connecting corridors that lead to downtown. The character and uses along these corridors reinforce the overall perception of downtown and the community altogether.

Map 1.2 exhibits an aerial map of the downtown core and transition area. This chapter evaluates existing conditions based on the boundaries of these maps, though Chapter 5 recommends amending the boundary of the downtown core and transition area.
Map 1.2: Aerial Photo Study Area, 2016
Downtown Core

The downtown core contains the government center for the City of Olathe and is home to the Johnson County seat. Much of its employment is related to public services including the Johnson County Courthouse, Jail, and Administration building and the City of Olathe’s City Hall, Public Library, and offices. The US Postal Service has their distribution center in the area as well.

The core has limited food service and retail, offices, and supporting government functions, such as lawyers, bondsmen, and accountants. Some light industrial uses are adjacent to the railroad tracks on the west.

The core has a few public gathering spaces. The Civic Center Park, split by Santa Fe Street, provides green space and a sculpture walk. In addition, a small public plaza sits between the Johnson County District Courthouse and County Administration Building. In the transition area, Mill Creek Park has a pool and green space. These spaces are not well-connected to their surroundings and presents an opportunity for future planning. Old Settlers Days attracts tens of thousands of people to Downtown Olathe. Meanwhile, the Farmer’s Market stopped meeting downtown due to its limitations.

Challenges and opportunities include:

- **Seat of government.** Johnson County and the City of Olathe provide a stable employment base for downtown. Density can be built around these anchors to improve business feasibility downtown.

- **Dedicated stakeholders.** Many groups are dedicated to improving downtown, including residents of the city at large.

- **Only active during business hours.** The district is generally open from 8am to 5pm only as a result of large number of government offices and limited mix of other uses. Other than special events such as Fourth Fridays, few people visit the downtown outside of court appointments or work.

- **Barriers to connectivity.** Downtown is relatively walkable, but Santa Fe Street and Kansas Avenue, two heavily traveled corridors, create psychological and physical barriers. The city has improved streetscapes and crosswalks, but traffic and distance continues to interrupt the comfort of walking. In addition, the railroad provides a major barrier to car traffic.

- **Historic buildings.** Few historic buildings remain downtown, and only a small portion of Park and Cherry Streets retain a traditional downtown feel. However, those that do remain make the area more unique than newer commercial centers.

- **Perceived parking problem.** Parking is often adequate due to the parking structure at Chestnut Street, but a lack of on-street parking is often seen as an issue. The construction of a new courthouse to the north may exacerbate parking on surrounding neighborhood streets as well.
Transition Area

The transition area is defined by a lower-intensity mix of uses surrounding the downtown core that blends into residential neighborhoods. Because it is on the edge of downtown, single family homes make up much of the area, but multifamily units are also present, including a few apartment complexes. Several single-family homes have been converted to other uses, including multi-family or commercial retail, offices, and restaurant uses. In addition, several significant institutions occupy the area, including the Kansas School for the Deaf and the Millcreek Learning Center.

Challenges and opportunities include:

- **Important institutions.** Several important institutions including churches provide opportunities to build activity clusters for their populations.

- **Active community.** Neighbors, business owners, and local groups are actively seeking to improve downtown and the transition area.

- **Converting homes to other uses.** The conversion of residential buildings intended for single families is often well-done and results in well-maintained properties. However, the conversion of historic homes to other uses can lead to more activity than was intended for the building, occasionally leading to distress and loss of historic character.

- **New Johnson County Courthouse.** A new courthouse for Johnson County will be constructed in the downtown core, but its parking demand will extend into the transition area. While the planned parking lot should adequately serve the development, property owners are concerned about the effects of the new courthouse, including its traffic and parking.

- **Lack of neighborhood commercial.** Residences in the transition area do not have easy access to most neighborhood commercial amenities except by automobile, despite being centered around the downtown.

- **Need for neighborhood conservation.** Preserving neighborhood character while absorbing the continued growth of downtown can be difficult to navigate, including with a demand for less expensive rental housing options. In addition, maintaining a high quality housing stock has been challenging.

- **Need for better connections.** Mill Creek Park and Mill Creek could be better connected to downtown and the surrounding area.
Santa Fe Street

Santa Fe Street is an important east-west street and the primary access point for many to downtown Olathe. It acts as a Main Street due to its access to Interstate 35 and contains a mix of buildings from historic to modern. To the east, Santa Fe Street continues to the Kansas State Line and to the west, Santa Fe Street continues past Lake Olathe.

Santa Fe Street has the highest traffic counts in the area, which can be over 26,000 vehicles per day (see page 29). The character is primarily auto-oriented free-standing or strip buildings with surface parking lots. Customers tend to visit a single destination, rather than walk from business to business. Most buildings are occupied by mainstream commercial uses, including fast-food restaurants, auto-oriented retail, and commercial services.

Recently, the City reinvested in the Santa Fe Street corridor streetscape, including decorative lighting and structures at the railroad overpass. However, there are still some areas that are in need of continued improvement.

Challenges and opportunities include:

- **Recent improvements.** Recent streetscape improvements along the corridor have improved the quality of the built environment substantially. In addition, other improvements such as Civic Center Park also add to the attractiveness of the corridor.

- **High traffic volumes.** Traffic speeds along Santa Fe Street are adequately slow, but high traffic volumes make it a barrier for pedestrian crossings. High traffic volumes creates noise which influences the use of the Civic Center Park. However, high traffic volumes also provide opportunities for business visibility.

- **Needs to Improve its gateway uses.** While Santa Fe Street’s streetscape improves its attractiveness, some of the adjacent uses could better complement its appeal. These uses and areas do not fully leverage the assets, civic values, and aesthetic characteristics of the city.

- **Railroad crossings on Santa Fe Street.** Because Santa Fe Street is a major street with up to 26,000 average daily vehicles, its at-grade crossing with the BNSF railroad on the west side of downtown creates conflict points for motorists and travel delay. The traffic delay was a significant complaint by participants for mobility in the downtown.
Kansas Avenue

Kansas Avenue is the significant north-south corridor through downtown transitioning to Northgate and Southgate. To the south, Kansas Avenue connects to Dennis Avenue. Where Southgate branches off Kansas Avenue, it continues to the former Great Mall site and the Olathe Medical Center.

Buildings are a mix of styles, though many are one-story auto-oriented developments such as car lots, mechanics, and other auto-oriented retail and services. Some light industrial uses are to the south, especially near the railroad crossing. Buildings are a range of materials and ages, including more attractive materials such as limestone and high quality brick near downtown to standing seam metal buildings.

Despite lower traffic counts on South Kansas Avenue, the street is 80’ wide, which makes for long distances for pedestrians to cross, particularly for people with mobility impairments. As the courthouse moves, parking demands may diminish. Regardless, the street’s width allows it to be reimagined.

Challenges and opportunities include:

› **Perceived Barrier.** Traffic speeds and volumes are low enough for pedestrians to cross Kansas Avenue, but its width can be a psychological barrier, a deterrent for patrons to visit a business across the street.

› **Parking Demand Shift.** As the courthouse moves north of Santa Fe Street, the parking demand south of Sante Fa Street will likely diminish, as parking supply will shift to the courthouse’s new surface parking lot located north of the building.

› **Streetscape improvements.** Kansas Avenue is scheduled for improvements after the courthouse moves in 2021. This presents a great opportunity to aesthetically enhance the street as an important approach to downtown.
Kansas City Road

Kansas City Road connects to Santa Fe Street on a diagonal northeast route towards downtown Kansas City. Part of the historic Santa Fe Trail, Kansas City Road joins downtown to other important cultural institutions in Olathe, including Olathe North High School, the historic Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop and Farm Historic Site, and the Olathe Community Center, before connecting to Interstate 35. The road also connects to residential areas and some employment centers.

The trail that follows the Kansas City Road is a major part of Olathe’s pedestrian and bicycle system, yet it needs a stronger connection to downtown. It currently stops following Kansas City Road at Nelson Road to the northeast of downtown.

Challenges and opportunities include:

- **Connection to Downtown.** Kansas City Road could serve an important pedestrian and bicycle connection to the downtown, and as such, needs to be better integrated. However, it is presently disconnected from the downtown from where it joins Santa Fe Street.

- **Anchoring institutions.** Kansas City Road has a series of destinations along the corridor, yet its connection to Santa Fe Street presents a geographic gap. Convenience for all modes of mobility will improve accessibility to all of these destinations.

- **Geography and direction.** Kansas City Road primarily runs diagonal except where it transitions to a north/south entry onto Santa Fe Street south of Poplar Street. This creates awkward roadway geometry which can impact affect drivers’ line-of-sight.
EXISTING CONDITIONS

Building from the background for downtown, this section examines its existing conditions and explores those characteristics. This includes looking at both the built environment and the transportation framework for downtown.

Land Use

Downtowns typically include a mix of uses, often with the most active uses on the ground level and residential or office uses on upper floors. Map 1.3 identifies land use in Downtown Olathe. Figure 1.1 presents land use information for the entire downtown study area, compiled through parcel data and visual survey. The gross floor area for non-single family uses downtown is almost 1.9 million square feet, 52 percent of which is at street level.

Ground floor uses in downtown are primarily government, educational, and other civic uses (57 percent), followed by commercial office (15 percent), commercial service (10 percent), and multi-family (10 percent) which is mostly found in the transition area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Use</th>
<th>FIRST FLOOR (SQFT)</th>
<th>% OF FIRST FLOORS</th>
<th>UPPER FLOORS (SQFT)</th>
<th>% OF UPPER FLOORS</th>
<th>TOTAL (SQFT)</th>
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<tr>
<td>General Commercial</td>
<td>27,261</td>
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<td>3,210</td>
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<td>Service</td>
<td>100,359</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>15,048</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>115,407</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
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<td>Office</td>
<td>150,820</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>78,457</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>229,276</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
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<td>Multifamily*</td>
<td>95,904</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>165,121</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>261,025</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
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<td>Government</td>
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<td>429,583</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
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<td>Other Civic</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>92,448</td>
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<td>Schools</td>
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<td>214,549</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>412,977</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
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<td>Light Industrial</td>
<td>38,981</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>4,549</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4,549</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>981,764</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td>905,968</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>1,887,732</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: Single Family homes are excluded, as is a 195,780 square foot parking garage
Source: RDG Planning & Design
Map 1.3: Existing Land Use (First Floor)
Key findings include:

- **Public/Civic.** Public and civic uses dominate Downtown Olathe, and include government offices, the Millcreek Learning Center, the Kansas School for the Deaf, and other civic uses like churches. While these uses bring workers to the downtown, they generally attract people during standard business hours and contributes to the 9am to 5pm culture. Olathe has also experienced the conversion of some storefronts into civic uses, which is an indicator of struggling commercial environment.

- **Office.** Office uses, often supporting downtown’s government function, are one of the other primary uses in downtown. Occasionally, these uses occupy storefronts that were designed for commercial use. While offices build on Downtown Olathe’s role as a government center, they also reinforce downtown’s culture as a 9am to 5pm destination.

- **General Commercial, Service, and Retail.** Downtown has a limited supply of general commercial and retail attractions, comprising only 3 percent of first floor space. These uses help animate downtown districts in the evening hours, as people seek meals and recreation after the work day is over. The lack of destinations in downtown contributes to the difficulty of attracting and maintaining viable downtown entertainment and retail options.

- **Vacancies.** Completely vacant buildings in Downtown Olathe are uncommon, with vacant buildings accounting for less than 1% of estimated square footage. However, some office buildings have a difficult time attracting and keeping tenants as the nature and requirements of lawyers and other government support industries have decentralized from being near the courthouse to locating throughout the metro.

- **Upper Stories.** Many buildings in downtown are two or three stories tall, contributing nearly 760,000 square feet of space on those stories alone. Most upper story uses mirror lower levels, including civic and office uses. There are some multi-family uses on upper stories, but they are typically in multi-family buildings in the transition area. Overall, there is little vertical integration of uses in downtown, to the detriment of businesses seeking to attract customers outside of normal business hours.

- **Light Industrial.** Some light industrial uses exist along the railroad on the west side of the downtown. Some of these businesses have difficulty with truck circulation and experience delays from the railroad crossing on Santa Fe Street, creating issues when accessing other parts of the city.
Residential Strength

Residential strength measures both of the quality and concentration of the housing stock. Areas with many residential structures in good condition have higher levels of residential strength. Areas with no units or low quality homes have lower levels of residential strength.

While many of Downtown Olathe’s commercial and civic structures are in relatively good shape, its residential strength varies across the district. Map 1.4 shows the residential strength of buildings as determined by the condition of homes in the study area. Darker colors indicate that residential strength is strongest while lighter colors indicates that homes are in need of repair.

Key findings include:

- **Downtown Core.** As previously noted, the downtown core has little in terms of residential opportunities and thus shows no existing residential strength.

- **Areas of Strength.** Areas of residential strength in the study area tend to be concentrated to the west and north, though some smaller areas in the south also show strength. Generally, these areas are clustered together on streets where most buildings are in a good condition. For rehabilitation projects, it may be worthwhile to identify gaps between areas of strength and cluster projects within an area to increase the size of these areas of strength.

- **Areas of Opportunities.** To some extent, residential strength has diminished by the conversion of single family homes into businesses. However, the residential areas with the greatest opportunity for improvement tend to include areas with a higher intensity of land use or experience more traffic, primarily to the east and south. The railroad is one such use, as is the Santa Fe Street corridor and the Kansas Avenue corridor to the south. Likely, this can be attributed to increased externalities affecting homeowners and rents, such as noise or pass-by traffic. Ensuring adequate buffering of residential uses will help strengthen these residential areas.
Building Characteristics

When thinking of downtowns, the buildings themselves are the framework and represent the vertical streetscape. Most buildings in Downtown Olathe are one or two stories, with relatively little vertical integration of uses. Of the few buildings that exceed three stories, most are government offices and multi-family apartment buildings, the latter of which are found in the transition area. The tallest building in Downtown Olathe is the current County Courthouse at eight stories, though as that is demolished, it will be replaced by the new County Courthouse as the tallest building.

Downtowns often have a sense of enclosure with its buildings, defining the urban space between the scale of its buildings to the street. This relationship creates comfort and character often found in downtowns. Wide open spaces, such as large surface parking lots, create a feeling of emptiness and discomfort. As a result, large open spaces in downtown often feel best when broken up into a series of “outdoor rooms” to help prevent it from feeling too open. In addition, streets framed with buildings or other “edges” provide the same benefits.

Key findings include:

- **Building Scale and Sense of Destination.** During the public engagement process, some participants did not recognize Olathe as having a downtown. This could be explained, in part, by the relationship of the building’s scale and setback to the street. Several other factors may influence this perception, yet the development character of the buildings likely influences this perception. New construction will need to be sensitive to the relationship between the building and street.

Building heights and their relation to the downtown core can be seen on Map 1.5. Note that it excludes single family homes.
Historical and Architectural Significance

Historical buildings function as the ‘walls’ of the urban room, defining the public realm and rooting it in the history of the city’s development and growth. Olathe’s rich history is reflected in several historically buildings in the downtown. While many were lost during urban renewal period, those that remain contribute to the character of the district.

Many buildings represent excellent examples of the commercial architecture common to Plains cities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Because historic architecture helps create a sense of place, these characteristics should be protected and enhanced by encouraging the design of new buildings to be in a style sympathetic to existing buildings. This has been bolstered by the efforts of the Olathe Historic Preservation Board, Preservation Plan, and supported in PlanOlathe.

Olathe does not have any downtown buildings on the national or state historic registers, though it contains several notable buildings like the Park-Cherry Building, the former Post Office, the Patrons Building, the Millcreek Learning Center, and the Kansas School for the Deaf campus. Some buildings near downtown are listed in the National and State Historic Registers.

Map 1.6 shows historic and potentially historic buildings and districts.

National & State Register Buildings Near Downtown

- **I.O. Pickering House** (507 W. Park). Built in the late 1870s
- **Franklin R. Lanter House** (562 W. Park). Built in 1901
- **Martin Van Buren Parker House** (631 W. Park). Built in 1869
- **Albert Ott House** (401 S. Harrison). Built in 1894
- **J.B. Mahaffie House** (1100 Kansas City Road). Built in 1865, originally a stop along the Oregon, Santa Fe, and California Trails.
- **George Hodges House - State Register** (425 S. Harrison). Built in 1892, home of George Hodges, Governor of Kansas from 1913-1915.

While no downtown buildings are on the national historic register, Olathe’s Historic Preservation identified the following as Potential Historic Districts:

- **Cherry Street Commercial Historic Area**: Includes three buildings on the east side of South Cherry Street at the intersection of Park Street;
- **West Original Town Historic Area**: Encompasses a nine-block area to the southwest, west of the railroad tracks and south of Santa Fe Street;
- **Southeast Original Town Historic Area**: Covers 12 blocks to the south, east of Kansas Avenue, north of Southgate Street, and west of Harrison Street;
- **East Cedar Street Historic Area**: Includes 12 residential properties immediately west of the Hycrest property;
- **East Loula Street Historic Area**: Includes 26 dwellings and the church facing East Loula Street;
- **North Cherry-West Poplar Streets Historic Area**: Includes a cluster of 16 early 20th century properties just north of the downtown; and
- **Kansas School for the Deaf Campus**
Transportation Network
This section examines Downtown Olathe’s transportation network and summarizes key patterns for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles.

Motor Traffic Circulation
The downtown traffic circulation system consists of two-way gridded streets, aligned north-south and east-west. Blocks were originally served by sets of east-west mid-block alleys with a north-south alley to connect them. These routes are preserved in several blocks, though some were reconfigured or removed. The alleys that remain allow building service and utility functions off the street, improving the public realm. Some alleys are also used by pedestrians, and this role could be expanded to create outdoor amenities.

Major Corridors and Intersections. Three major road corridors provide circulation from downtown to other parts of Olathe. As previously discussed, they include Santa Fe Street, Kansas Avenue, and Kansas City Road. Spruce Street is another vital route due to its underpass beneath the railroad. When trains stop traffic on Santa Fe Street, this becomes one of the primary routes to circumvent the wait, although the clearance is too low for trucks. Loula Street is another local route across the tracks, yet the road is blocked like Santa Fe Street when a train is passing. The average daily traffic counts of important intersections are shown in Map 1.7.

Signalized Intersections. In downtown, signals are located at the intersections of Santa Fe Street and Kansas Avenue, Chestnut Street, and Kansas City Road. Kansas Avenue also has signals at Loula Street and Spruce Street. Signal timing will need to be revisited once the courthouse relocates, as well as the need for the signal at Loula Street may need to be revisited altogether.
Map 1.7: Average Daily Traffic (ADT)

AVERAGE DAILY TRAFFIC

- 12,521 ADT
- 21,968 ADT
- 20,547 ADT
- 6,072 ADT
- 5,388 ADT
- 18,880 ADT
- 26,424 ADT

Study Area
Railroad Crossings. The BNSF Railway operates the railroad on the west side of downtown, averaging 88 trains per day. Santa Fe Street, along with Loula Street and Park Street, cross the railroad tracks at-grade, creating an obstacle to circulation. Due to high traffic volumes on Santa Fe Street, the cumulative delay and crash costs for that crossing alone are estimated to be over $10 million from 2012 to 2025. Artificial horns, cross bars, and flashing lights announce the arrival of trains. Spruce Street has an underpass on the north side of downtown. However, traffic can often overpower the network.

Transit Access. In 2017, Olathe finalized their Transportation Master Plan, an important component of which was transit. Downtown is served by two fixed route buses along Santa Fe Street with 30-minute headways, the 660 Antioch-Downtown and the 672 Jo-Co-Downtown. Of routes that enter Olathe, Route 660 is one of the busiest with more than 220 average daily riders. Also, it is the most used local route with Route 672 functioning as a midday round-trip for Route 660. Olathe’s destinations are estimated to account for 25 to 50 percent of the ridership on these two routes.

The City operates a taxi coupon/voucher program providing door-to-door demand response transportation service within Olathe municipal boundaries to transport elderly and disabled citizens to work, medical needs, shopping, or other reasons. Participants average 100 to 140 trips per day during the week, dropping to about 40 trips per day on the weekend. Most trips (58 percent) are for work, and many occur downtown.
Transportation Planning. Several documents guide the development of future streets, streetscapes, and trails:

- **Plan Olathe.** Plan Olathe, the city’s Comprehensive Plan, was completed in 2010 and is updated annually. It guides the future of the city’s transportation network with its vision of establishing and maintaining a balanced multi-modal transportation system that provides effective, efficient, and safe mobility for residents. The plan emphasizes the need for improving mobility, supporting high-quality trails to connect activity centers, and integrating land uses with multi-modal transit opportunities.

- **Olathe Transportation Master Plan.** In 2017, the city completed a Transportation Master Plan to guide long-range transportation investments. The plan estimates Olathe’s 2040 population, household change and employment growth, and evaluates the population’s role in future active transportation, transit, roadway, and freight systems. This includes identifying potential projects that could help improve mobility.

- **Olathe Streetscape Master Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines.** The Streetscape Master Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines, prepared in 2003, establishes a design framework for redevelopment in downtown and along Santa Fe Street. The plan describes public realm improvements and design standards/guidelines for private property. It does not include specific standards for Kansas Avenue or Kansas City Road.
Pedestrian and Bicycle Circulation

Map 1.8 shows the existing active transportation network. Safe, pleasant, and seamless pedestrian access is vital in human-scaled business districts like Downtown Olathe. Sidewalks ring most downtown blocks, with a few exceptions along Water Street. Bicycle circulation is limited to shared roadways along Kansas Avenue, Poplar Street, and Kansas City Road. A sidepath west along Santa Fe Street is shown as part of the trail system, though it is a standard sidewalk in downtown.

- **Pedestrians.** While pedestrian circulation is good, the combination of the railroad and traffic flow on major streets become obstacles to smooth and comfortable pedestrian movement. There is a current pedestrian crossing at the Santa Fe Street and Cherry Street intersection that has had some success. Other desired pedestrian crossings on Santa Fe include one at Water Street.

- **Bicyclists.** Potential projects include continuing the shared bikeway along Kansas Avenue to the south that connects to Dennis Avenue and a potential trail along Mill Creek. As of right now, bicyclists needs more convenient access and wayfinding to the city’s trail system.
Map 1.8: Bicycle and Pedestrian Network

- Study Area
- Existing Share the Roadway
- Existing Trails
- Planned Bike Lanes*
- Planned Trails*

*Previous Plans Only
Parking

Access by all modes of transportation, including automobile, walking, biking, and public transportation are all key elements found in vibrant downtowns. However, customers want visible and convenient parking near their destination, or they perceive a lack of parking. Currently, the supply and quality of parking is an important issue for downtown, though it should not come at the expense of other modes of transportation or the feel of the area.

Johnson County hired Walker Parking Consultants to study parking downtown in 2017. The study looked at parking supply as related to relocating the County Courthouse. Map 1.9 shows the study area and proposed courthouse site. Table 1.2 shows the parking supply and demand by block. Findings include:

> **Parking Supply.** The study area includes more than 2,366 public parking spaces. To determine parking adequacy, an effective parking supply is calculated using 98 percent parking factor to available spaces. This suggests an effective parking supply of 2,319 spaces.
Parking Demand Survey. Field surveys at peak hours estimated parking demand. During the survey, they counted 1,289 cars. On-street spaces were 41 percent occupied while off-street spaces were 60 percent occupied. This left a surplus of 1,030 available parking spaces. Only off-street parking on Block 8 showed problematic levels of occupancy (over 85 percent).

Parking Demand Design Day. The number of employees and visitors fluctuates during a typical week. Given information about regularly busy days, a “Design Day” level of activity was also analyzed, equivalent to a very busy day that occurs once or twice per month. Parking demand for design day was about 1,345 spaces, still well below the current effective supply.

Future Parking Demand. Figure 1.3 shows projected parking demand, including the estimated increase in staff for the new courthouse. It shows a demand of 44 new spaces. The projected future demand was 1,496, still much lower than the 2,126 spaces estimated for that same period.

Exceptions. The analysis did not account for lost parking spaces if current surface lots such as blocks 1, 6, or 11 were redeveloped. Eliminating these lots would decrease the parking supply by more than 450 spaces, if the County expects no visitor to walk more than 800 feet, and block 1 was developed, the new courthouse would have a deficit of 778 spaces. Even including the Chestnut Street garage, it would create a 260 space deficit.

Because this analysis suggested an issue with spillover parking in surrounding neighborhoods, Johnson County explored several large-scale parking solutions near the new courthouse, including a parking structure on the surface lot behind City Hall on block 2. Preliminary probable costs, the size, and the number of spaces created can be seen in Figure 1.4. Ultimately, the County decided to develop a large surface lot on block 17 to the north of the courthouse. This is discussed more in Chapter 4.
Market Review

“We went on and on with one improvement after another until, in that same room, instead of merely 45 cars we were making 200 cars each day.”

- Walter Chrysler
Introduction

This report draws extensively on research and analysis that Gruen Gruen + Associates (GG+A) conducted in April 2017 to evaluate Downtown Olathe and the principal findings, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the results of the research and analysis. It also reflects RDG Planning & Design’s research and conclusions.

The findings and conclusions are based on an inspection of Downtown Olathe and environs, one-on-one in-person interviews, and focus panels and telephone interviews with representatives of public entities, private property and building owners, real estate brokers and developers, merchants, and office space users. These included representatives of the City of Olathe, the Olathe Chamber of Commerce, and the Olathe Convention and Visitors Bureau; Olathe Health; CBC Real Estate, Clay Blair Services Corp., DDI Commercial, Inc., Kessinger Hunter, Lane4 Property Group, Montgomery & Co., Park Cherry Building, Rodrock & Associates, Waterford Property Company, Dub V's Bar and Deli, Kansas Coffee Company, Olathe Glass & Home Décor, Warren Hannon Jeweler, and Peeps Babies & Bears/Kansas 4D Ultrasound; bcDESGNGROUP, Garmin, James R. Borth Law Office, John J. Hood, Jr., CPA, Krieger Law Firm, LLC, R. W. Mozingo Law Firm, LLC, and Schlagel Long LLC.

The team also analyzed the downtown building inventory and reviewed other secondary data to evaluate the physical inventory. In addition, GG+A obtained and analyzed employment data for Downtown Olathe and the City of Olathe.

Figure 2.1 identifies characteristics that distinguish relatively more successful downtowns from less successful downtowns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>MORE SUCCESSFUL CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>LESS SUCCESSFUL CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONCENTRATED LINKAGES</td>
<td>Highly concentrated with spatial and use linkages that encourage positive visitor and value spillover</td>
<td>Spread out with unconnected land uses and activity zones, in addition to spatial discontinuities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERCEIVED SAFETY AND SOCIAL COHESION</td>
<td>High degree of perceived safety and low degree of social dislocations such as graffiti, dirty streets, and panhandlers</td>
<td>Low degree of perceived safety and high degree of social dislocations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARKING</td>
<td>Adequate parking that does not separate active uses with massive parking lots/structures</td>
<td>Inadequate parking or parking lots/structures that create spatial discontinuities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNIFICANT STREET-LEVEL ACTIVITY</td>
<td>Street level activities that encourage pedestrian movement; easily accessible and encourages walking and browsing</td>
<td>Patches of activities interspersed with vacant, underutilized space, and parking lots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIQUE TENANCIES</td>
<td>Quality and experiential retail, restaurant, and entertainment tenancies whose primary or only facility is located downtown</td>
<td>Non-experiential tenancies limited in mix and/or quality, or tenancies frequently located in nearby shopping centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTIVE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>Well-maintained historic buildings with modern interiors and building systems and new structures of architectural merit; the totality offers a unique physical character.</td>
<td>Under-maintained, obsolete building space and poorly maintained streetscape and public realm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL AMENITIES</td>
<td>Quality cultural and recreational amenities reflecting the community and located in a compact, integrated area that attracts frequent visitation and/or from an extensive geographic area</td>
<td>Cultural and recreational amenities limited in number and/or quality, and located at the periphery of or spread-out in downtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARACTER OF RESIDENTIAL UNITS</td>
<td>Market-rate residential units located in or close to the core of downtown</td>
<td>Primarily subsidized residential units located in or close to core of downtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKE-UP OF THE LABOR FORCE AND OFFICE SPACE</td>
<td>High proportion of downtown labor force is in private sector and the downtown is a preferred location for office space users with best-in-class space for the area</td>
<td>High proportion of downtown labor force is in public sector and the downtown is not a preferred office space location with obsolete, lower rent office space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFERENCE AND MEETING SPACE</td>
<td>Quality conference/meeting space located in core downtown, if area is large enough to support such space</td>
<td>Primary conference/meeting space located outside the downtown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gruen Gruen + Associates
Part 1: Downtown Employment and Real Estate

The first part of this chapter reviews estimated employment trends in Downtown Olathe. The second part of the chapter summarizes the composition of building space for the downtown. The downtown (including the core and transition area) is defined for this report as being bounded by Spruce Street on the north, Pine Street on the west, Cedar Street on the south, and State Street on the east. The downtown core is smaller and generally bounded by Kansas Avenue on the west, Poplar Street on the north, Cedar Street on the south, and Water Street on the east.

Downtown Employment Trends

The employment trends in this section tie to the limited demand for building space in downtown suggested by the review of real estate trends summarized on the following pages. Table 2.2 enumerates employment by economic sector in the downtown core.

The overall size of the employment base has been relatively stable, with employment increasing by 1.8 percent overall from 2006 to 2014. According to the US Census Bureau, Downtown contained over 5,000 total jobs in 2014, up slightly from about 4,900 jobs in 2006. The change by individual employment sector, however, has been more dramatic. Other than government employment, all other sectors have experienced large decreases in the number of jobs from 2006 to 2014. Administration and support, waste management & remediation experienced a dramatic decline, losing over 1,200 jobs over the eight-year period. Jobs in the finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) and professional and business services sectors which are traditionally office-space using sectors also experienced large declines. Employment in these two sectors dropped from over 500 jobs in 2006 to 150 jobs in 2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE 2.2: Number of Downtown Jobs, 2006-2014</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>CHANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ag., Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, &amp; Mining</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing &amp; Trans./Warehousing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-78.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>-14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, Insurance, &amp; Real Estate (FIRE)</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-78.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; Business Services</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>-70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin., Waste Man. &amp; Remediation</td>
<td>1,342</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>-90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational &amp; Health Services</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure &amp; Hospitality</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-96.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>2,739</td>
<td>4,678</td>
<td>4,555</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4,931</td>
<td>5,618</td>
<td>5,021</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OntheMap, U.S. Census Bureau; Gruen Gruen + Associates

“Other than government employment, all other sectors have experienced large decreases in employment from 2006 to 2014.”
As previously mentioned, only one sector - government – has expanded its share of the number of jobs in Downtown. Note that the estimate of government employment of approximately 4,500 jobs may be overstated if Johnson County reports all of its employment at its downtown headquarters/administrative building location even if some employees are working day-to-day elsewhere in the county. Even if not all government employees are located in Downtown, government employment remains a large share of the downtown employment base. Government employment grew while financial, professional, and business service employment declined, the shares have shifted so that government employment makes up nearly 91 percent of Downtown’s job base in 2014. Finance, insurance, and real estate and professional services sectors are associated with office space consumption. These sectors experienced downward shifts as described in detail below.

Table 2.3 shows the distribution of employment for Downtown Olathe and the City of Olathe for 2014. While government employment makes up less than eight percent of employment citywide, it comprises 91 percent of downtown employment. All other employment sectors comprise less than 10 percent of Downtown employment. The largest employment sectors in the City of Olathe – educational and health services, professional and business services, and retail trade – are concentrated outside of Downtown Olathe.

```
FIGURE 2.3 Number of Jobs Downtown and in the City of Olathe by Sector, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>DOWNTOWN</th>
<th>CITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources &amp; Construction</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing, Trans. &amp; Warehousing</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Activities</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; Business Services (1)</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational &amp; Health Services</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure &amp; Hospitality</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Including Administration & Waste Management Services.
Source: OntheMap, U.S. Census Bureau; Gruen Gruen + Associates
```

“Government employment makes up less than eight percent of employment citywide, it comprises 91 percent of downtown employment.”
Composition of Building Space

Table 2.4 summarizes the amount of building space for uses including commercial retail, commercial office, and residential uses for the entire study area, as defined by RDG Planning + Design.

In addition to approximately 702,600 square feet of Johnson County and City of Olathe government building space, a total of nearly 1.2 million square feet of building space is located within the broader definition of the Downtown. Even with the expanded definition of Downtown, government uses make up over one-third of the Downtown’s space inventory. Multi-family residential and educational uses, collectively, comprise another third of the study area’s building space although all of this space is located beyond the downtown core.

Retail and office space other than in government buildings comprise only approximately 13 percent of the inventory. The majority of this space is located in the downtown core. Service uses which consist of auto body shops, bail bonds offices, banks, funeral homes, and dentists/doctors comprise about six percent of the inventory (and use very different types of space). Some of these uses are located in space both in the core and transition areas of Downtown. “Entertainment” and eating and drinking places including a fine arts center and four food and drink establishments comprise less than one percent of the inventory. These uses are located in the downtown core.

A major conclusion drawn from the review of land use and employment conditions is that the Downtown has not shared in retail and office space growth proportionally as much as the newer centers providing both shopper/comparison goods, convenience/necessity goods, and office space which have developed outside of Downtown. These newer centers and office buildings have located along or near the interstate highways, closer to where many of the newer residential neighborhoods have developed. Three commercial areas outside of Downtown contain about over two million square feet of regional, community, and neighborhood-serving retail space. These retail/commercial nodes along the 119th Street corridor, K-7 Highway and Santa Fe Street, and East Santa Fe Street and Blackbob Road contain many of the leading retailers and restaurants across most retail categories. Corporate office locations in Olathe include Corporate Ridge Office Park, a 100-acre business park at K-10 Highway and Ridgeview Road near the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center and HealthRidge Fitness Center.

### FIGURE 2.4: Downtown Building Space Characteristics for Private and Public Uses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Square Feet</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>14,640</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>229,276</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service²</td>
<td>115,407</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating and Drinking and Entertainment³</td>
<td>15,832</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government⁴</td>
<td>702,597</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multifamily⁵</td>
<td>261,025</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational⁶</td>
<td>412,977</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Industrial</td>
<td>38,981</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other⁶</td>
<td>92,448</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,883,183</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Excludes a 195,780-square-foot parking structure owned by City of Olathe at Cherry and Loula Streets.
(2) Service uses include auto body shops, bail bond offices, banks, funeral homes, dentists/doctors. These services use very different types of space.
(3) Includes Chestnut Fine Arts Center and food/drink establishments.
(4) Includes the City Hall, County Admin. Building, library, post office, and County Courthouse and Jail.
(5) Multi-family and educational uses located beyond the downtown core.
(6) Other includes places of worship and social service facilities.

Source: RDG Planning & Design; Gruen Gruen + Associates
Real Estate Market Conditions

Table 2.5 summarizes the inventory of larger commercial and office buildings in Downtown. Collectively these six buildings comprise nearly 105,000 square feet of space, or approximately 46 percent of the downtown office space inventory. Over 200,000 square feet of commercial and office space is located in the Downtown, exclusive of office space for and owned by government entities. The inventory contains a high proportion of small buildings.

The largest private office building in Downtown, Park Cherry at 100 East Park Street, sits across from the Johnson County Courthouse. The property’s long-time owner reported occupancy at 96 percent, up from 70 percent three years ago. The representative indicated the building has slowly refilled over the past few years but rents have been lowered to attract new tenants to back fill the vacant space. More recent tenants include an architect, accountant, non-profit, IT firm, and an ultrasound and baby boutique business on the ground floor which replaced the long-term bank tenancy. Over the past 10 years, the property owner reports attorneys have relocated out of Downtown. While still extremely important to the building’s tenant base, the lure of the Courthouse is not as strong of locational inducement as it was in the past. The building competes with other Downtown office buildings for users. Most tenants originate from the Downtown. Asking rents for the office space are approximately $14.00 per square foot on a gross basis. Net rents (excluding taxes, insurance, and common area maintenance charges) are around $10 per square foot. Many of the tenants reported being attracted to the building due to its convenient location by the Courthouse, proximity to residential locations, low price, and attractiveness.

The 130 North Cherry building is a 22,000-square-foot building owned by the partner of a law firm which has moved out of the building. The building currently contains approximately 10,000 square feet of vacant space. According to the leasing agent, the building is primarily tenanted with small, price sensitive, one-person law offices which need quick access to the County Courthouse. Larger firms vacated the building to be south of Downtown and closer to the residences of the lawyers and other firms and services. The leasing agent indicated that few users have looked at the vacant space. The leasing agent is starting to market the building to non-attorneys but interior improvements are built specifically for law offices. Asking rents for the office space are approximately $18.00 per square foot on a gross basis. The leasing agent indicated rent is negotiable depending on tenant finish.

The 121 East Park building contains approximately 11,500 square feet of space and will soon be only 60 percent leased. A 2,000-square-foot dental office is leaving and one other 2,000-square-foot space is vacant. According to the leasing agent, a personal service provider whose business does not rely on foot traffic has expressed interest in leasing space and is attracted due to the low rent. Most potential users are from Downtown and only look within the Downtown if leasing space. Few firms outside of Downtown have expressed interest in relocating to Downtown. Asking rent is $17 per square foot on a gross basis.

Discussions with another leasing agent for a small office building in Downtown Olathe who is marketing a small vacant space in the building on Kansas Avenue indicated that the highest rent location for office space in Downtown Olathe is the Park Cherry Building and the adjacent office building at 130 North Cherry. According to the leasing agent, Downtown Olathe’s office vacancy has increased and rents have declined over time as many attorneys and title companies have moved out of Downtown. The building in which the leasing agent is currently marketing had obtained rents of about $12 per square foot (gross) in the past but would now likely obtain rents of around $9 per square foot (gross). Most office space outside of the larger, nicest buildings described above are unable to obtain gross annual rents of more than $10 per square foot.

### FIGURE 2.5: Inventory of Commercial and Office Building Space (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Name</th>
<th>Square Feet</th>
<th>Estimated Occupancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Park Cherry, 100 E. Park</td>
<td>28,361</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130 N. Cherry</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Square, 110 S. Cherry</td>
<td>19,532</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121 E. Park</td>
<td>11,537</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centennial, 131-141 S. Kansas</td>
<td>12,540</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114-124 N. Cherry</td>
<td>10,870</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>104,840</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Includes buildings above 10,000 square feet of space and non-government office use buildings.

Source: RDG Planning & Design; Gruen Gruen + Associates
Factors that Encourage Demand or Locational Strengths
The interviews and field research indicate the primary factors that encourage or could be cultivated to encourage demand or represent competitive advantages of Downtown include the following:

- The presence of several historic buildings provides the downtown core with physical character. Their pedestrian-friendly layout and feeling also creates opportunities for a walkable district, including being within walking distance of many of the historic neighborhoods surrounding downtown.

- The Johnson County Courthouse (and the new planned Courthouse) provides several advantages. First, it creates some spillover demand for eating and drinking establishments from employees and visitors. Second, its proximity can be valuable for some firms, including office users such as attorneys, though its importance in this aspect has diminished over time. Finally, it provides an anchor institution for Olathe’s government district which can support other government offices in addition to related uses. These may include various government functions not currently located downtown.

- Low rents and building values can be used to include unique and interesting retail, eating and drinking, entertainment, or other entrepreneurs to locate Downtown. Often these sorts of spaces also may attract artists.

- The downtown is a relatively centrally location for the City of Olathe. This makes it an easy drive to many of the more than 130,000 residents.

- Olathe has been growing at a rapid pace. The growth of population and businesses provide a potential market that could be encouraged to visit, reside, work in, or recreate and shop in the historic city center if downtown has offerings appealing to the residents and businesses.

- Downtown Olathe has good visibility and access along the heavily trafficked Santa Fe Street (up to 26,000 average daily trips). In addition to the potential to divert travelers along Santa Fe Street to downtown, institutions like the Millcreek Learning Center and Kansas School for the Deaf, in addition to events like Old Settlers Days, also help attract visitation downtown.
Factors that Discourage Demand or Locational Weaknesses

The following factors discourage the attraction and retention of demand and represent primary disadvantages associated with the location and make-up of the Downtown:

- Downtown – as it is now defined – is too large and spread out;

- Downtown currently lacks a concentration of major private sector office space users or an established base of market rate residential units with middle- and higher-income households. Additional households with disposable income for entertainment, dining out, and retail purchases, in conjunction with private sector employment, would augment demand for goods, services, and activities Downtown. The combination of market rate housing, private offices, and the services and retail/restaurant uses they would help support, would also improve the image of Downtown;

- Downtown does not currently contain a critical mass of private office space users, office space inventory, and set of support services and amenities that corporate and major professional service office space users require. Much of the existing office space inventory is not responsive to preferences of contemporary major office space users. Downtown does not provide agglomeration advantages for major office space users;

- The perception of a parking shortage is problematic. It is an American truism that wherever the downtown, the amount or placement of parking is almost always a tenant complaint. The interviews with merchants and office space users were no exception. However, the perception of a parking shortage appears to relate to customers or visitors wanting to park immediately in front of or adjoining their primary destinations, not always being able to do so, and concerns about the loss of public parking due to redevelopment (given many properties do not control parking for tenants and visitors). Based on our inspections and interviews, we believe the primary underlying factor accounting for much of the perception of a parking shortage is the combination of an extensively spread-out Downtown, a relatively unattractive physical environment, limited unique, interesting, and fun commercial tenancies, and a high proportion of government uses in buildings not conducive to encouraging strolling and browsing. As a result, portions of the Downtown are not well linked together by activated street level activity, including interesting storefronts. Therefore, visitors are less willing to walk more than short distances or to multiple destinations; and

- Downtown lacks a critical mass of synergistic, well-linked, and integrated retail, cultural, and other attractions and sufficiently frequent events/programs needed to induce multi-purpose or frequent trips from a wide area. This is partly explained by the high proportion of government offices in Downtown. Downtowns (Riverside, California and Tucson, Arizona to list two other examples) with an extremely high proportion of public sector employees support a lower level of retail and entertainment-related activity than do downtowns with a higher proportion of private sector workers.
Part 3: Assessment and Challenges

An objective assessment of the factors contributing to a successful downtown is needed to establish a framework and strategy for improving the downtown. It initially involves building on strengths the downtown already possesses rather than concentrating on improving its weakest attributes.

- **Downtown boundary definition too spread-out.** The boundary of Downtown Olathe is too spread-out and extensive with uses such as auto body shops, a plumbing shop, and a brick, tile, and stone store that should not be in a healthy, vital downtown. Going forward, build upon strengths in a concentrated, compact area. Development and redevelopment projects too far away from each other and from the healthiest part of Downtown will not readily facilitate private redevelopment in between.

- **Perceptions of safety concerns and social dislocations.** The interviews and inspections of Downtown suggest perceptions of safety concerns exist. Many of the interviewed office space users expressed concern about parking their automobiles in the parking garage at Cherry and Loula Streets and try to retrieve their cars before evening to move them if they stay Downtown past normal working hours. The presence of the jail house, bail bondsman offices, charity thrift stores, and homeless shelters do not positively brand the Downtown.

- **Parking separates active uses, creates spatial discontinuities, and contributes to limited street-level activity.** The parking structures and seven surface parking lots in Downtown separate active uses and serve as symbolic or actual physical barriers to adjoining uses. The large number of public sector buildings, ground-floor building space occupied by bail bondsman, title companies, and attorneys, parking garages and parking lots, limited unique and desirable tenancies, and few ‘attractions’ discourage street level activity.

- **Public sector comprises majority of downtown employment.** Downtowns with a high proportion of public sector employees generally support a lower level of retail and restaurant activity than those with a high proportion of private sector workers. According to the US Census Bureau, public sector workers make-up 91 percent of the downtown labor force, a very high proportion. The number of private sector establishments and associated private employment has declined over time so that Downtown has become less diverse. Law firms, for example, have moved away from Downtown because electronic court filing reduces the need for many firms.
to have their main offices near a court house and firms prefer to be located closer to residential bases or a critical mass of office space and specialized support services and amenities not available Downtown. Other than government, all other economic sectors have experienced large decreases in downtown employment from 2006 to 2014.

High vacancy in the Downtown’s larger office buildings and low rents indicate that demand is low for office space. Property owners and their representatives, leasing agents, and brokers reported that many attorneys and title companies relocated out of the Downtown and that rents have declined over time. Currently, Downtown office space obtains low net annual rents of $10 per square foot or less.

- **Relatively few unique desirable retail and restaurant tenancies.** The Downtown contains relatively few unique desirable retail and restaurant tenancies. The interviews suggest that traditional retail and eating and drinking establishments have declined over time. Excluding the subsidized cafeteria in the County Administration Building, the Downtown includes only two coffee shops and two restaurants which lack full kitchens. The combination of limited street level activity and relatively few unique, interesting, and fun stores and restaurants contributes to the perceived parking shortage because of the lack of multiple destinations to walk to once Downtown. Customers want to park as close to the specific store (or more frequently service) that they want to visit so they can most efficiently visit and then leave.

  Downtowns thrive when they have many small firms, market rate housing, a diverse set of economic activities, and high levels of entrepreneurship. This in turn supports retail, restaurants, and cultural activities. One result of lessened competition for restaurants and retailers that remain is less pressure to stay open, provide stellar service, and respond to consumer preferences (such as to serve coffee quickly or provide fresh food).

- **Limited cultural and recreational attractions.** Only one of Olathe’s cultural and recreation attractions is located near the downtown core. Chestnut Fine Arts Center is on the east side of the downtown core, across from City Hall. The Buddy Rogers and Family’s Playhouse which houses the Olathe Civic Theater Association is located on Loula Street, east of the downtown core. The Olathe farmer’s market is located outside of Downtown. The City of Olathe hosts a free summer concert series which is also located in a park outside of the Downtown.

- **Limited market rate residential units.** GG+A has long advocated for subsidized housing for low-and moderate-income households and for the provision of social services. It is important, however, to recognize the conflict in placing such housing and social services in Downtown with attracting to the downtown office space users, higher income households, or nonresident visitors with ample choices on where to locate their workplaces, residences, and how to spend their leisure time. The downtown core currently lacks high quality, market rate multi-family uses.

- **Conference, meeting, and hotel space located outside Downtown.** To the extent a community is large enough and well-located to serve conference and meeting space demands, such space Downtown can help support overnight visitation and a downtown’s other retail, restaurant, and cultural facilities. A new 200-room hotel and 25,000-square-foot conference center, Olathe Embassy Suites and Conference Center opened in 2016 outside of Downtown in the 100-acre Corporate Ridge Office Park at K-10 Highway and Ridgeview Road. Interviews suggested that hotel developments are likely to be located closer to major highways and concentrations of corporate office space than in Downtown.
Downtown’s current primary function. These characteristics suggest that downtown currently serves primarily as a government campus for administrative, justice, and incarceration purposes. It does not function as a downtown for which residents and visitors come for entertainment, recreation, dining, and shopping or for which businesses and employees come to benefit from agglomeration advantages. A representative of a large business in Olathe vividly summed up the general perception of downtown when he said “I only come downtown to pay parking tickets.”

Nature and sequence of development, redevelopment, and demand attraction. Olathe as a whole has seen vast growth in the recent past, including a population increase exceeding 35 percent from 2000 to 2010. This has fed economic activity in Olathe, a process expected by the Mid-America Regional Council to continue with nearly 30,000 new jobs anticipated in 2040. However, most of Olathe’s growth has occurred on vacant land and in new commercial areas around the city’s perimeter instead of as redevelopment in the city’s downtown. As a result, Downtown Olathe’s employment and built environment have not shared in as much of this growth as might be expected.

At this stage of downtown’s evolution, potential office space demand from private office space users as opposed to government or non-profit government related uses (such as Chamber of Commerce or other economic development and related mission driven users of space) is likely to be complementary to retail and residential uses. Since the advent of the internet, proximity to the courthouse is less necessary than in the past, though it still attracts some general, financial, and legal offices. However, creating a more desirable and vital environment will allow the downtown to attract more service and commercial office-oriented firms seeking the ambiance, proximity to services, and restaurants, as well as convenience to where they live at prices below conventional suburban office parks and commercial corridors.

Unlike the traditional model or sequence of development, office space development will not be likely to be the initial catalyst for the re-branding of Downtown. “
Recommendations

1. **Add services that will help government entities retain and attract talent while appealing to private employers and employees.** Downtown primarily functions today as a center for government administration and justice. Recognizing this, downtown governmental entities should work together to retain and attract talent by encouraging a fitness center, a wellness center, and a day-care center to locate in the Downtown. Making such services available to private employers, employees, and residents to the extent possible would also be beneficial. A representative of Olathe Health indicated a small clinic could provide wellness services Downtown.

To quantify the potential demand for child-care from government workers, a survey of government workers should be conducted to find out:

- Whether and if so the numbers of workers that have children in relevant age categories;
- Whether households currently use child care assistance on weekdays;
- The extent to which workers utilizing services are satisfied with them;
- Factors important to making the child care assistance decision; and
- The willingness to pay for services.

For the nearest child-care facilities, interviews could be conducted with the operators of the facilities to learn the following:

- The primary geographic area from which the centers attract customers;
- The areas or facilities with which centers compete;
- The occupancy levels of the centers;
- Pricing for the services provided; and
- Whether the facilities currently serve children of government workers.

The results of the survey and market research could help evaluate the demand for child-care services and help attract child-care service operators. (Similar surveys could test demand for fitness or wellness services).

“Downtown governmental entities should work together to retain and attract talent...”
2. **Survey downtown workers to identify demand for downtown housing.**
   Downtown workers will likely provide the initial demand for downtown housing. Conducting a survey will determine demand in addition to information on demographic characteristics, current housing patterns, willingness to live downtown, and preferences for housing, products, and pricing. Government workers are an important component of this as they comprise 91 percent of downtown employment. We recommend that the survey include provisions for ascertaining respondents’ willingness to participate in a focus panel. This could provide additional information prior to completing final design plans for any residential developments or product features to maximize market responsiveness and competitiveness.

   At this time, the importance of creating market rate housing in Downtown relates less to potential market demand than it does to the establishment of a desirable locational image – that it is hip or chic to live downtown. To attract households able to pay market rates, however, requires reasonable expectations of the targeted households that the downtown is evolving into the center of cultural, entertainment, and recreational activities.

3. **Encourage culinary program to locate in downtown core.** Encourage Olathe Public Schools Culinary Arts Program, Johnson County Community College, and Kansas State University Olathe to place a culinary arts program downtown that would include providing public food service at least certain work week days when school is in session. Identify if such a program could provide training to and part-time labor for downtown eating and drinking establishments and potentially serve as an incubator for new concepts.

4. **Attract convenience store and eating, drinking, and entertainment.** Restaurants and eating and drinking places do better if grouped together. The intersection of Cherry and Park Streets in the downtown core provides one opportunity with two coffee shops and a restaurant, while another is on Santa Fe Street where the high traffic counts will help provide customer traffic to support retail tenants and appeal to residents and office-space using businesses. Note that the Santa Fe Street location would compete with the downtown core for sales. Additional restaurants and entertainment opportunities, particularly those that occur at night, will also enrich Downtown Olathe’s image as more than just a government center and will likely be able to share parking with complementary day-time uses. At this stage in the evolution of downtown, the operations of most eating, drinking, or entertainment concepts will likely need to be subsidized. It is important that commercial enterprises provide quality services that offer a unique experience unavailable elsewhere.

   To enhance the appeal of the downtown to the primary sources of housing demand and office space users, it will be necessary to increase the core’s selection of dining and entertainment options. Eating and drinking places are frequently a major component of the enhancement of mixed-use agglomerations that successful downtowns comprise. A variety of additional food uses, including take-out restaurants, which typically have lower parking requirements than full-service restaurants, would serve both the employment- and household-based markets. Eating and drinking places provide lunch- and dinner-time traffic that can help support retail and appeal to office tenants. The Kansas Coffee Company, a sit-down coffee house that provides free WIFI Internet, is an example of a use that relates well to a consumer shift to making the most efficient use of time.

   While the downtown cannot support a full-service grocery, or at this time a specialty grocer like a Trader Joe’s, an effort should be made to attract (and financially subsidize support if needed) a convenience store and a deli that offer organic produce and takeout.

5. **Reevaluate Farmer’s Market.** Investigate the potential for moving the existing farmer’s market from Stagecoach Park and Black Bob Park back to Downtown or developing a farmer’s market that would appeal to employees, households, and visitors seeking fun and unique experiences, in addition to filling the void created by an absence of a grocery store. This may require creating or updating a business plan which may need to include an identification of an appropriate structure, directors, staff and legal entity for developing and operating a sustainable farmer’s market downtown. Part of this initial evaluation and planning should include an identification of potential qualified vendors offering a variety of products (e.g. fresh and prepared foods, fruits and vegetables, herbs and spices, candy, flowers, cheese, baked goods, honey, and handicrafts). A farmer’s market would also represent one approach for incubating new retail and services businesses for the downtown. Co-location or adjacency to a venue for other downtown programming or services such as concerts, performances, or cooking demonstrations (from the suggested culinary program) would be mutually reinforcing and help build critical mass.

6. **Work with existing businesses and property owners.** Current downtown businesses and property owners have remained supportive of efforts to improve Downtown Olathe. Creating partnerships with these local individuals and groups will help the City identify and implement policies and incentives to rehabilitate buildings, attract and retain tenants, and build density downtown.
7. **Attract destination businesses and conduct annual contest to foster unique and experiential concepts downtown.** Under current conditions, most retail and other commercial businesses will locate downtown because of the lower costs for space compared to competing options. Downtown will likely need to attract local entrepreneurs as opposed to regional and national credit tenancies which prefer standard retail center locations available near the Downtown (such as the Santa Fe/135th Street corridor east of I-35 and Santa Fe and Parker Streets west of downtown). Destination businesses - those with a reputation or following that do not depend upon customer foot traffic and spillover from adjoining stores - are most likely to pioneer a downtown location. For example, downtown already has destination commercial businesses including a jewelry store whose customer base extends well beyond downtown, an ultrasound and infant clothes and gift store which attracts expectant mothers and their families from a wide area, as well as Junque Drawer, an artisan boutique. A home decor store long based in Olathe would also consider a location in downtown because it is close to its existing location, it already has a large customer base that will follow the store to a new location, it wishes to avoid higher costs of standard centers, and it prefers a unique building.

Hold and publicize an annual contest to attract independent, unique retail, restaurant, and other experiential concepts to available space in buildings. Under this approach, aspiring business people complete applications and business plans, which are reviewed by a panel of experts, the winners of which are given attractive terms for leases or “free rent” for a year and abated municipal fees. The idea is to incubate and grow the kinds of unique businesses not readily found in standard shopping centers.

8. **Attempt to reduce the negative impacts of parking lots and structures not integrated into the urban fabric.** The existing parking lots and parking structures disrupt linkages and pedestrian flow between uses. Attempt to introduce design fixes for parking facilities to avoid the creation of “dead space” to adjoining sidewalks and surrounding parking. A library kiosk for book and video/CD pick-up and drop-off, a reading room with magazines and newspapers, or a police branch are a few examples of how to use the ground floor of the garage to activate the space in the absence of robust commercial space demand (and provide a greater sense of safety and security).
“The guy who takes a chance, who walks the line between the known and unknown, who is unafraid of failure, will succeed.”

-Gordon Parks
STRATEGIC PLANNING

The plan’s concepts flow from the opinions and perceptions of those who best know Downtown Olathe – the residents, business owners, and others who work or invest their time and capital in downtown. This chapter summarizes the public input process and key takeaways from the activities.

Public engagement is one of the most important pieces of planning, and as such, is carried throughout the entire planning process. While participation typically focuses on business and property owners, every resident of Olathe has a compelling interest in the heart of the city. For that reason, they also were asked for their ideas and opinions about Downtown. Components of the public engagement process included:

- **Steering Committee.** The steering committee met at strategic milestones during the project. First meeting in February, the committee established principles and objectives for the study and refined plan objectives, in addition to providing direction and review during the process. Those in the committee were instrumental in preparing the plan.

- **Technical Committee.** The project team met with staff on a regular basis via phone, webcast, and on-site meetings. Both this group of individuals and the steering committee is recognized in the front of the plan for their time and dedication to the Envision Olathe planning process.

- **Stakeholder Interviews.** Stakeholder focus groups provided several days of discussions about the project area, its dynamics, and potential future directions. Students, neighbors, property owners, and businesses all participated. Several individual interviews provided a more in-depth investigation of the community, including people’s opinions about their special issues and challenges.

Figure 3.1: Project Timeline
Online Engagement. The planning process included the development of a project website to act as a platform for the project, to provide updates of the planning process, to make the process publicly accessible, and to help brand the project. In the process, over 850 excited respondents shared their ideas, concepts, and feedback. Online engagement included a community questionnaire to gauge people’s perspective about downtown.

Kick-off and Roundtable Event. A community kick-off event took place March 20, 2017. This event included a public presentation discussing the planning process to help the public understand the value of planning for Downtown. Displays at the event encouraged people to identify priorities for the study. This was followed by small round-table group discussions where the public identified community goals, aspirations, and issues with peers.

Design Studio. Three days of on-site design studios were held April 17-19, 2017, to engage the public, stakeholders, and other interested parties in developing concepts for Downtown. Two open sessions encouraged the public to work alongside the project team to illustrate and test their own ideas while developing initial concepts. The studios were led as working sessions, creating ‘works in progress’ which were subsequently fleshed out by the project team.

Open House. A public Open House occurred on October 30th, 2017. The open house provided the public an opportunity to review, comment on, and prioritize the development plan before final development and adoption.

Plan Approval Meetings. The City Council and Planning Commission held public hearings prior to the approval of Envision Olathe. The meetings were held ___.
“Olathe is unique and has potential to be a great city. Let’s make it happen!”
- Survey Respondent
April 2017

The Envision Olathe Downtown Plan builds off the principles and goals of the 2003 plan. The First Principles section of this plan continues the momentum and commitment of past planning efforts by describing what success looks like for the community. These principles emerged from numerous interviews, small group discussions, and meetings.

- Build memories
- Stimulate private investment
- Attract new customers
- Create a vibrant district
- Strengthen neighborhoods
BUILD MEMORIES

We want people to remember Olathe as a special place in their heart. A place where visitors and residents alike want to return to in the future and tell others about their fun experiences. Olathe wants and needs to be a unique experience for all. We’ve described this as placemaking in the past, yet ultimately what we desire is a place that people will remember to tell others about us.
STIMULATE PRIVATE INVESTMENT

We want developers and investors to see where they fit in the bigger picture and that their investment will be matched by the city’s commitment to improve downtown. Special features add sparkle and interest to being part of a place where people want to walk, shop, explore the surrounding parks, and possibly become an entrepreneur. Meanwhile, functional improvements, like pedestrian connections across Santa Fe Street or roadway connections across the railroad, increases confidence by downtowners that the city is committed to making downtown a premier destination in the Kansas City metro.
ATTRACT CUSTOMERS AND VISITORS

We want to attract people to Downtown Olathe for their ordinary needs and spend money on unique purchases. We want to give visitors as many excuses as possible to choose Olathe, more than simply visiting City Hall or County offices. Making Downtown a destination is of critical importance. We also need to make sure they know we exist by collectively marketing the district through campaigns, building improvements, and overall shoulder-to-shoulder teamwork.
CREATE A VIBRANT DISTRICT

We want Downtown Olathe to hum with activity at all times of the day, beyond just traditional office hours. By appealing to people across the city, and by fostering a density of different uses and activities Downtown, people will be excited to live, work and play whenever they can get there. From festivals, to stores, to entertainment, downtown should strive to have all it all as the civic and image center of Olathe.
STRENGTHEN NEIGHBORHOODS

We want our surrounding neighborhoods to benefit from the improvements in Downtown Olathe. The connecting corridors that travel to and through downtown provide an opportunity to integrate the reinvigorated city center with the rest of the community in addition to serving as their own catalysts for renewed development.
Steering and Technical Committees

A Steering Committee of 21 appointed individuals was tasked with providing direction and feedback at critical milestones in the planning process. Events occurred on a near monthly-basis with exception to not meeting in June and July while key redevelopment projects were under review.

- **February**: Identify challenges and opportunities.
- **March**: Participate in Kick-off Event and lead small group discussions.
- **April**: Participate in Design Studio and provide input/feedback.
- **May**: Review preliminary concepts.
- **June-July**: Technical Committee meetings only.
- **August**: Review master plan concepts
- **October-November**: Participate in Open House and review publication.

A Technical Committee, representing various department heads from the city, met on a monthly-basis to review the details of the emerging plan. These discussions were supplemented with near-weekly video conference calls. Guidance from these meetings led to more refined design concepts.

Stakeholder Interviews and Discussion Groups

One-on-one interviews and small-group discussions provided in-depth understanding about downtown, helping the project team understand the district’s perceived opportunities and challenges. In addition, meetings allowed interest groups to share their ideas about strategic directions for Downtown. Altogether, about 50 people participated in these discussions representing interests from developers, real estate agents, business, commissions, K-State, high school students, young professionals, non-profit organizations, event organizers, history, culture, art, parks and recreation. Themes that consistently emerged through the discussions include:

- Olathe should have a downtown image center and community commons like those developing in other metro area communities.
- Downtown should be a living place outside of typical business hours.
- Downtown should reinforce surrounding neighborhoods and vice versa.
- Downtown should be viewed as a destination, a place to bring visitors.
- Downtown should be the heart of the community with activity corridors extending outward.
Online Engagement

Participants engaged the planning process through the website and questionnaire. This publication was posted to the site for feedback, as well.

**Project Website.** A project website was created where residents could learn about the process and share their perceptions and ideas to improve Downtown. The website was promoted through posters, news outlets, e-blasts and social media.

**Community Questionnaire.** The community questionnaire gauged the publics’ interaction with Downtown, in addition to sharing their perceptions and ideas. Over 850 respondents completed the survey in Spring 2017. The full report is in the appendix, while the key trends are summarized below.

- **Customers of Downtown.** Most people who visit downtown are there for the post office, public library, work, or Old Settlers Days. People who visit at least (almost monthly or more) visit for food or drinking, shopping, or parks and recreation.

- **Perception of Downtown.** Generally, participants do not share a positive impression of Downtown. The strength of Downtown’s economy was rated lowest, especially for retailing, food, drink, and tourism. Transportation was rated highest, though transit service is viewed as weak. Most notably, no category had a majority of good or excellent ratings, though pedestrian safety crossings, streetscape and public environment, and directional information were rated the highest.

- **Strategic Directions.** Participants perceive that downtown needs more restaurants, entertainment, and retail businesses. Preserving surrounding historic buildings and adding special events and activities scored well too. Building new housing was viewed as less important, as were better directional information and additional office development.

For ideas, most participants indicated a desire for destinations that were arts, retail, entertainment, or event based. Also, they noted that it should build on Olathe’s history. In addition, they want the district to “feel” welcoming, inviting, and safe. Other ideas for improvement revolved around transportation, specifically improving traffic flow over the railroad tracks or for pedestrians across Santa Fe Street.

Again, more detailed responses are available in the appendix.
Kick-off and Roundtable Event

More than 50 participants attended the event to discuss ideas and projects for improving Downtown face-to-face. Participates separated into small groups with their peers to identify goals, issues, and aspirations for Downtown, then reconvened to share the results with the larger audience. The following responses includes participants’ top priorities for Downtown:

- Improve access to downtown with a focus on bypassing the trains on the BNSF railroad track
- Retain and attract more restaurants, retail, and entertainment establishments to Downtown
- Make Downtown Olathe active outside of traditional business hours, especially after 5pm. This should include adding nightlife to Downtown
- Maintain the heritage of the area while creating Downtown as a destination for Olathans first, and for others interested in an authentic Olathe experience
- Create new quality housing opportunities downtown while expanding upon the diversity of housing types available
- Improve and expand urban parks downtown
- Extend the trail system to connect downtown to broader trail system
- Better advertise Downtown Olathe to build awareness. This should include marketing the improvement that Olathe makes.
- Ensure that City Codes are enforced in Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods to ensure it is an attractive place to live, work, and visit.
- Continue to improve the downtown streetscape, including integral corridors like Kansas Avenue
- Create and refine city incentives to promote economic downtown development
- Ensure that there is adequate parking that is available, well-designed, and convenient for businesses, residents, and visitors.
- As Downtown sees redevelopment, build vertically for retail, residential, and mixed uses to improve the concentration of desirable uses.
Design Studios
Multi-day public design studios took place in Olathe during April. The consultant team then refined these concepts on-site over several days. The plan presented in Chapter 4 reflects and explores the work done in these sessions. During the workshops, public discussion defined the following topics:

- **Improve connectivity across the railroad.** Connectivity for cars, pedestrians, and bicycles can be dangerous and time consuming. Access across the railroad should be relatively easy and should not inordinately disrupt the flow of traffic.

- **Encourage the development of retail that the market can support.** Currently, Downtown consists of mostly government uses with little private commercial activity. Emphasis should be put on fostering private businesses that support this role while providing additional reasons to visit the downtown.

- **Create attractions for downtown.** Downtown has little in the way of attractions and does not function as a comprehensive district that draws visitors. Commercial enterprises should focus on being unique attractions that could bring people to downtown outside of typical business hours and that encourage visitors to explore the district.

- **Develop usable open space that ties into the rest of the district.** Downtown has some open space currently, but it is not well-coordinated or well-utilized. The pieces of the downtown park system should be better tied together, and new open space should be created to provide both an attraction through programmed activities and space for public celebrations.

- **Redevelop sites that could support a higher and better use.** Many sites in Downtown Olathe are underutilized when compared to other downtowns in similar sized cities. Redeveloping these sites could create a more complete district and it allows an opportunity to create a density of activity that could attract new activity.

- **Redevelop Corridors.** Much of the Santa Fe corridor has been redeveloped already, but its streetscape should be completed all the way to I-35. In addition, the Kansas Avenue streetscape project provides an option to increase bicycle connectivity while the Mill Creek corridor could supplement that with pedestrian connectivity.
Open House
In coordination with National Community Planning Month, the City held a public open house on Monday, October 30th. In total, nearly 100 participants attended to learn more about the concepts included in the plan and to provide their feedback. Overall feedback supported concepts in the plan and several subjects were reinforced by the public.

- Make sure adequate parking for existing businesses as redevelopment occurs.
- Study traffic circulation thoroughly so that proposed improvements make the most of the dollars invested.
- Communicate with current property owners as redevelopment occurs so that downtown improvements benefit those who have already invested in the area.
- Implement the plan in a consistent, fair, and realistic manner.

Implementation Workshop
Following months of review and refinement by staff, the plan was submitted to the steering committee for additional feedback. A draft of the plan was later presented at a City Council Workshop on March 20, 2018, and again during an online walkthrough on March 23rd.

Approval Meetings
Final approval for the plan was carried out by the City Council on April 3, 2018.

RESOLUTION FOR ADOPTING PLAN

RESOLUTION NO. 18-1038

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE ENVISION OLATHE DOWNTOWN PLAN UPDATE.

WHEREAS, Envision Olathe has evolved since the original document was written in 2003,

WHEREAS, this living document provides a framework for the city to help us realize our vision and goals for the downtown area; and

WHEREAS, Implementation of several recommendations from the (2003) Envision Olathe Downtown Plan and Streetscape Master Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines (2003) can be seen today in the form of public investments and improvements in Downtown Olathe; and

WHEREAS, Numerous Olathe residents and stakeholders including a Downtown Steering Committee composed of citizens, business owners, and county representatives, and the City’s Downtown Technical Committee contributed to the update process of the Envision Olathe Downtown Plan by attending planning workshops and submitting comments; and

WHEREAS, the updated Envision Olathe Downtown Plan was presented to the City Council at its March 20, 2018 study session; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OLATHE, KANSAS:

SECTION ONE: The Envision Olathe Downtown Plan is hereby adopted as a guideline for the Olathe Planning Commission and the City Council when addressing redevelopment in the downtown area. It shall be considered as a policy guide and may be modified when deemed appropriate.

SECTION TWO: The Envision Olathe Downtown Plan Update should be reviewed annually, and its recommendations may be updated as projects are completed, and downtown conditions change.

ADOPTED by the City Council this 3rd day of April 2018.

SIGNED by the Mayor this 3rd day of April 2018.

ATTEST:

City Clerk
(Seal)

APPROVED AS TO FORM:
“The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity. The fears are paper tigers. You can do anything you decide to do. You can act to change and control your life; and the procedure, the process is its own reward.”

- Amelia Earhart
This chapter integrates the major needs identified during the strategic planning process with the realities of the market to provide key recommendations. Components of this program include:

- **Development Opportunities.** Downtown is the historic center of Olathe’s commercial, civic, and community life. This traditional role makes it especially important as a unique anchor district within the city. However, Downtown also includes land uses that are either functionally obsolete, likely to relocate, or do not achieve full development potential. Identifying sites that can take advantage of Olathe’s rapid growth and expanding demand is an important priority for this plan. Opportunities for development include both public and private projects which will help Downtown become more than a government district.

- **Preservation and Rehabilitation.** Urban renewal eliminated many downtown buildings. The conservation and reuse of Downtown’s existing stock of buildings is an important ingredient of development policy.

- **Mobility and Parking Opportunities.** Streets are the circulation system that link Downtown to the larger community while allowing travel within the district. Because most people arrive by car, parking is fundamental to the mobility system. However, emphasizing multi-modal options to reach Downtown by foot, bike, or transit also allows alternative methods to travel while reducing stress on parking. In addition, a multi-modal system allows people to comfortably walk or bike to multiple destinations after parking.

- **Supporting Corridors.** Downtown is a crossroads for several important transportation corridors which are fundamental to its character. They extend to the broader city, providing a fabric which connects major destinations to Downtown and acting as its gateways.

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**Organization**

The report is organized into four sections, including:

1. **The Program**
2. **System Framework**
3. **Development and Mobility Opportunities**
4. **Connecting Corridors**

**Policy Guidelines.** Decisions affecting Downtown will be made by many different players including public organizations like the City, private property owners, and numerous individuals. These decisions will be made incrementally over time. A key purpose of this plan is to make sure these decisions are well thought out and coordinated. However, Envision Olathe cannot anticipate every project or opportunity, so it is designed with the flexibility to guide multiple alternatives through sound policy.

Many downtown plans include a master plan drawing that provides very specific uses or physical design concepts for their study area. By contrast, the Envision Olathe planning process demonstrated the need for a more nimble plan, capable of remaining relevant and maintaining a meaningful vision for a number of development options and decisions. The next two sections establish a unified program and framework which acts as a high order fabric connecting the numerous flexible site-level decisions. Its key elements include general goals and policies, Downtown districts, and transportation movements.
THE PROGRAM

Envision Olathe creates a feasible and realistic program for development and implementation by combining input from the public with a review of both development trends and market potential.

The downtown vision begins with establishing a program, much like an architectural program for a building project. The program sets forth the ingredients of development for both current and future community needs, pending projects, and other opportunities. The program is comprised of three separate agendas.

Development Agenda

The development agenda includes policies, actions, projects, or opportunities that respond to existing or desirable market demands. It is based on the market analysis and includes ingredients of development for retail, office, residential, and development potential during the planning period.

1. Pending Projects. Several major projects are underway downtown, including the new county courthouse, the investigation of the library’s future needs, and several other proposals such as the potential redevelopment of city-owned sites. Supporting and guiding these proposals to strengthen Downtown is the first and easiest of step in this process.

2. Services to help Downtown employers attract and retain talent. Downtown employers, including the City and County, should encourage commercial uses that retain and attract talent, including a daycare, fitness and/or wellness center, dry cleaning, or other similar services.

3. Convenience, eating, drinking, and entertainment establishments. Some businesses appealing to employees also benefit the surrounding neighborhood, including convenience stores, delis, breweries, and takeout establishments. Additional eating, drinking, and entertainment places should be encouraged Downtown, preferably clustered together to attract traffic. Providing evening activities will further enhance the appeal of Downtown. Incentives may be necessary to start the process. Food trucks are another possibility for providing inexpensive space.
4. **Destination businesses and experiential concepts build memories.** Currently, most businesses locate Downtown due to low rents, which also presents an opportunity to attract entrepreneurs. Holding an annual contest for attractive leases and reduced fees can help entice independent and unique retail, entertainment, and other experiential concepts to available space (especially in public-owned buildings), creating a new draw. This incubates entrepreneurs while providing uses not readily found in standard shopping areas. Destination businesses not reliant on foot or spillover traffic are also good candidates for Downtown Olathe.

5. **Housing options Downtown.** New market rate housing in downtown will create a desirable image and attract more customers for businesses. Attracting households able to pay market rates requires an expectation that Downtown is evolving into a cultural, entertainment, and recreation center. These units could target downtown employees.

6. **Cultural market and culinary program partnership concepts.** Strategic partnerships can also help cultivate activities Downtown. Potentially, the farmer’s market could move back Downtown or another marketplace with a variety of products could help substitute for a grocer. Markets can also incubate new retail and services businesses while reinforcing adjacent Downtown programming venues. Possible partnership opportunities for locating a culinary arts program Downtown that could provide some food service, training, entrepreneurship, and part-time labor for eating and drinking places include Olathe Public Schools Culinary Arts Program, Johnson County Community College, and Kansas State University Olathe.

7. **Artisan units/galleries.** Downtown Olathe strongly support the arts through public art, the Chestnut Performing Arts Center and OCTA, and its other various activities. The City can continue to support the arts by exploring the feasibility of creating an arts village as an attraction unlike anywhere else in the Kansas City metro.
Functional Agenda

The functional agenda includes policies, actions, or projects that improve the circulation, access, utilization, and operations of Downtown. It is largely based on Downtown’s needs for increased connectivity, accessibility, and efficiency.

1. Parking and parking linkages. As land north of Santa Fe is developed, new parking needs to be added to prevent overflow. This must be handled sensitively, and improved pedestrian linkages will be needed across Santa Fe to promote access. More generally, parking needs should be considered both from site and district-wide perspectives to prevent “dead space” and promote walkability. Proper design can help avoid issues and improve adjoining sidewalks by activating spaces, by allowing redevelopment, or by creating interest along edges.

2. Traffic flow and aesthetics on primary corridors. Olathe has invested in important corridors to Downtown like Santa Fe Street. This should continue throughout Downtown and on other corridors like Kansas City Road and Kansas Avenue. These efforts could also expand to include building façades to further generate positive experiences. Enriching the streetscape improves functionality and traffic flow while creating a sense of place, developing a desirable environment, and improving pedestrian and bicycle safety. Continued streetscape work on Kansas Avenue will be central to this.

3. Access across the railroad. A main complaint is access across the railroad. A southern counterpoint to the underpass on Spruce Street could be provided by rerouting Loula under the railroad on a city-owned parking lot. Doing so may provide the depth to allow truck clearance. Active transportation linkages should also be included, while public art can celebrate the movement of the railroad.

4. Connections to and from Downtown. Downtown does not feel well-connected to important activity centers in Olathe. Gaps in vital connecting corridors like Santa Fe Street, Kansas City Road, and Kansas Avenue should be reduced or eliminated to provide better access to important sites such as the Community Center and Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop and Farm to the northeast, the Great Plains Mall site to the south, and the I-35 exit to the east. Addressing the Kansas City Road/Poplar Street intersection may also help.

5. Alternative transportation access. Downtown has sidewalks and some bicycle and transit access but could better connect to the multi-modal transportation network. First, bicycle infrastructure on Kansas Avenue and pedestrian routes along Mill Creek could link to the trail system, while pedestrian paths could join green spaces, Mill Creek, and opportunity sites parallel to Santa Fe. Crossings over the railroad and Santa Fe also need to be improved with possibilities at Kansas Avenue and Water Street. A transit hub could also bolster transit and multi-modal connections.
Community Agenda

The community agenda includes policies, actions, projects, or initiatives to improve the experience of Downtown. It is based on building desirable outcomes for participants and reinforcing a positive image of the district.

1. **Building memories for customers.** Downtown should be the beating heart of Olathe and central to the image of the city. To do this, Olathe needs to transform the mundane into the memorable through attractions, places, and activities that build memories for residents and visitors alike.

2. **Public spaces for community activities and attracting users.** Downtown has some good existing parks, but they are often underutilized. These spaces should be activated year-round by adjacent uses and appropriate regularly programmed events on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis to attract users. Improving connectivity between parks, Mill Creek, and the future Johnson County Square can further facilitate use.

3. **Investing in neighborhoods.** Downtown’s built environment is in relatively good condition, but surrounding housing shows evidence of distress. Deteriorating properties should be targeted for preservation, reuse, or redevelopment to encourage reinvestment by surrounding owners.

4. **Celebrating Olathe’s past and present.** Olathe has unique features thanks to its history as an independent city with a separate downtown. Its railroad can be utilized by exploring its relationship with Downtown. Furthermore, Olathe is diverse, which can be leveraged for unique cultural experiences. In addition, the Kansas School for the Deaf and Museum of Deaf History, Arts, and Culture also provide another novel angle.

5. **Continuing to encourage the arts.** Arts are prominent in Downtown Olathe, both performing and visual, including displays around its parks and public buildings, and through institutions like the Chestnut Fine Arts Center and the Olathe Civic Theatre Association. The arts should continue to be leveraged to create desirable attractions in Downtown and to improve the public environment. This could be especially powerful along the railroad tracks through mobile art installations.

6. **Perceptions of safety and security.** Many Downtown users express concerns about their safety and security while there. The presence of the jail house, bail bondsman offices, charity thrift stores, and homeless shelters do not positively brand the Downtown. Bringing more people and businesses downtown will help improve those perceptions.
SYSTEM FRAMEWORK
Envision Olathe organizes Downtown into several discrete districts, each with its own development opportunities, which are all connected by an overarching and interconnected set of proposed transportation and public space networks.

Downtown contains large areas in public ownership which provides multiple opportunities for redevelopment. In addition, the City and County have reinvested heavily in Downtown through streetscape, infrastructure, and park projects and will continue major investments including the new courthouse. As these projects continue, the City can reinforce Downtown’s historic role as the beating heart of the community while improving the livability of the surrounding area.

District Framework
The district framework uses the structure of the study area to provide context for the individual development ideas presented in this chapter. These opportunities are organized by the five individual districts depicted in Map 4.1, including:

- **Civic Center.** This area should be improved and reinforced as the civic heart of the community while utilizing the space beyond business hours or special events.
- **Community Commons.** Prime land in this area should be redeveloped, including the downtown library and post office sites, to build residential density, appeal to downtown users, and expand commercial offerings.
- **Park North.** This area should build upon its historic character to create destinations and density Downtown while better utilizing existing space.
- **Kansas Avenue.** This area should better join the Kansas Avenue corridor into the fabric of Downtown while improving access for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles.
- **Eastgate.** This area should integrate destinations along Kansas City Road with those Downtown by improving their connections.

Mobility Framework
Downtown Olathe primarily has a traditional street grid system which provides much of the character and function for Downtown. It establishes regular block length and building footprints which provides many routes for people to choose from whether by car, bike, or on foot. However, some specific barriers need to be addressed. The plan identifies specific opportunities to improve circulation and access, including potential improvements such as:

- Creating an underpass under the railroad for Loula Street
- Creating a roundabout where Kansas City Road and Poplar Street intersect
- Creating a bicycle pathway on Kansas Avenue from Dennis Avenue to the Northgate Trail by the Olathe Memorial Cemetery
- Creating a trail along Mill Creek
- Creating pedestrian and bicycle connections throughout the downtown district

These opportunities are displayed in Map 4.2 and further explored throughout this chapter.

Public Space Framework
In addition, existing and future public spaces, including parks, plazas and trails, should have a cohesive and complete set of connections to facilitate better movement within and between them. The connectivity of these areas can also be seen in Map 4.2.
Map 4.1: District Framework
- Green Network
- Existing Path Network
- Existing Bike Network

Map 4.2: Mobility and Public Space Framework
- Street Closure
- Vehicle Route Change
- Existing Path Network
- Proposed Path Network
- Enhanced Crossing
- Existing Bike Network
- Proposed Bike Network

Map 4.2: Mobility and Public Space Framework
DEVELOPMENT AND MOBILITY OPPORTUNITIES

Envision Olathe approaches its development plan by exploring possibilities for redevelopment and suggesting patterns to help unite each site to its surrounding context, while maximizing outcomes.

Several sites in Downtown represent candidates for new development. Some are publicly-owned and could be redeveloped for private use. Others are privately-owned and could be redeveloped to maximize the yield of the site. Property owners and developers, in responding to the development concepts, may take different, equally valid approaches to opportunity sites. Therefore, the plan explores possibilities for redevelopment and suggests patterns that help unite each site with its surrounding context, while maximizing outcomes.

The section explores the development potential of these opportunity sites, including alternatives for development, redevelopment, or reuse. The concepts are just that: concepts—ideas that present scenarios for future change. Map 4.3 shows candidate sites for redevelopment, including:

a. Johnson County Courthouse
b. Courthouse Square
c. Northwest Lot Redevelopment
d. Chestnut Lot Site
e. Community Commons Blocks
f. Park North
g. Mill Creek Environments
h. South Kansas Avenue Redevelopment
i. Brickyard Reuse/Redevelopment
j. Eastgate Reuse/Redevelopment
k. Other opportunities
Map 4.3: Opportunity Sites

Study Area

Opportunity Area
JOHNSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

The proposed location of the new Johnson County Courthouse is west of Olathe City Hall, east of Kansas Avenue, and north of Santa Fe Street. The concepts presented in this plan do not represent planned development, but rather possible scenarios for strengthening the relationship between the courthouse and its downtown environs. It should be viewed as a framework for influencing the building’s orientation on the site and nearby parking.

Courthouse Building Program

The preliminary building program for the Johnson County Courthouse includes a footprint of about 64,000 square feet on the main level with seven stories (each level having different footprints). Map 4.4 shows the buildable area that provides the necessary 50’ setback for effective site security. The building’s envelope is imagined to fit within this area. The schedule for retaining a design/build firm began in August. Design and construction of the project should be complete by 2021.

Courthouse Site Design Principles

The schedule for designing the courthouse and the publication of this plan is timely. This plan identifies a set of principles that emerged through the planning process that should be considered while designing the building and site. These principles intend to advise administrators and designers of the courthouse when preparing concepts for development and will help address some issues that the building may face.

COURTHOUSE SITE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

COMPATIBLE
The new courthouse must be compatible with surrounding buildings and the neighborhood. Its proposed location will demand that the building be sensitive to its residential context. Careful attention is needed in terms of scale, setbacks, viewsheds, security, buffering, and lighting. The same applies to its parking; however, its location demands even more care in terms of security, aesthetics, and access.

SECURE
Security is one of the primary concerns of the courthouse design. However, it should not come at the expense of other factors on this list. This project needs to focus on how security measures can be integrated without compromising aesthetics or impinging on its residential neighbors.

COHESIVE
The courthouse should complement City Hall, creating a cohesive aesthetic. The buildings should be distinct in style but also work together to create a common vision for Olathe’s governance. This can be done using complementary materials, architectural details, and landscaping.

ATTRACTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE
The new building must be an attractive and accessible addition to Downtown. Modern security demands can often overwhelm public architecture, so careful attention is required to create an inviting and open public face. The building’s architecture and site design must echo concepts of justice and equal access for all, while also complimenting the adjacent Olathe City Hall.

CONNECTED
Ensuring that the new courthouse is connected to the rest of Downtown is of the utmost importance, especially with Santa Fe acting as a barrier to southward movement. Courthouse employees and visitors must feel comfortable accessing the city’s core in order to feed economic activity and vibrancy Downtown.
Compatible

- Position the building as close to Santa Fe Street as possible to frame the frontage with activity. If the courthouse is set too far back, the open space planned for the current courthouse site will make Downtown’s core appear empty, negatively influencing the public’s perception of the area’s activity.

- Buffer parking to be sensitive to the parking lot site’s residential context. For example, parking lot lighting should point down to reduce glare on adjacent homes. Other amenities such as a small open space for stormwater detention could also provide benefits to surrounding property owners.

Secure

- The courthouse requires extensive security and force protection. However, this should not come at the expense of neighborhood aesthetics in terms of scale, setbacks, existing viewsheds, landscaping, buffering, and lighting. Many security barriers exist that both are attractive and secure the perimeter of the building through creative landscaping and hardscaping.

Cohesive

- Locate the courthouse entrance near that of City Hall. This will draw activity to the south end of the site and allow the creation of a central plaza for a common entry. However, it needs to be accomplished in a safe and secure manner. To avoid confusion between the City and the County, clear signage should be provided to distinguish the entrances to the two buildings.

Attractive and Accessible

- Poplar Street may be closed between Kansas Avenue and Cherry Street. This will break circulation in the downtown and direct more traffic onto Spruce Street which already carries heavy volumes due to the underpass. Access needs to be carefully considered before closing this street.

- Force protection should be designed within the landscape and not left to concrete barriers (Jersey barriers). Use (and over use) of concrete barriers distract from the design of the building and gathering space. They can even induce fear by calling attention to the threat. Some examples of landscaped barriers can be seen on the next page.
The building should be designed with 360 degree architecture, meaning each side of the building needs to have architectural interest, detailing, and windows. As a result, there should be no blank walls. Art can also be incorporated to make walking toward the entrance interesting and memorable from any direction.

Connected
Pedestrian access across Santa Fe is a large obstacle between the new courthouse and the remainder of Downtown, including the county administration building. A new tunnel will be built to move prisoners from the jail to the courthouse, so siting the courthouse on the south side of the site reduces the length of the tunnel. During construction, a separate, parallel tunnel could also be constructed that is either enclosed or open. While not currently planned for or part of existing plans, a public tunnel could improve pedestrian connectivity across Santa Fe, while improving public safety and acting as a public amenity with lighting and art.

Courthouse Site Development Concept
Map 4.5 shows the proposed concept for the future Johnson County Courthouse. The courthouse site development concept meets the City’s design principles. Generally, the building sits towards Santa Fe Street with parking in the rear. Individual design features include:

1. **Possible Courthouse Entrance.** This location, congruent with City Hall and near Santa Fe, is the preferred location for the courthouse entrance. The courthouse will have limited entryways to allow proper security measures.

2. **Common Plaza.** Co-locating the courthouse entry with that of City Hall allows the existing community commons to be expanded as a public plaza for the center of government in Olathe. While some of the current public art or fountain may need to be shifted, it can likely be retained in the plaza.

3. **Sculpture Walk.** A sculpture walk extending from the Common Plaza to the primary public parking lot to the north will add interest for pedestrians. It will naturally transition from art on the Common Plaza while providing an attractive mid-block pedestrian connection.

4. **Pedestrian Promenade.** A pedestrian promenade north of the sculpture walk will continue the pedestrian connection. It will primarily serve those walking from the parking lot to the courthouse entrance, but it also helps prevent disconnecting neighborhoods to the north from Downtown. The additional tree cover will also provide buffering benefits from the parking lot for neighbors to the east.

5. **Poplar Street Connection.** Current plans may call for the closure of Poplar Street to through traffic, but if closed, part of the road should be retained for access to the parking lot. An east-west pedestrian connection should also be included to facilitate neighborhood foot traffic.

6. **Protected Surface Parking.** In addition to the general parking lot, the courthouse will require protected surface parking for county vehicles. Providing it close to the courthouse minimizes the impact that protective walls or fencing may have on the surrounding neighbors while also increasing the security of the lot.

7. **Protected Underground Parking.** Current plans for the courthouse include limited parking under the courthouse for judges and other limited individuals. This provides safe travel and parking locations for these individuals. Access would be off of the Poplar Street entry, shared with the protected surface parking.
8. **Runoff Retention Area.** A stormwater retention area could be installed north of the parking lot. This would allow onsite retention of water, mitigating issues associated with larger areas of impervious surfaces. It also would provide a small green space to neighbors and some buffering benefits for neighbors to the north.

9. **Bicycle Pathway.** A bicycle pathway is recommended along Kansas Avenue to connect Downtown Olathe to the broader bicycle system. Most of the route would be completed in conjunction with streetscape improvements, but those efforts will not continue north of Santa Fe. Helping to connect the route from downtown to Kansas City Road and the Northgate Trail, the pathway would continue along Kansas Avenue and could also potentially be accommodated through the courthouse site or along Santa Fe and Spruce Streets.

10. **Spruce Street Underpass Widening.** Once the new courthouse is in operation, the railroad underpass at Spruce Street may need widening. The underpass does not have the clearance for trucks to pass, and lowering the street may not be possible as the slope is already significantly steep to Kansas Avenue. This plan proposes an additional underpass at Loula Street that has a more appropriate slope to provide clearance for trucks. However, design and traffic studies would identify the best course.
COURTHOUSE SQUARE

The current Johnson County Courthouse will be demolished after all courthouse operations transfer to the new building. The County's focus has largely focused on the siting and design of the new courthouse. However, there is acknowledgment that some site improvements are necessary for what will become the demolished area of the current building.

Current Plans

Johnson County’s long-term plan for the site is to retain it for the possibility of a new county building, perhaps a courthouse in 70+ years. Meanwhile, the space is imagined as open space. The size of the future Courthouse Square is relatively large, nearly three acres, in the center of Downtown. If left too plain or unprogrammed, the space will make Downtown - the city's heart - feel empty.

Concepts proposed in this plan for Courthouse Square consider that the design of public spaces have a life cycle, just like courthouses. Parks, pavement, playgrounds, and water features last 20 to 30 years. Landscaping, restrooms, and other structures last 40 to 50 years. Many projects around the nation that were completed by the Civil Conservation Corps (CCC) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the 1930s have undergone two cycles of redesign. Any of the public spaces built in the Kansas City metro area will require reinvestment or complete updating of their programming within 40 years of its construction. Considering the typical life-cycle of public spaces, Courthouse Square could experience two major designs before a new county facility even would be considered for the site.

Future Plans

This plan recommends initiating a planning process focused on the design of Courthouse Square, considering the area from the County Administration Building to the new County Courthouse. Throughout the duration of the planning process, consideration should be given to creating private/public partnerships and launching a fundraising campaign to accomplish big ideas for the space.

Courthouse Square is now home to the Old Settlers Day event, yet the programming needs to expand to include routine activities and events throughout the year. The space could become a catalyst for attracting visitors to Downtown for special occasions, visiting shops, buying a nearby home, or choosing Downtown as a place to open a business.

Concepts

Courthouse Square is relatively large and the programming for the site needs to consider its relationship to the buildings and offices surrounding it. The space has the potential to become an iconic destination, a place where people's identity of the community can be celebrated. It could serve as a tool to showcase to Olatheans the exciting developments occurring Downtown.

This plan presents several demonstration projects that may have some application to Courthouse Square. Some of the initial concepts developed during this plan, shown in Map 4.6, include:

1. Pedestrian pathways. Pathways should lead people between entrances of offices, businesses, and public facilities. Routes can be circuitous, leading people to various attractions that are placed within the park.

2. Public art. Public art should be placed throughout the park. The space could be designed as a large-scale outdoor sculpture park, similar to the Papa John Sculpture Park in Des Moines, Iowa. The sculpture park is a large space in their downtown that is subtly separated into different-sized rooms by changing the landscaping of the area. This breaks up the size of the park and improves its scale and comfort for pedestrians.

3. Santa Fe Street crossing. Pedestrians crossing Santa Fe Street can cross the street at-grade or possibly beneath it. The at-grade crossing could be upgraded with pedestrian countdown timers and better pavement markings.

Alternatively, the County is planning a dedicated pathway for prisoners between the jail and courthouse underneath the street. Envision Olathe proposes a parallel, separated pathway that allows pedestrians convenient access to different parts of Downtown while the prisoner tunnel is constructed. This presents one possible solution to improving comfort and access for county employees and the public to cross Santa Fe Street, identified by participants as an uncomfortable crossing. However, this tunnel is currently not programmed for the existing courthouse project.

The tunnel concept would also provide an opportunity to create an interesting entrance into Courthouse Square at a lower level, allowing elevation to create additional separation and amenities. For example, the tunnel could step up to main park level to create a natural environment for small performances or movies. This could become one feature making for interesting programming opportunities in the long term.
The entrance to the tunnel could be controlled or left open.

4. **Gathering spaces.** Gathering spaces should be programmed for small and large events across the site. The concept represented in this plan includes the existing gazebo and introduces a performance space on the north edge of the site.

5. **Quality furniture & landscaping.** The park should be much more than an open lawn with functional pathways. The space should offer places to sit, rest, and watch people. Benches, lighting, trees, shrubs, and flowers add interest and color to the area.

6. **Management & programming.** The park must be programmed for events to keep it activated. Several strategies are possible. One is to lease out the space to either the City of Olathe or a Downtown partnership for the planned life of the new courthouse building. This allows the County to maintain control over the land for future needs and eliminates the need for the county to maintain, program, or operate the space. Otherwise, the county could partner with the City and other interested groups. So long as the space feels distinct, interesting, and programmable with frequent activities, it will function admirably as a plaza given its central location.

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I enjoy the fountains, sculptures and art installations...they add character and interest to downtown and I’d be thrilled to see more!

- Survey Respondent
NORTHWEST LOT REDEVELOPMENT

The City-owned parking lot at the northwest corner of Kansas Avenue and Santa Fe Street is an ideal site for redevelopment due to its location and visibility. In 2017, the City issued a request for proposals from developers to restore the site into private use, which coincided with the launch of this plan. The City selected a proposal, though the site is still in city ownership as the developer may not move forward.

Map 4.7 shows a concept that would fit the site well: a four-story mixed use building with residential over commercial and parking tucked behind. This is a good fit for the site, given the high traffic volumes along Santa Fe Street and Kansas Avenue and the concurrent redevelopment of the new courthouse to the east. It would be a potential catalyst site to pioneer new development in Downtown Olathe.

Features of this concept include:

- **Commercial (first story).** 30,000 square feet of commercial space could dedicated on the first floor with storefronts along both Santa Fe and Kansas Avenue. Grocery, retail, restaurants, and specialty shops are the target tenants. Depending on commercial demand, some of the first floor may be converted to resident amenities, such as gym, community lounge, pool, and/or business center space.

- **Residential (upper stories).** Residential density is still much needed in downtown to help support businesses and increase after business hours activity. This concept could host approximately 100 market-rate apartments on three floors above the commercial space, averaging 750 square feet in size. Dwelling units should vary in size and price point to offer a range of options for those looking to live downtown.

- **Parking.** Parking is available on-street and off-street. However, most parking needs should be accommodated behind the development footprint to screen it from the street and provide an active facade for the street. In addition, on-street parking for commercial patrons should be available on Kansas Avenue in front of the businesses.
CHESTNUT LOT SITE

The City-owned parking lot at the southwest corner of the Santa Fe Street and Chestnut Street could remain as it is today or possibly redevelop for a higher intensity use. Currently, the surface parking is one of the most used lots in Downtown as it is highly visible from Santa Fe Street, convenient to buildings fronting Cherry Street, and close to the courthouse. Redevelopment options need to consider the supply of parking to businesses in the area. The plan for the area considers several alternative concepts, including:

Concept 1: Accent Enhancements

The parking area is frequently near capacity during work hours. Enhancements under this concept are primarily aesthetic, so it maintains the current layout of the lot. However, it improves the overall impression of the space. Elements of this concept include:

- Enhance rear entrance façades.
- Add security lighting.
- Improve alleys to parking area.
- Place trees in planter beds to provide shade in the parking area.
- Continue routine maintenance.

Concept 2: Alley Commons

Map 4.8 shows the Alley Commons. The parking lot is reconfigured to create a gathering space (possible outdoor dining) for business patrons and establishes connections from nearby redevelopment projects to the alleys that lead to the new County Square. Reconfiguring the parking lot is a sensitive subject as it experiences high parking demand due to its proximity to the courthouse. With the courthouse relocating, demand may diminish, thereby making the implementation of this concept more acceptable. Elements of this concept include:

- Enhance rear entrance façades
- Add security lighting
- Improve alleys to parking area
- Place trees in planter beds to provide shade in the parking area
- Reconfigure parking design to establish pathways to surrounding projects
- Create a common gathering space for patrons

Map 4.8: Chestnut Lot Alley Commons, Concept 2
Concept 3: Chestnut Lot Redevelopment

Map 4.9 shows the Chestnut Lot as a mixed-use redevelopment. This concept redevelops the parking lot for a mixed-use project that increases the intensity of uses on the site, which is in-common to typical downtowns. The site was subject to an RFP released by the City in 2017 to redevelop the site. The City continues to evaluate development possibilities.

Elements of the concept include:

- **New mixed use project.** Figures 4.1-2 shows the mixed-use project including ground-level commercial space fronting Chestnut Street with parking behind. Upper-level residential uses are supporting by a lower-level parking. In total, this concept presents a four-story building.

- **No loss of parking.** The building would be built to replace the existing parking currently used by Park Cherry tenants and others while supporting the demand generated by the project itself. This is accomplished by having both a lower level and first story covered parking.

- **Green space.** To maintain the pedestrian continuity of the original alley entryway concept, a courtyard would be developed between the retail wings.

- **Preserve the alley.** The alley remains open to give adjacent buildings a rear storefront and buffer space.

- **Taller building.** The current configuration of the building and parking minimizes ramping and maximizes the parking count. Additional levels could be added to the project, yet parking demand will spillover to surrounding blocks. Development projects with dedicated parking spaces are perceived to attract more tenants.
Figure 4.1: Chestnut Lot Redevelopment Massing

- Residential Upper-Levels
- Commercial Ground-Level
- Parking Ground-Level
- Greenspace Commons
- Parking Lower-Level
COMMUNITY COMMONS BLOCKS

Concepts for the Community Commons explore possibilities for redeveloping the post office and library as a collective, coordinated project that can bring higher-intensity uses to Downtown. The ultimate strategy focuses on attracting residents, businesses, customers, and services that can be shared by all. To the east, the Olathe Millcreek Center is already being renovated for the District’s Alternative Education programs which serves as many as 800 students annually. A recap of the circumstances for other key sites includes:

- **US Post Office.** The US Post Office is a distribution center that sits on a two-acre site near Santa Fe Street. Participants in the planning process suggested that the distribution center should relocate out of Downtown, yet retain a retail presence in the area. Also, the US Postal Service has indicated an interest in selling its building in the past.

- **Olathe Public Library.** The Olathe Public Library completed a Library Master Plan in 2012 that indicated a need for programming a new library. Congruent with these findings, the city released an Request for Proposals in 2017 to explore redevelopment options for the current site.

Map 4.10 shows the existing library site and possible locations considered for its relocation. Concepts show the development the library in its existing parking lot and Enterprise Bank site. The site south of Civic Center Park was deferred as the park is perceived as a catalyst for stimulating private development. Some libraries also contain retail post offices within them, depending on community needs.

Scenarios for redevelopment share common features, like all having new multi-family development. Yet, the scenarios also have some characteristics that create distinct themes. For the purposes of describing the concepts, they are referred to as the Neighborhood Center and Civic Center Scenario.
**Concept 1: Neighborhood Center**

The Neighborhood Center Scenario concentrates on attracting people to live in the downtown core. It targets higher-density projects, including multi-family housing commercial uses, that help the district emerge as a neighborhood.

In this concept, the library relocates to the Eastgate area, which essentially expands the perception of the downtown core’s boundary. In addition, this concept redevelops the post office site.

Elements of the concept, shown on Map 4.11, include:

1. **Civic Center Park.** The Civic Center Park plays a key role in the Neighborhood Center concept. Currently, the park acts as an attractive gateway feature to Downtown, yet its daily use is marginal. By bringing development against the park, the space becomes an amenity for nearby tenants - residents and businesses. New amenities, like pet waste stations and potable water fountain, will encourage use of the park.

2. **Multi-family or Mixed-Use Project.** Overlooking the Civic Center Park is a new multi-family project. This is imaged as a 4-6 story building with parking at or below grade. The building could be taller, assuming that the additional parking can be accommodated nearby. Portions of the first floor could accommodate commercial space, particularly along Chestnut Street.

3. **Park Street - Retail & Services.** The development character of Park Street from Cherry Avenue to Chestnut Street should continue east to Water Street. This project recommends a 1-3 story building that hosts businesses serving Downtown employees and residents. A convenience store, daycare, small fitness center, and retail post office are all possible tenants.

4. **Park Street - Daycare.** Concepts for Park Street can be used interchangeably. The project proposes a smaller commercial space of 1-2 stories that continues the building character to the west. Ideally, businesses located in this space could cater to the new residential uses, but more importantly to employees within Downtown. For example, a childcare center with a play area could be suitable. This use would also complement the presence of the Millcreek Learning Center to the east.

5. **Multi-family Project.** The multi-family project is a 4-6+ story building with commercial or parking below. This project is expected to be taller because the parking structure to its west could have dedicated spaces for tenants at night.

Map 4.11: Community Commons: Neighborhood Center, Concept 1
Concept 2: Civic Center Neighborhood

The Civic Center concept concentrates on retaining library services near other government services, introducing some multi-family housing, and creating commercial tenant spaces.

This concept assumes the library remains on its current site with the new library being constructed in the current library’s existing parking lot. The old library would be replaced with parking to serve businesses on the north side of Park Street and the library. In addition, this concept redevelops the post office site.

Elements of the concept, shown on Map 4.12, include:

1. **Civic Center Park.** See Neighborhood Center Concept on previous page. The variant from the previous concept is the project is split into two, allowing space for a pedestrian promenade that connects Civic Center Park and the new Olathe Public Library.

2. **Multi-family or Mixed-Use Project.** See Neighborhood Center Concept on previous page.

3. **Park Street Development.** The south end of the post office site would expand the commercial presence on Park Street as in Concept 1, but with more 1-3 story commercial development. The pedestrian promenade would pass through this development, providing an opportunity for tenants to utilize the space for outdoor seating which would expand commercial activity from within the buildings to the public realm.

4. **New Olathe Public Library.** This concept assumes the library remains on its current site, while a new library is constructed in its existing parking lot. The new library will likely need to be 2-3 stories to accommodate the preliminary building program. Once construction is complete, the old library can be replaced with parking. It is possible that a new library project could also host a retail post office or other related functions.

5. **Civic Promenade.** A pedestrian promenade from the Civic Center Park to the entrance of the new library connects the library to Santa Fe Street.
Map 4.12: Community Commons: Civic Center, Concept 2

Figure 4.3: Residential overlooking park shown consistently between scenarios

Figure 4.4: Concept 1 Private Development - Looking west on Park Street

Figure 4.5: Concept 2 Private Development - Extending Park Street District to the east

Figure 4.6: Concept 2 Library Development - Looking west on Park Street
PARK NORTH CONCEPTS

Maps 4.13-4.14 show the Park North Concepts, while Figures 4.7-4.8 provide perspectives for these concepts.

Currently, Water Street is not a through street, and if closed, it would create enough real estate north of Santa Fe Street to support a larger redevelopment project. The area has several nearby attractions, including the Chestnut Fine Arts Center, Civic Center Park, and Mill Creek Park. The redesign of the district should resolve issues with pedestrian access across Santa Fe Street, preserve the historic and environmental character of the area, capitalize on the fine arts scene, and allow the creation of new attractions as laid out below.

Elements of the concept include:

- **Close Water Street.** Closing Water Street from Poplar Street to Santa Fe Street unites the two blocks as one development project. The result removes an unnecessary left turn lane on Santa Fe Street and creates more developable space on those two blocks to the north of Santa Fe Street.

- **Pedestrian Median Refuge.** Converting the left turn lane at Water Street into a pedestrian refuge would help pedestrians cross the street and stop in the median until traffic clears. This helps unite the two Civic Center Parks and protects people from cars.

- **Mill Creek Trail and Wilderness Area.** Mill Creek provides an opportunity for a pedestrian trail to improve circulation and connection for pedestrians. The trail would link Mill Creek Park, the two Civic Center Parks on either side of Santa Fe Street, and the Kansas School for the Deaf, and other areas of Downtown. Closing Water Street and creating a pedestrian refuge median would further facilitate recreation along the trail and would utilize the water as a feature. Lower areas along the trail could also be converted into a small water feature or pond. Along the trail, interesting stops and pathways could also tie into the Kansas School for the Deaf through ideas such as sensory gardens or stations.

  In addition, the Park North area on Mill Creek already has some interesting elevation changes and natural areas. Preserving these trees could provide an area with unkempt charm for those traveling along the trail, creating a feeling of wilderness despite being Downtown. Utilizing the elevations of the area also helps create distinct parts of the Park North District.

- **Protect Destinations.** Preserving and maintaining the creek and nearby attractions is important. The area contains the Chestnut Fine Arts Center and the sculpture walk through the park. Adding pedestrian paths from these destinations to new development is necessary for a unified project.
Concept 1: Artisan Village

Map 4.13 shows the Artisan Village concept. This concept builds on the initial theming established by the Chestnut Fine Arts Center and Civic Center Park’s sculpture walk. The combination of these “creative” attractions creates a unique district in Downtown that is unlike any place in the city by building on its existing strengths.

Elements of the concept include:

1. **Artisan Cottages.** Small cottage-type units could act as live-work studios or galleries for artists and makers. The project could be marketed as collective experience where individual units could specialize in retail crafts (art or furniture restoration) and interactive experiences (like painting, glass-blowing, or candle-making). Visitors would be compelled to explore all shops. Those closer to parking would more likely be retail-oriented. Efforts should be made to preserve and integrate existing homes into the concept.

2. **Artisan Cottages - Parking.** Parking for the artisan cottages would be provided nearby while using parts of Water Street for internal circulation.

3. **Chestnut Fine Arts Center.** The Chestnut Fine Arts Center remains an important staple of the fine arts scene in Olathe. Connecting the building to the cottages strengthens the brand of the area. Enhancing the parking area will help supplement parking needs for the cottages.

4. **Median Pedestrian Refuge.** Converting the left turn lane at Water Street into a pedestrian refuge helps people cross the street by allowing them to stop in the median until traffic clears.

5. **Mill Creek Trail and Environ.** Enhancing the Mill Creek area reintroduces nature as an amenity to Downtown, making it more than a functional channel for runoff. Extending a trail from Mill Creek Park to south of Santa Fe Street leads to connecting Olathe’s cultural destinations to other parts of the city. The pathway could be complemented with the installation of public art and informational displays.
Concept 2: Urban Village

Map 4.14 shows the Urban Village concept which imagines a more conventional, market-based development. However, many of the changes made in the previous concept are consistent. This concept increases the residential density of downtown, and leverages the proximity of Mill Creek Park, Civic Center Park, and Mill Creek Trail as neighborhood amenities.

1. **Multi-family or Mixed Use Project.** Overlooking the Civic Center Park is a new multi-family project. The concept suggests a 4-6 story building with parking below. The building could be taller, assuming that parking can be accommodating nearby. Civic Park North acts as a yard for residents living in the multifamily building, and the sculpture walk remains a special amenity in the area.

   The western edge of the first floor could also potentially accommodate commercial space that opens up to Civic Center Park.

2. **Townhouses.** Townhouses could be built to overlook the wilderness area to the east and to face the street on the north. This would also provide residential density near Downtown while maintaining the transition from higher density uses to the south from lower density uses to the north.

3. **Median Pedestrian Refuge.** See description in Artisan Concept.

4. **Mill Creek Trail and Environs.** See description in Artisan Concept. The Mill Creek Trail wilderness area provides greenspace for residents and those traveling the Mill Creek Trail.
PEDESTRIAN MEDIAN REFUGE

Figures 4.9 and 4.10 show the pedestrian median refuge proposed at Water Street. Closing Water Street, north of Santa Fe to the park, makes the left turn lane on Santa Fe Street obsolete. To promote pedestrian access across Santa Fe, this lane could be converted into a pedestrian refuge that would allow pedestrians an opportunity to maneuver traffic one direction at a time. In so doing, it significantly increases feelings of safety for pedestrians while crossing.
MILL CREEK TRAIL

Map 4.15 shows what a trail along Mill Creek may look like. Such a trail would provide a major north-south pedestrian connection from the Mill Creek Streamway Park in the north, past the Mill Creek Park and Pool, Downtown, and the two Civic Parks, and all the way to Water Works Park in the south. It could also link existing and new destinations that would be made possible by the activity along the trail. This path would nicely complement the north-south bike connection proposed for South Kansas which together would help connect the trail system extending throughout Johnson County from the Kansas River to the north and State Line to the east. It also provides opportunities for green stormwater management practices and other options as described in Map 4.15.
Mill Creek Park
Originally a camp site, Mill Creek Park has been providing Olathe's green space since 1935. Continuing a trail from the park along Mill Creek connects the park with Downtown and other activity centers.

Pedestrian Median Refuge
A crossing over Santa Fe Street is integral to the continuity of a trail. Closing Water Street and creating a pedestrian refuge will make crossing safer and more pleasant. A flashing pedestrian beacon could also alert drivers.

Signage
Adding informational and directional signs provides could point to destinations and guide visitors.

Park North Concepts
The proposed Park North Concepts provide one of several major destinations along Mill Creek Trail. With a small area of wilderness already on the creek, it could create a memorable stopping place for visitors.

Sensory Park
The proposed sensory park is a series of outdoor exhibits appealing to all the senses, including sound, smell, and touch. As natural habitat, it can also serve as an outdoor classroom for the Kansas School for the Deaf.

The Old Mill
The Old Mill sits on a large parcel overlooking Mill Creek. The building could potentially serve as a catalyst site as a bed and breakfast or brewery should a trail extend along Mill Creek.

Map 4.15: Mill Creek Environments Concept
SENSORY AREAS

GREENWAYS AND PATHWAYS
KANSAS AVENUE CONCEPTS

Kansas Avenue presents several opportunities for new investment following the relocation of the county courthouse and planned streetscape enhancements. Most of those recommended in Envision Olathe are south of Santa Fe Street. The corridor is integral to Downtown’s future because it connects people to neighborhoods and businesses.

Concepts for Kansas Avenue focus on adapting the street to more users, making it more friendly for bicyclists and pedestrians, and offering ideas to provide alternative routes for crossing the railroad tracks while also creating conditions for new construction. Elements of the concept include:

- **Streetscape Enhancements.** Functional and aesthetic improvements to increase the attractiveness of the corridor and friendliness to active transportation users.
- **Loula Street Underpass.** Adding an underpass to circumvent rail traffic.
- **(Re)Development Opportunities.** Improvements create the ability to develop new buildings or redevelop existing buildings.

Kansas Avenue Streetscape Enhancements

The streetscape for Kansas Avenue south of Santa Fe Street should continue to evolve and refresh, providing a positive and memorable experience to attract visitors and private investment in Downtown’s western edge.

Many enhancement to add life to the street and district are minor and relatively inexpensive. Features such as pedestrian lighting, trees and benches can be used to create a sense of place with a human scale. Clean streets, ornamental lighting, native plantings, shrubs, and community graphics can also positively influence the impression of the corridor. Similar applications can also be made to secondary circulation corridors such as Spruce Street and Loula Street.

From curb-to-curb, South Kansas Avenue’s existing street is nearly 100 feet wide. Figure 4.11 shows the street with two travel lanes, a turn lane, and angle parking. The wide street subtly encourages drivers to move faster through the district as their field of vision expands, and discourages bicyclists because of the safety concerns from the speed of drivers and angle parking. Also, the wide street discourages walkers, particularly with mobility impairments, from wanting to cross the street.

The city is exploring the redesign of the street following the relocation of the courthouse. Concepts for the corridor reallocate right-of-way to add improved lighting, landscaping, and safety features. Principles for updating the streetscape include:

- Improve safety for pedestrians
- Improve safety for bicyclists
- Update lighting
- Improve landscaping that complements Courthouse Square
- Preserve parking
- Examine the traffic signal at Kansas Avenue and Park Street

Prior to Envision Olathe, the city commissioned redesign plans for South Kansas Avenue. Figure 4.12 shows some elements of the concept but it includes dedicated space for bicyclists and does not show a median. A median could still be accommodated as lanes are shown as 15 feet wide, which could be reduced to 10 to 12 feet to reduce traffic speeds.
Figure 4.11: South Kansas Avenue Street Section - Existing

Figure 4.12: South Kansas Avenue Street Section - Proposed Complete Street

Complete Street Concept

Figure 4.12 shows a street section that removes the turn lane, reduces the traffic lanes from 16 feet to 15 feet, retains the eight-foot sidewalk on both sides, and introduces a bicycle pathway (also called a cycletrack) adjacent to the sidewalk with a buffer strip near the parking. Reducing lane widths to 10 or 12 feet could also occur to reduce traffic speeds, and new space could be used to introduce a median or additional landscaping buffers between the sidewalks and traffic. Map 4.15 shows a plan view of the streetscape between Santa Fe Street and Loula Street. Elements of the concept include:

- **Cycletrack.** A cycletrack is a dedicated two-lane route for bicycles that is protected from traffic by parked cars and buffering. The concept expands Olathe’s overall bicycle network, providing a link from the bike lanes on Dennis Avenue to the south with Poplar Street to the north, leading to Mill Creek Park and the trail along Kansas City Road. As the cycle track crosses north of Santa Fe Street, the alignment of the path becomes incorporated into the site plan of the courthouse, shown in Map 4.4. Designing Kansas Avenue for active transportation introduces a new image for Downtown, and introduces more options to move around the city.

- **Intersection Bump-outs.** Bump-outs allow pedestrians cross intersections at shorter distances and protect parked vehicles. They can also be places for trees and landscaping. Bump-outs in this design concept shorten the crossing distance by 19 feet.

- **Street Lighting.** Lighting for Kansas Avenue should be consistent with Santa Fe Street, which is a historical lantern luminaire, and could incorporate LED bulbs. These could be adapted to include a pedestrian-level light, as well. Alternative lighting styles should be considered with care.

- **Landscaping.** Downtown could exhibit a strong canopy of full-size trees, offering shade to pedestrians and buildings on both sides of the street. In Fall, leaves blow away and run off into the storm sewer. Honey locust trees are resilient and can thrive in difficult urban growing conditions, like small planters and the heat of concrete in the summer. Banners and flower baskets are also minor, relatively inexpensive enhancements that add color and interest. Banners should be changed seasonally and for special events.

- **Benches and Trash Bins.** Seating areas should be well-defined. Benches provide space for people to sit and watch others. Trash bins should accompany benches to reduce litter along the street.

- **Wayfinding.** Pedestrian-scale wayfinders inform and direct people to the Downtown’s various destinations. Existing signs may need to be altered to accommodate bicycle traffic.
Figure 4.16: South Kansas Avenue Streetscape Possibility - Complete Street
Loula Street Underpass

The temporary closure of Santa Fe Street while trains pass was frequently discussed during the planning process. It causes vehicles to stack up Downtown, sometimes for as long as 10 minutes. Locals use Spruce Street as a bypass to get underneath the tracks. Elevating the tracks over Santa Fe Street was previously considered and determined to be cost-prohibitive. Nevertheless, Envision Olathe explores other concepts for providing relief to traffic backup on Santa Fe Street and the Spruce Street underpass.

The proposed Loula Street underpass better connects the neighborhood to the west and Downtown. It may also relieve some congestion in the district by increasing options for moving around and diverting traffic of Spruce Street. Additional study is necessary to understand the feasibility and traffic implications of an underpass at Loula Street.

Elements of the concept include:

1. **Loula Street Underpass.** Loula Street will not have adequate clearance beneath the railroad tracks if a road is cut at a straight line from Kansas Avenue to Walnut Street. The distance is comparable to the Spruce Street underpass, which is steep and lacks the clearance for trucks.

   By bending Loula Street to the south, the street can gradually lower at a four-to-five percent grade to get under the tracks with 16 feet to 18 feet of clearance. The underpass would have enough standard clearance for trucks and could act as a south counterpoint to the underpass at Spruce Street which will likely see increased traffic due to the new courthouse building.

2. **Pedestrian-only Crossing.** As Loula Street's at-grade crossing is replaced with an underpass, a new sidewalk would provide pedestrians a more direct path over the original point the street crossed the tracks. Public art, signage, and benches could be placed in a small plaza pedestrians waiting for the train to go by. Art could be interactive, reacting to the movement of the train. This creates additional interest as pedestrians wait.

3. **Neighborhood Preservation and Buffering.** The realignment of Loula Street stays behind the homes west of the tracks, but two properties immediately adjacent to the tracks would need to be acquired. Buffering between the new roadway and backyards should screen the presence of the street.

4. **Redevelopment Opportunities.** The Kansas Avenue Streetscape and Loula Street Underpass are two major investment projects. However, the improved street environment and better accessibility would provide redevelopment opportunities for property owners of nearby sites. One option would be to create sub-dividable space for entrepreneurs. It could serve makers, artists, and other businesses that fit the area, especially as some entrepreneurs already look to the Kansas Avenue for affordable space. It could also incorporate a makerspace with tools so people can gather to create, learn, and invent if such a space is not accommodated elsewhere.
South Kansas Avenue Development

Map 4.18 and 4.19 show additional development opportunities along South Kansas Avenue between Loula to Park Streets. The primary difference between the two concepts is looking at new development or adding an infill building. Both provide a greater intensity of uses for the site.

Elements of the concept include:

**Concept 1: Park and Kansas Redevelopment**

The existing buildings could be demolished to provide room for a larger commercial space than is possible elsewhere Downtown. With a location right on the new Courthouse Square, it would be prime for this kind of activity.

1. **International Cultural Market.** To provide both an attraction and opportunities for purchasing food Downtown, an international indoor marketplace with arts, crafts, fresh produce, and food service. As an international cultural market, it would also celebrate Olathe’s diversity in the heart of the city. The space could also be adapted to provide affordable opportunities for entrepreneurs to incubate unique businesses in a small space before graduating to larger spaces Downtown. The entrance should orient towards Courthouse Square to steer people to the facility.

2. **Centennial Building Reuse.** Figure 4.15 illustrates a possible approach to enhancing the Centennial Building’s façade. The city owns the building and is relocating some of its services to the building. They intend to upgrade the building’s façade so that its character enhances Downtown and complements the Builder Designs Building to the north which has already improved its façade. Similar enhancements could continue to the north.

   As the City of Olathe redevelops the façade of the Centennial Building, it too could showcase what good design might mean for future developments on Kansas Avenue and throughout Downtown.

3. **Alley Enhancement.** The space between and behind buildings can be activated by adding pedestrian-friendly features, including walkways adorned with art, landscaping, and lighting. It could also incorporate outdoor seating or connections with the surrounding buildings to draw activity outside.
Map 4.19: Park and Kansas In-Fill, Concept 2

1. **International Cultural Market**
   Existing buildings could be preserved if a new building was constructed on the parking lot to the west. While it allows a permanent international market to locate Downtown and preserves existing buildings, it also decreases the parking availability. However, parking demand should decrease as the courthouse relocates.

2. **Centennial Building Reuse.** See description in Park and Kansas Redevelopment.


**Concept 2: Park and Kansas In-Fill**

Map 4.19 shows an in-fill building behind the buildings fronting Kansas Avenue, reusing the parking lot to increase the intensity of uses.

- **Reuse.** Initial strategies should focus on the reuse of the structure prior to entertaining redevelopment concepts. The industrial character of the building could be adapted for a brewery, boutique restaurant/retail, or office.

- **Redevelopment.** The site can be redeveloped with a new building fronting Santa Fe Street and parking tucked behind. Possible uses could follow programs that match the building’s reuse.

Acme Brick Tile and Stone Site

Maps 4.20-21 show possible development concepts for the Acme Brick and Tile Building. This light industrial use fronts Santa Fe Street next to the railroad, and experiences some heavy truck traffic. These characteristics create conflict as the railroad and traffic can delay deliveries. In addition, the industrial use can conflict with its surrounding residential and civic uses. If Acme Brick Tile and Stone chooses to relocate, this site could be reused or redeveloped.

- **Reuse.** Initial strategies should focus on the reuse of the structure prior to entertaining redevelopment concepts. The industrial character of the building could be adapted for a brewery, boutique restaurant/retail, or office.

- **Redevelopment.** The site can be redeveloped with a new building fronting Santa Fe Street and parking tucked behind. Possible uses could follow programs that match the building’s reuse.
EASTGATE CONCEPTS

Eastgate presents several opportunities as it is the missing link between a series of destinations - downtown, North High School, Community Center, and Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop and Farm Historic Site. The Eastgate area, deriving its name as the east gateway to downtown, could become a new center of activity that unites the sequence of gathering places.

The existing Enterprise Bank and Trust building is attractive but is underused. Meanwhile, segments of land along Poplar Street remain open and the building west of the bank is vacant. These conditions present an opportunity to reimagine the space as a redevelopment project and even consider changes to traffic movements. Also, it presents an opportunity to expand people’s perception of where downtown begins.

In addition to private redevelopment possibilities, the site could become the new location for a public library. During the public input process, discussions about building a new library emerged along with the desire to introduce new housing in downtown. The current library site is a strong candidate for housing redevelopment in the city’s core, and the Eastgate site is a strong candidate for introducing an amenity that connects downtown and the Community Center.

Elements of the concept include:

1. Kansas Avenue Realignment. As the County Courthouse moves north of Santa Fe Street, Poplar Street and Spruce Street become increasingly important routes to the new building. The connections between Kansas City Road, Poplar Street, and Santa Fe Street could be rationalized to create more intuitive traffic movements. Figure 4.23 shows the concept for realigning Kansas City Road, bending west to align with Poplar Street to connect with a roundabout. By realigning the Kansas City Road, the surrounding vacant land becomes eligible for more significant redevelopment project.

2. Salvation Army Site. The Salvation Army occupies much of the western part of the district. Most of their land would remain as is, though the southwest portion contains underused land that could support a transit hub.
Map 4.24: Eastgate Concepts

1. Kansas Avenue Realignment
2. Salvation Army Site
3. Transit Hub
4. Library or Mixed Use Site
5. Townhomes
6. Mixed-Use Redevelopment

TRANSIT HUB DEMONSTRATIONS
3. **Transit Hub.** Kansas City Area Transit Agency (KCATA) is planning for a transit hub for somewhere along Santa Fe Street near Downtown Olathe. Currently, the bus route runs along Santa Fe Street, so a small stop could be near the Salvation Army site. It would act as a central meeting point for traditional bus transit in addition to van-pools, taxis, and other forms of public transportation for suburban areas. The footprint would be relatively small with drive lanes, a basic shelter, and nearby parking. Funding has not been committed.

4. **Library or Mixed Use Site.** The Enterprise Bank and Trust site is a candidate for reuse or redevelopment in conjunction with the vacant building to its west. As previously mentioned, the site is a good location for a civic use, like a new library.
   - **Reuse.** The existing bank building could be repurposed as the structure appears to be in stable condition. Yet, the parking in front of the building does not fit into the urban form that is typical to downtowns. Repurposing the building may be more economical, however redevelopment would establish the a standard development character for future downtown projects.
   - **Redevelopment.** New construction should be a minimum of two stories and stand as close to the street as possible with parking tucked behind. Framing the street with buildings improves the scale of area and makes walking easier between projects. Parking should be buffered from Santa Fe by attractive landscaping and street trees.

5. **Townhomes.** An urban-density residential project, such as townhomes, along Poplar Street provides a transition from single-family homes to the multi-family mixed use project.

6. **Mixed Use Redevelopment.** As Kansas City Road is realigned and straightened, land to the east opens for development as an opportunity to emphasize the entry into Downtown along Santa Fe and Kansas City Road. The new 4-5 story development should front both Santa Fe and Kansas City Road. It would likely be residential with potential commercial uses on the corner. Parking could be accommodated behind the building with a back entrance to provide pedestrian access to neighborhoods to the north. This concept fills the pivot from Kansas City Road to Santa Fe while providing a clear entry to Downtown and better utilizing the site’s location.
The concepts in this plan are just that: concepts—ideas that present scenarios for future change.
CONNECTING CORRIDORS

The corridors leading to downtown are areas of civic importance. They influence people’s perception of the community, its values, and ultimately the sense of arrival to downtown. Envision Olathe lays the initial framework for further study of the individual corridors connecting to downtown, showing preliminary improvements for mobility (motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians) and development potential. The City’s Streetscape Plan should also be updated to include Kansas Avenue and Kansas City Road. Envision Olathe provides initial rationale for launching stand-alone plans for these three corridors, including:

- Santa Fe Street
- Kansas Avenue
- Kansas City Road

The following section provides an overview of the potential opportunities related to these corridors.

- **Key Intersections.** The appearance and function of these intersections influences people’s perception of the area. Often, they mark the arrival into nodes of activity. These intersections should be improved or maintained at higher standards and often include signage, landscaping, art, and graphics.

- **Opportunity Sites.** Market demand suggests that redevelopment of these sites may result in additional redevelopment interest along the corridor.

- **Enhanced Greenspace.** Large open spaces along corridors should be well-maintained and possibly have specific plans for enhancement.

- **Streetscape Improvements.** Enhancements may include landscaping, sidewalk improvements, street furniture, lighting, and graphics. Often landscaping includes shrubs, flowers, maintained lawn, and/or other plantings.

- **Policy Area.** Policy areas may include design standards, access/parking consolidation, and organizational support.
Map 4.25: Santa Fe Street Corridor

Map 4.26: Kansas Avenue Corridor

Map 4.27: Kansas City Road Corridor

Key Intersections
- Opportunity Site
- Enhanced Greenspace
- Streetscape Improvements
- Policy Area
“I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go.”

- Langston Hughes
INTRODUCTION
Envision Olathe has evolved since the original document was written in 2003, and like all plans, it will continue to change. As a living document, it illustrates our future goals and acts as a catalyst to help us achieve our vision, even as property ownership changes, funding sources evolve, economic forces evolve, and priorities shift.

This chapter provides strategies for implementing Envision Olathe, including organizational roles, policy instruments that may be useful, a project prioritization and schedule, and potential funding sources. The City of Olathe can use this to guide future policy efforts for downtown.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
Successful development efforts require coordination among organizations, appropriate policies, and successful public/private partnerships. This section considers the roles of various organizations related to downtown and recommends ways to strengthen its support structure. Figure 5.1 shows a generalized organization structure between the city and downtown businesses.

City of Olathe
The City of Olathe is responsible for implementing and guiding the recommendations of the plan. All city departments must continue to be in frequent communication with each other and work together for implementation, including Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Housing and Transportation, the Library, City Manager, and others. The Mayor and City Manager, under guidance from the City Council, will oversee the overall plan strategies. The Chief Planning and Development Officer will undertake the day-to-day implementation, continuing to work with other groups and departments as necessary. Also, the City should dedicate one full-time staff member in their planning department who is responsible for implementing the Envision Olathe Plan and serve as planner for all permits, reviews, oversight, coordination, partnership and updates for future plans and studies.

Johnson County
Johnson County also has an important role to play in the implementation of Envision Olathe. As a large employer and landowner in downtown, Johnson County should work with the City of Olathe to facilitate greater activity around downtown. In return, Johnson County strengthens its county seat, becomes more competitive in attracting and retaining talent, and stimulates the overall tax base. The county and city should remain in regular contact with each other as they have done throughout this planning process.
Downtown Advisory Committee

Olathe’s residents and businesses near Downtown are committed to improving the area. Much like historic preservation commissions, a group of citizens to monitor downtown activities can push plans forward and provide continual input to the city. Olathe is finalizing the creation of a Downtown Olathe Business Association and has fostered the creation of the Central Core Initiative. These groups, in addition to other representatives, should guide future planning efforts for revitalizing downtown when the plan is adopted as part of a renewed Downtown Advisory Committee.

The Downtown Advisory Committee should remain active to oversee the implementation of the plan. The committee should include property owners, businesses, civic leaders, city staff, and members of the general public and neighborhoods. Responsibilities should focus on development and transportation projects rather than day-to-day operations. Tasks may include:

- Advise on development proposals for consistency with Envision Olathe
- Recommend improvements to the streetscape and public spaces
- Promote and/or organize downtown events
- Advise on updates to the Envision Olathe as necessary

Chamber of Commerce

As implementation of Envision Olathe unfolds, it is important to involve the Olathe Chamber of Commerce and other private business owners early and throughout the process. The Chamber’s active involvement in business recruitment and staff expertise will be a great resource and tool to generate activity and energy downtown, while also facilitating the creation of more businesses. Tourism promotions through the Chamber can also focus attention on improvements in downtown as a tool to attract new customers, events, meetings, or conferences. These could be accomplished through a partnership between the Chamber and the Downtown Olathe Business Association. The most significant action the Chamber of Commerce could take is to relocate to downtown, representing a commitment to the future success of the district.

Johnson County Old Settlers

The Johnson County Old Settlers is a not-for-profit with a 47-member board that keeps the Old Settler tradition alive through its annual event for over 100 years. The volunteer board meets for 9 months to plan and organize the event that attracts some few hundred thousand people annually to Downtown Olathe. With their knowledge of programming, they would be an excellent asset and partner for programming in Downtown Olathe, and Old Settlers Days provides an excellent opportunity to showcase downtown improvements.
PARTNERSHIPS
As a Downtown Advisory Committee is formed, including representatives from the Central Core Initiative and Downtown Olathe Business Association, the resultant partnership will be able to help promote commercial activity and advance Downtown as the vital urban center of the city. Formal downtown partnerships allow joint marketing of the district, expand opportunities to improve revenue, and develop relationships with leaders, in addition to promoting the development of new businesses.

Partnerships can take many forms, formal and informal. Utilizing existing networks such as Main Street America, forming a non-profit organization, joining an existing institution like the City or Chamber, or creating a formal Community Improvement District (CID) all have their pros and cons. For example, CIDs can provide funds for improvements but they require for-profit businesses to contribute income; this likely will fit downtown better after new for-profit businesses are attracted. Regardless, all partnerships should engage a broad range of stakeholders beyond local business owners, such as civic organizations, government agencies, property owners, and arts, cultural, and educational institutions. In Downtown Olathe, unique local partners include the Kansas School for the Deaf, the Museum for Deaf History, Arts, and Culture, the Millcreek Learning Center, and other non-profit organizations such as the Chestnut Fine Arts Center and OCTA.

Having a centralized downtown partnership provides a group of individuals dedicated to Downtown which allows the district to form relationships with other organizations throughout Olathe and the Kansas City metro and improves communication between governmental agencies and stakeholders. As mentioned previously, it can also oversee the implementation of this plan. Forming a downtown business partnership is a vital step in helping to ensure a distinct identity for downtown that is unique in Olathe.
Downtown Programming and Marketing

Programming and marketing is vital to attracting people, encouraging social interaction, and building memories in Downtown Olathe, especially as Courthouse Square is developed. Not only can it be a source of civic pride, helping residents feel connected to their cultural and political institutions, but it can also activate the downtown and support surrounding businesses.

Programming and marketing can require a lot of effort. For Courthouse Square, the County could lease management to the City of Olathe, the Chamber of Commerce, or a Downtown Business Association to program the space. This ensures the site remains available for future Johnson County use while allowing the space to act as a vibrant part of Downtown Olathe. Programming can be approached using the following steps.

1. Identify cultural and community programming in Olathe and the surrounding cities to find new, synergistic opportunities for downtown.

2. Create a calendar of activities that complements existing programming at different scales, including daily or weekly community-focused activities, in addition to larger signature events that bring a distinct rhythm to the area. Examples may include:
   - **Annual.** Events like Old Settlers Days, Shop Olathe, a Downtown Holiday Market featuring an artisanal arts and craft fair, holiday food vendor carts, performances, and/or other exhibits, fairs, or festivals.
   - **Monthly.** Events like Fourth Fridays, Picnic and Movie nights, or night markets/food fairs that highlight local chefs at open air marketplaces.
   - **Weekly.** Events like small scale live musical performances, Friday Night Happy Hour/Beer Garden, and fitness events and activities
   - **Daily.** Activities built into the square’s infrastructure such as ice skating during winter, food trucks and kiosks featuring local vendors, street performers, a fitness and wellness circuit, or flexible seating that allows restaurants and educational groups to use the space.

3. Build strategic partnerships with sponsors or institutions such as Kansas State University or the Kansas School for the Deaf to help bring this calendar to life.

Marketing should use social and traditional media, in addition to word of mouth, to help improve the perceptions of downtown and to build attendance for regular activities.
Development Codes and Policy
Some of Olathe’s best opportunities to affect Downtown come from better aligning zoning and development regulations with Downtown’s needs. This can occur by updating the zoning map, evaluating the City’s streetscape guidelines, and by modifying district boundaries to reflect current projects.

Downtown Zoning
Currently, Downtown Olathe is comprised of a mix of different zoning districts, each with different development regulations assigned to them. However, following the adoption of the PlanOlathe Comprehensive Plan in 2010, a new downtown zoning district was created in Olathe’s Unified Development Ordinance that recognizes the unique characteristics of the traditional core and better accommodates its mix of retail, service, office, civic, and residential uses. This downtown zoning district allows more flexibility, requires less parking, and permits higher intensities of building form and scale. It also is designed to address building form, including continuous façades and the creation of visual interest through depth, façade design, and transparency.

Applying the downtown zoning district to the downtown core and parts of the transition area would help to build the density of residents and businesses downtown needed to create a critical mass of activity. It would also make it easier to develop many of the projects listed in Envision Olathe. As new development projects occur downtown, they should occur under the downtown zoning district standards.

Streetscape Master Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines
In 2003, Olathe adopted the Streetscape Master Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines to establish a clear design framework for public realm improvements downtown and along the Santa Fe corridor, as well as to create design standards and guidelines for the redevelopment of private property downtown. In the end, this is meant to improve the character downtown which will attract desired private redevelopment.

Many of the standards in this document are still relevant today. However, it may be worth revisiting and updating the document to include design guidelines for Kansas Avenue and for Kansas City Road. While some of these standards are already being implemented through the downtown zoning district, new development opportunities along these connecting corridors not immediately in downtown need similar attention.

District Boundaries
Currently, the boundaries used for downtown stem from the previous 2003 Envision Olathe document. However, as projects change the face of Downtown, so too do the boundaries need to change to reflect them. For this reason, two amendments are proposed to the bounds of downtown, seen in Map 5.1:

1. **Downtown Core.** Areas to the east of downtown, including the Kansas School for the Deaf, tend to be higher density uses. This is especially true along Santa Fe Street. As a result, Envision Olathe recommends expanding the definition of the downtown core east to N. State Street to include the Kansas School for the Deaf. This recommendation would also support redevelopment opportunities on Santa Fe in that expanded area.

2. **Transition Area.** With the courthouse moving north of Santa Fe and its parking lot projecting another block north, it may be worth extending the transition area north to Prairie Street to reflect that change. This would also help ensure that neighborhoods near the new courthouse building are included in future planning efforts downtown. While extending the downtown designation may seem counterintuitive based on the market study’s recommendations, the real issue associated with a spread out downtown is the entropy it can create. The fact is, concentrating benefits creates a more positive impact. As a result, these recommendations for expanding the boundary should be paired with policies that continue to concentrate investments into strategic areas rather than spreading them evenly throughout the boundary.
Map 5.1: Downtown Olathe Study Area Expansion, 2003-2017
Development Incentives

Gruen and Gruen Associates looked at the real estate economics of mixed-use projects with ground-floor commercial space and residential uses above to estimate the value of land for development. To a developer, land values are determined by the attainable income minus a required return on the investment and the costs of constructing, operating, and financing the development. However, market value is also affected by a buyer’s perception of value, expectations about the timing and risk of development, and the price of other locations. As market factors, interest rates, construction costs, and other relevant variables change over time, the types of development that can optimize the value of the land also change.

Based on the analysis of Gruen and Gruen Associates, a mixed-use project in the downtown is likely to require subsidy to be feasible. This is because the downtown does not currently support market rates rents in a mixed-use development that would fully cover the development costs for this type of project and because downtown is a pioneering location without comparable projects. As of the date of this plan, it appears that the market is currently not robust enough to support new large-scale, mixed-use development on its own. However, this is not unusual; most similar apartment projects around the Kansas City metro have required significant development subsidies, even in areas that support higher rents.

Findings from this analysis include:

- **Increasing feasibility.** Even for projects where the land cost was free or nominal, it is expected that rental rates would need to be higher to make large projects feasible without development subsidies. Potentially, this could be achieved by increasing the desirability of downtown. Other ways to make projects more feasible would be to reduce profit expectations, lower expenses (such as through sales tax abatement), or lower costs (such as through reduced parking assumptions).

- **Increasing the scale of development increases the need for subsidy.** Another consideration is how the scale of development affects its costs. In Downtown Olathe, increasing the scale of development actually decreases financial returns. Because each additional unit generates a loss on investment (after accounting for operating expenses, debt service, and a “payback” to equity investment), increasing the number of units makes a project less feasible and increases the need for subsidy. This is because higher density projects may trigger the need for underground parking or a taller building height, which both add to a project’s cost. Underground parking costs far more than surface parking, offsetting the new rent from additional units. Meanwhile, residential buildings beyond four stories frequently requires a different type of construction and additional fire mitigation, often creating higher costs per unit.

At the time of its report, current market conditions make it prudent to initially invest in making downtown more desirable before pursuing large-scale redevelopment projects. This includes recommendations for downtown enhancements laid out earlier in this document which may be less expensive and less risky to pursue than large-scale development at this stage. Improving the image and utility of downtown may lead to higher rental rates, thus reducing (but not likely eliminating) the amount of incentives that developers might request to undertake a large-scale project. Pilot projects can also help establish the market for downtown housing and create a new image for downtown.

“...Invest in making downtown more desirable before pursuing large-scale redevelopment projects.”
Neighborhood Conservation

Downtown Olathe contains a range of historical houses with varying styles, prices, and conditions. Some structures have struggled with poor housing quality and disinvestment. More recently, reinvestment has begun to improve the quality of the housing stock, seen at projects such as new in-fill homes along Harrison Street. As the City continues to invest in the downtown, reinvestment will likely increase in surrounding neighborhoods.

To protect and sustain the city’s older neighborhoods, Olathe should continue to use neighborhood conservation programs to strengthen the housing stock, preserve its unique historical character, and promote further reinvestment and rehabilitation. The built housing supply is the city’s largest single capital investment, and its preservation is essential to maintaining residential affordability. Neighborhood conservation strategies include:

- **Land Use Policies.** Olathe should maintain zoning and land use policies that protect the integrity of its neighborhoods. The “Original Town” Overlay District is one example, providing waivers from setback and lot requirements and requiring architectural review of new dwellings to ensure appropriate design. New zoning proposals should continue to be evaluated with a view toward their effect on surrounding neighborhoods, especially as Downtown uses spread into the transition area. Zoning should encourage design that reduces land use conflicts between residential and other uses and that encourages buffering and screening standards.

- **Neighborhood Revitalization Program.** Downtown Olathe is currently within Olathe’s neighborhood revitalization area, allowing property owners to request a 10-year 80-90% tax rebate on property improvements. The retained tax increment is used for Original Town public improvements. From 2008 to 2016, 43 residential and 19 commercial property owners have used this program. Continuing to support and market the program will encourage additional reinvestment in properties.

- **Property Maintenance.** Owners should maintain their property according to the City’s standards. Enforcing these more proactively can help improve the quality and image of housing near Downtown. Some nearby cities have recently begun inspecting rental units to ensure they meet minimum safety and quality standards. These activities could be paired with property maintenance incentive information to encourage reinvestment.

- **Rehabilitation.** Olathe currently provides housing rehabilitation programs (including interest-free, zero percent loans deferred until the property is sold) to promote stabilization of the housing stock. The City should continue to support these programs, emphasizing the leveraging of private funds to extend scarce public resources. Further marketing these programs will encourage additional reinvestment. Investigating options for rehabilitating rental properties may also be a beneficial extension of these programs.

- **Infill Development.** Although Olathe has a limited supply of infill lots, the city should encourage the development and redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties within and near Downtown. Infill lots use existing infrastructure, reducing costs and using city services more efficiently than greenfield growth.

- **Home Conversions.** Owners of many former single family homes have converted them to multifamily, office, or other uses. These uses may be appropriate in the transition area, but the City may wish to review their policies regarding home conversions to ensure they do not negatively impact the historic character of the area or their immediate neighbors.
Façade Improvements

Downtown Olathe’s diverse, authentic character makes it unique, but some uses are worn, outdated, or inadequate. The city should continue developing the Downtown Storefront Improvement Grant for businesses to invest in the appearance and feeling of downtown, upgrade buildings, and attract users. Some owners have also already improved buildings, such as that of Ramos Law Firm on Kansas Avenue.

Funding could come from the Community Development Block Grant or general funds. Investing in the buildings and streetscape preserves the character and identity of the district, creating an engaging, pedestrian-friendly streetscape that encourages activity. The program should focus on a few specified blocks at a time that change every 2-3 years. The City launched a façade improvements in 2018 that requires a match from the building owner or business. Consideration should be given to reviewing this program in 2019-2020 to determine if additional incentives or contributions are warranted and needed.

Generally, façade treatments should create a visually comfortable and familiar environment while promoting architectural creativity. This can be accomplished by providing interest, variety, and detail on a human scale and maintaining a sense of relationship with nearby buildings. The following elements also enhance architectural character while respecting traditional design:

- Vary the building form such as through recessed or projecting bays;
- Provide a range of window shapes and sizes that relate to the interior;
- Emphasize entries with projecting/recessed forms, detail, color or materials;
- Vary material, joints and details, surface relief, color, and texture to scale;
- Express architectural modules that divide the façade into smaller elements;
- Diversify roof lines to create interesting, human-scaled skylines.

Many buildings downtown have simple footprints, but they should avoid large areas of undifferentiated façade. Instead, they should display architectural variety and scale by expressing building structure, varying the surface, and integrating art and ornament. Detailed entries create interest and variety by breaking up the façade. Major entries should be emphasized with a greater level of detail, and/or enhanced lighting, art, and graphics. Interest can also be created by playing with light and the depth of doors, windows, and roofs. Transparency is important where appropriate, providing pedestrians an awareness of activities inside the building. When not appropriate (or possible), activity should be created on the façade which could include architectural ornament or public art. Reflective glass should be avoided to reduce a blank wall. Buildings can also achieve some “transparency” by extending façade treatments and activity into alleys. This allows the building to seamlessly transition into street-level activity. However, materials and treatments on all sides of the building must be high quality for this to be effective.
Figure 5.2: Façade Improvement Concept for the Centennial Building, Tevis Architects
Alleys Enhancements

Downtown has several alleys that serve a functional purpose for utilities, trash, and deliveries. However, these alleys also have the potential to be transformed to invite regular activity in what could be vibrant, public, people-oriented spaces. All that is needed are simple improvements such as seating, paving, lighting, public art, and/or canopies.

The City and Landworks Studio already began investigating the potential of some alleys in Olathe such as at the Alley Rally events held during Old Settlers Days. Surrounding property owners can further these efforts by extending their own uses out into the alleys, such as Dub V’s use of its back patio. Alleys can also become sources for stormwater management by using attractive permeable pavers. The City is spearheading these efforts at the Centennial Building which has plans to improve its alley.

Figure 5.3 shows an example of a possible re-activation of an alley. The following images provide some examples of how Downtown Olathe has begun reimagining its alleys and how its alleys could be further activated.
Figure 5.3: Possible Alley Enhancements
**PRIORITY AND PHASING**

Because Envision Olathe’s many projects will be developed incrementally, this section lays out a phasing plan to help individual projects maintain a conceptual schedule for implementation.

Envision Olathe establishes a concept for future improvements in Downtown Olathe. To ensure that projects within the concept are implemented over time, the City must set its priorities for individual projects, complete initial steps towards implementing the projects, and evaluate new conditions as they arise. In addition, the City, along with coordinating agencies and others in the development process, should maintain a five-year capital program for downtown, similar to the city-wide capital improvement plans. The general strategy, phasing, and timeline laid out over the following pages are based on the following considerations:

- **Pending projects.** Pending projects are most likely going to be the first projects that reach completion. They require less work by staff to see them implemented, though their completion should not be taken for granted and must be actively monitored to ensure adequate progress is made.

- **Utilize public opportunities early on.** The City has the most control over its own land and policies. So, these should be its next area of focus. Continuing to establish the proper policy instruments, planning wisely for public land, and coordinating these efforts to align with the recommendations of this plan can help the City jump start development to achieve desired outcomes moving forward.

- **Think ahead for long-term projects.** Some projects will not occur for many years. However, the City needs to think ahead and start the process by doing things like building partnerships and initiating conversations with property owners, surveying downtown employees to gauge interest, and conducting groundwork studies to determine project feasibility, such as a traffic analysis for the Loula Street Underpass or other long-term projects.

- **Focus efforts wisely.** Keeping in mind community priorities, the City should concentrate activity and benefits to create the greatest returns. Most recent activity is focused around the Kansas Avenue and Santa Fe Street intersection, but work on the Millcreek Center and Civic Center Park presents opportunities for the Community Commons district early on.

- **Cautiously evaluate residential development.** The downtown residential market is currently being established and is relatively weak. New residential development projects asking for subsidies should be carefully evaluated to improve the feasibility of completion and ensure adequate returns on public subsidies. It may be better to initially use public dollars to create destinations and satisfy current local needs. Residential units can be included in this, but their benefit will mostly be to help change the image of Downtown Olathe at this point in the process.

- **Be open to opportunity.** New opportunities may arise as situations change downtown. Being aware of and open to opportunities can help implement the plan. This is especially true for ongoing projects such as the Mill Creek Trail which will require communication with the many property owners along the length of the trail and an understanding of the benefits that such a project could bring.

The concepts in this plan are just that: concepts—ideas that present scenarios for future change.
Figure 5.4A-F identifies individual projects and priorities. Market demands and opportunities will inevitably change and influence priorities. The current schedule is based on an aggressive implementation timeframe of 10+ years. However, the City should modify the schedule annually, based on constraints, opportunities, and priority criteria that consider the following questions:

- Does the project respond to specific or high-profile community issues?
- Does the project generate maximum private market response?
- What is its potential to transform the image of the area and community?
- Does the project attract local residents and visitors, increasing business traffic and creating new reasons for people to be downtown?
- Does the project support the growth of existing businesses?
- Does the project capitalize on established, but unmet, market needs?
- Can the project be realistically implemented within a reasonable timeframe with potentially available resources?
- Does the project generate substantial community support or consensus?
- Does the project incorporate and leverage outside funding sources, such as state grants or charitable contributions?

“Downtown Olathe really looks beautiful and has come a long way already but it is very exciting to anticipate more improvements to come!”

Participant - March 2017
FIGURE 5.4A: Implementation Table - CIVIC CENTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>SCHEDULE</th>
<th>ROLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Courthouse¹</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Within 5 Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5-10 Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beyond 10 Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Fe Street Crossing</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td></td>
<td>County, City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courthouse Square Park Planning/Design²</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Public/Private Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courthouse Square Park Construction</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Public/Private Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Programming and Marketing</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td>County, City, Downtown Org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Lot Redevelopment³</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>City, Developers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Go to pages 82-90 for description.

Notes

1. The new courthouse project is already underway, so this will likely be one of the first pieces of this plan to be completed. The Santa Fe Street Crossing Passageway may happen at the same time as the courthouse tunnels are constructed underneath Santa Fe Street.

2. The Courthouse Square project will have a significant impact on downtown and should be undertaken separately from the design of the courthouse. However, it too will be an early project in the implementation of Envision Olathe.

3. A developer was selected in 2017 for the Northwest Lot Redevelopment project, though the current proposal may or may not move forward.
### FIGURE 5.4B: Implementation Table - COMMUNITY COMMONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>SCHEDULE</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate Library Scenarios</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>City, Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Center Scenario</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Within 5 Years</td>
<td>Developers, US Postal Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Center Scenario</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>5-10 Years</td>
<td>Library, Developers, US Postal Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redeveloped Library</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Beyond 10 Years</td>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate Chestnut Parking Scenarios</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chestnut Parking Alley Commons</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Within 5 Years</td>
<td>City, Business Owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chestnut Parking Redevelopment</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>5-10 Years</td>
<td>City, Developers, Business Owners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

1. This district will probably be the first to develop other than the Civic Center district. Redeveloping the library is a high priority for the community and will guide the development of this district. If the library stays, the Civic Center Scenario is the most likely outcome. If it decides to move, the Neighborhood Center Scenario should be the preferred outcome.

2. Developing this site will likely hinge on the demand generated at the library and post office sites. Changes to this site would likely not occur until those development projects are complete.
**FIGURE 5.4C: Implementation Table - PARK NORTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>SCHEDULE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mill Creek Trail Planning/Design¹</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>City, Property Owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Water Street</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Within 5 Years</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Street Pedestrian Refuge</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>5-10 Years</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mill Creek Trail Construction</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Beyond 10 Years</td>
<td>Public/Private Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate Park North Scenarios²</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>City, Property Owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist Village Scenario</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Within 5 Years</td>
<td>City, Property Owners, Developers, Nonprofits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Village Scenario</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Beyond 10 Years</td>
<td>City, Property Owners, Developers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

1. Mill Creek Trail will take time to become a reality, so planning and design should start immediately. Closing Water Street and construction of the Water Street Pedestrian Refuge should be developed concurrently with the trail.

2. Determining what happens at the Park North blocks will likely be guided by what happens with the library and what opportunities present themselves to create destinations in Downtown Olathe.

Go to pages 98-105 for description.
### FIGURE 5.4D: Implementation Table - KANSAS AVENUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>SCHEDULE</th>
<th>ROLES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Within 5 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate Kansas Avenue Scenarios(^1)</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Park &amp; Kansas Avenue Redevelopment</td>
<td>Development</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Park &amp; Kansas Avenue In-Fill</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brickyard Maker Space(^2)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loula Underpass Feasibility/Design(^3)</td>
<td>Policy</td>
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<td>Loula Underpass Construction</td>
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<td>Loula South Redevelopment</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas Avenue Streetscape Improvements(^4)</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Courthouse Square will make development at the corner of Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street and Kansas Avenue more attractive. However, it would need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to wait for the scheduled Kansas Avenue streetscape improvements to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be completed. At that time, property owners can decide if the best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>location for an international market is on their land or on city-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owned land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. This project would depend on the property owner’s preferences for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The first step in the Loula Underpass is determining its feasibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If feasible, construction could begin which presents the opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to redevelop buildings nearby if property owners or developers show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Streetscape improvements for Kansas Avenue are already scheduled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications for design should be made to accommodate the bicycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boulevard concept.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### FIGURE 5.4E: Implementation Table - EASTGATE

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
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<td>Kansas City Road Realignment Study¹</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>City, Property Owners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kansas City Road Realignment Reconstruction</td>
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<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise Bank Reuse or Redevelopment¹</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Ongoing Within 5 Years</td>
<td>Property Owners, Businesses, (Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastgate Townhome Development²</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Property Owners, Developers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastgate Mixed Use Development²</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Property Owners, Developers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit Hub¹</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>KCATA, Property Owners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Go to pages 112-115 for description.*

### Notes

1. The first steps in determining what occurs in the Eastgate district include identifying the location for the new library and studying the costs and benefits of realigning Kansas City Road at Poplar. Relocating the library to Eastgate or realigning the road and opening space to develop both present opportunities to improve the district. If the library relocates, this will become one of the early districts to redevelop in the downtown.

2. The Eastgate Townhome and Mix Use Developments would require either the realignment of Kansas City Road or a new library in the district.

3. The Transit Hub would provide a better connection between Downtown Olathe and the transit system. It does not require the relocation of the library or a realigned Kansas City Road, but it likely would benefit greatly from the Water Street Pedestrian Crossing in the Park North district.
**FIGURE 5.4F: Implementation Table - AREA-WIDE POLICIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>SCHEDULE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Within 5 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleyway Improvements</td>
<td>Development</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Façade Improvements</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>●</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Conservation</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>●</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanding Downtown Boundary and Updating Downtown Zoning</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives for Downtown</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Business Organization</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve Connecting Corridors</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Update Streetscape Plan1</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create Corridor Plans for Kansas Avenue, Santa Fe, and Kansas City Road</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Public Art</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>●</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

1. Olathe’s Streetscape Master Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines should be updated to reflect both Kansas Avenue and Kansas City Road as important corridors in the city. Its recommendations for Santa Fe should also be evaluated as to their currency.
FUNDING TECHNIQUES

Available financing tools are available at the local, state, and national levels to help implement the recommendations for Envision Olathe.

This section provides an overview of relevant grant programs but only scratches the surface in terms of potential partnerships or funding sources that could be used to implement Envision Olathe. Local funding is the most flexible while federal funding is inflexible and often comes with requirements that must be met. State funding allows intermediate control. Funding sources include:

Local Programs
- Private and Foundation Philanthropy
- Improvement Districts
- Tax Increment Financing
- Existing Programs
- Business Resources
- Capital Improvements
- City General Revenues
- General Obligation Bonds
- Revenue Bonds
- New Grant Programs

State Programs
- Tax Exemptions
- Attraction Development Grant Program
- Promoting Employment Across Kansas
- Tax Credits
- Kansas State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit
- Heritage Trust Fund

National Programs
- Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program
- Recreational Trails Aid Program
- Surface Transportation Block Grant Program
- National Creative Placemaking Fund

Local Programs

The City, County, and other local agencies and groups have a variety of programs that can be utilized to help fund downtown improvements.

Private and Foundation Philanthropy

Envision Olathe provides a multiple opportunities for individual or foundation contributions. Private philanthropy, with appropriate recognition and commemoration, is a critical part of the implementation program, and is especially appropriate for trail projects, such as the Mill Creek Trail, public art and gateway pieces, and other public open spaces like Courthouse Square. More information about sources of philanthropy and non-profits can be found from The Greater Kansas City Community Foundation

Improvement Districts

Improvement districts are special taxing units which allow property owners to petition for the imposition of special assessments or sales taxes on goods and services sold in the area. Community Improvement Districts (CID), Business Improvement Districts (BID), and Transportation Development Districts (TDD) each have their own requirements, making their use dependent on needs. CIDs are probably the best fit for funding additional improvements Downtown.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

TIF allows cities to pay for some costs of new development in blighted or conservation areas. The redevelopment costs are paid off with the incremental addition to property and sales tax revenue generated by the new development. Existing property and sales tax revenue is "frozen" until the project pays for the agreed upon costs. Funds may go toward public infrastructure improvements, including road construction, as well as demolition of existing structures. It may not go towards building construction.
partnerships, community engagement, neighborhood support and problem solving, and provide incentives for organized neighborhoods and leadership development.

- **Johnson County’s County Assistance Road System (CARS).** The County provides funds to construct and maintain major arterials like Santa Fe Street. Projects that improve capacity, provide major maintenance, upgrade system management, fix bridges, and/or enhance the route are eligible for a 50 percent cost share for its construction and inspection costs if selected. Cities are responsible for design, right-of-way, and utility relocation costs.

- **Johnson County’s Stormwater Management Program (SMP).** The SMP partners with cities in Johnson County to address stormwater management related issues. This includes providing 75 percent of funding for study, design, and construction of stormwater improvements to alleviate flooding and improve water quality. Stormwater management can be integrated into several projects with green space, including a trail along Mill Creek.

### Business Resources

The Olathe Chamber of Commerce provides many resources for those trying to start or grow a business. In addition to providing contacts for groups such as the Johnson County Economic Research Institute or the Mid-America Regional Council, it also produces a printable list of resources. KC SourceLink is another program which assists startups and small businesses. Resources like this can reduce the time costs of research, helping to improve bottom lines.

### Capital Improvements

Maintenance and replacement of outdated infrastructure is a regular spending item of all cities. Often, new improvements can be incorporated in the course of regular capital improvements such as utilizing the money already allocated for the Kansas Avenue streetscape improvement project.

### City General Revenues

General revenues, appropriated through the City’s annual budget process, can finance services, improvements, facilities, and development projects. These appropriations are separate from general revenues devoted to debt service on bonds. Common uses of general revenues in downtown development programs include funding staff and organizational expenses, or projects that can be divided into smaller phases, such as streetscape improvements.
General Obligation Bonds

General obligation bond issues, typically secured by general city revenues or incremental property taxes, can finance major public projects or improvements. General revenues may include property taxes or local option sales taxes. Appropriate uses for bonds include streets, infrastructure, park and public space projects, and similar improvements. These can be assessed to properties that benefit from the improvement through benefit districts.

Revenue Bonds

Revenue bonds are debt instruments that are repaid all or in part from revenues generated by a project or associated revenue sources. For example, part of the capital cost of a parking structure may be repaid through parking fees generated by that structure, or other parking facilities in a community. Revenue bonds typically are not secured by the credit of the community.

State Programs

The State of Kansas offers numerous programs that can help businesses and developers establish themselves in Kansas. This list provides a brief overview of some common programs. Others can be found by contacting the Kansas Department of Commerce or local organizations engaged in economic development who are familiar with state programs.

Tax Exemptions

Numerous tax exemptions are available for businesses in Kansas. This includes sales tax exemptions for qualified projects, utilities sales tax exemptions, and machinery and inventory sales tax exemptions. Often local groups are available to help navigate which tax exemptions may apply for a particular project.

Attraction Development Grant Program

This program provides strategic economic assistance to entities that develop tourism attractions which aid sustainable, market-driven travel experiences within the state and influence travel destination choices, create economic impact from job creation, capital investment, revenue, and/or visitation in Kansas. The program reimburses up to 40 percent of actual expenditures for a single grant project.

Promoting Employment Across Kansas (PEAK)

PEAK allows expanding businesses to retain a portion of their payroll withholding taxes paid for each newly created job. Companies in metropolitan areas need to create at least ten jobs within two years. High-impact projects that create 100 new jobs within two years can retain 95 percent of payroll withholding tax for seven to ten years.

Tax Credits

- **Day Care Facilities Tax Credit.** Tax credits are offered for Kansas income taxes for businesses providing child care services to employees. These credits apply to taxpayers who pay for or provide child care services for their employees or that provide facilities and necessary equipment for child care services. The facilities must be licensed or registered pursuant to Kansas law. The amount of the credit is based on the amount spent by the taxpayer less any contribution from its employees or any other sources, not to exceed $45,000 for the first year or $30,000 for subsequent years. Credits above taxpayer tax liability for the tax year will be refunded.

- **Research & Development Tax Credit.** Kansas offers an income tax credit equal to 6.5 percent of the difference between the company’s current qualified research and development expenditures and the average of the annual qualified research expenditures for the current year and the two previous years. No more than 25 percent of the allowable annual credit may be claimed in any given year.

- **High Performance Incentive Program (HPIP).** Companies operating an eligible business, paying above-average wages, and investing in employee training may receive a corporate income tax credit of up to 10 percent of capital investment. Unused credits may be carried forward for up to 16 years.

Kansas State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (SHRTC)

The Kansas State Historical Society administers the SHRTC equal to 25 percent of qualifying expenses incurred during a qualified project or 30 percent for certified 501(c)(3) organization. Buildings must be historic structures as listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Register of Historic Kansas Places, or contribute to a National or State Register Historic District.
Heritage Trust Fund (HTF)

HTF provides matching funds of up to $90,000 to preserve properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places or the Register of Historic Kansas Places. The HTF reimburses expenses for projects that preserve or restore historic properties including professional fees and construction costs. Properties owned by the state or federal governments are not eligible.

National Programs

A variety of federal and nationwide funding sources are available for downtown rehabilitation, small business development, and streetscape improvements. A consolidated list of possible federal funding sources is available through Reconnecting America at: www.reconnectingamerica.org/resource-center/federal-grant-opportunities. A few funding opportunities specific to this plan are detailed as follows, although it is not all inclusive of possible funding sources from the federal government or national organizations.

Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program

The National Park Service provides a 20 percent tax credit for rehabilitating designated historic properties. Properties must be income producing buildings and work must adhere to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. A 10 percent tax credit is available for rehabilitation work on non-historic buildings built prior to 1936, subject to conditions for retaining a majority of the original structure.

Recreational Trails Aid (RTA) Program

The Recreational Trails Program offers federally-funded grants through the Federal Highway Administration. Reimbursement grant funds are available for motorized or non-motorized trail development or renovation and preservation. Reimbursements are limited to 50 percent of eligible project costs and capped at $45,000 per grant. Applications are due in the spring.

Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG)

In 2016 the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) was incorporated into the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG). While no longer called TAP, STBG sets aside $760 million annually for Transportation Alternatives. Funding allocations are to projects that expand transportation choices through pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, scenic and historic highway programs, landscaping and scenic beautification, historic preservation, and environmental mitigation.

National Creative Placemaking Fund

The organization ArtPlace America offers funding for projects that target arts and culture into planning and community development efforts to strengthen the community. Any city, person, or other entity can apply and grant amounts range from $50,000 to $500,000 per project. Projects must be completed over 18 months. Awarded projects should be confined to a geographic area (such as a downtown), focus on creative placemaking, explain how arts and culture will be used, and provide metric to measure change. Applications are due in February every year.
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[This page is intentionally left blank]
1. Which of the following best describes you?

- 42, 4.9%
- 130, 15.3%
- 524, 61.6%
- 85, 10.0%
- 144, 16.9%

2. What is your age?

- 5, 0.8%
- 9, 1.1%
- 39, 4.6%
- 285, 27.8%
- 208, 24.5%
- 163, 19.9%
- 135, 15.8%
- 52, 6.1%

70 and Over
3. How often do you visit downtown for the following reasons? (select all that apply)
4. How would you rate existing economic conditions in Downtown Olathe?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provision of parks and open space</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall economic health</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office market environment</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future business prospects</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural facilities and attractions</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business growth during the last 5 years</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Other</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of business attracted from outside Olathe</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business variety</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant and bar environment</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailing environment</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Responses: 722

*Other: Survey respondents desire more reasons to visit downtown such as community events, art, shopping, and restaurants
5. How would you rate existing transportation conditions in Downtown Olathe?

- Pedestrian safety crossings: 59 Poor, 130 Fair, 218 Average, 261 Good, 42 Excellent
- Directional information to downtown: 75 Poor, 126 Fair, 226 Average, 228 Good, 41 Excellent
- Access across Santa Fe Street: 96 Poor, 166 Fair, 211 Average, 212 Good, 28 Excellent
- Connection to surrounding neighborhoods: 103 Poor, 156 Fair, 228 Average, 189 Good, 26 Excellent
- Street and traffic flow: 81 Poor, 181 Fair, 257 Average, 178 Good, 17 Excellent
- Adequacy of parking: 117 Poor, 206 Fair, 212 Average, 141 Good, 29 Excellent
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities: 125 Poor, 204 Fair, 234 Average, 106 Good, 13 Excellent
- Trail connections: 145 Poor, 186 Fair, 209 Average, 115 Good, 17 Excellent
- Transit service: 200 Poor, 182 Fair, 213 Average, 58 Good, 9 Excellent
- *Other: Survey respondents believe that the railroad crossing is a significant issue

Total Responses: 723

*Other: Survey respondents believe that the railroad crossing is a significant issue
6. How would you rate the existing community character in Downtown Olathe?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Score</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streetscape and public environment</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>3.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition of buildings</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall district appearance</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public investment in downtown</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience of being downtown</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of downtown</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition of surrounding residential areas</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Other</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private investment in downtown</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.12</td>
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Total Responses: 725

*Other: Survey respondents perceive downtown Olathe to be deteriorating and appears unsafe
7. How would you rate the existing operations of Downtown Olathe?

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>Business hours</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing and promotional activities</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities and events</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Other</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and entertainment scene</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.08</td>
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</table>

Total Responses: 715
*Other: Survey respondents want more attractions and extended business hours in downtown Olathe
8. How important are the following development improvements for Downtown Olathe?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Improvement</th>
<th>Score</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More restaurants and entertainment</td>
<td>4.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>More retail businesses</td>
<td>4.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More storefronts (infill development)</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More public gathering spaces</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional parks</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing in upper stories</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More office development</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More housing</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Responses: 692

*Other: Additional to restaurant, shopping, and entertainment development, survey respondents want to see the public library and farmers market improved.
9. How important are the following transportation improvements for Downtown Olathe?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Slightly Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve street and traffic flow</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen access across Santa Fe Street</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More parking</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve pedestrian safety crossings</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better bicycle and pedestrian facilities</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve connection to surrounding neighborhoods</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve trail connections</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A transit shuttle or circulator</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better directional information to downtown</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Responses: 689

*Other: Survey respondents want to see issues surrounding the railroad crossing addressed.
10. How important are are the following community character improvements for Downtown Olathe?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Slightly Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preserve surrounding historic districts</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design guidelines for new development</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>211</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restore historic business facades</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve streetscape (sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, and benches)</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve entrance features and gateways</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special graphics and signs (including historic information)</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murals and public art</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Other</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Responses: 691

*Other: Survey respondents believe that Downtown Olathe’s historic character should be strengthened
11. How important are the following operational improvements for Downtown Olathe?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Slightly Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More special events and activities</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More neighborhood events and activities</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better advertising and promotion</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend business hours</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Other</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Responses: 686

*Other: Survey respondents want improvements that will attract people to and retain them downtown.