

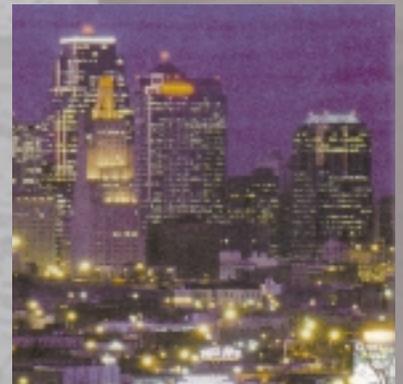
Final Executive Report

# Downtown Corridor Development Strategy

Kansas City, Missouri

Prepared for  
The Civic Council of Greater Kansas City

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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While it lies in the heart of America, Kansas City has a decidedly western attitude about outward growth and expansion. Within the region, the downtown area has always been a great center, serving as a place for trade, business, government, and entertainment. The impression of a bustling downtown, people on the street, and safety in numbers has declined as people and activities have dispersed outward. Many businesses and developers have become hesitant to invest in downtown without a clear sense of the future.

Downtown can reestablish its hold on the center, however, by building onto its strengths and addressing key issues. The economy of downtown needs to diversify to embrace more residential and cultural uses as a complement to the traditional business and government core. Retail, restaurants, and entertainment will follow this lead. A system of gracious parks and tree-lined streets throughout the downtown will create image and value, while inspiring private reinvestment in key quadrants.

The goal of the Downtown Development Strategy is to create confidence and certainty for future investment. The plan identifies future development opportunities, open space amenities, exciting new destinations, and the connections between these places. It also identifies policies and strategies that must be set in motion to accomplish these goals. In order to be successful, many different entities within the public and the private sectors will have to work together to achieve a shared vision of the future.

As a first step, a downtown development and management entity with a geographic focus should be established to carry out the goals and the mission of the Downtown Corridor Development Strategy. The “Downtown Entity” should focus immediately

on the implementation of the Performing Arts Center/Convention Center District and the Library District, while setting the groundwork for development in the South Loop. In the second phase, the Downtown Entity would continue the South Loop development, engage institutional uses on Grand Avenue, and promote the ongoing development in the Crossroads District. Longer-range projects include new residential districts in the East Loop, North Loop, and the Berkley Riverfront District. A professional, committed organization will be able to respond to opportunities within the overall design framework of the plan.

Downtown Kansas City in the future will be the center for performing arts in the region, with a magnificent new campus on the hill overlooking the heart of downtown, the Crossroads, Crown Center, and Penn Valley Park (*Figure 1*). The Performing Arts Center will connect to the Avenue of the Arts to the north and will invigorate the many unique and historic theaters in the downtown. With a vibrant downtown and multiple activities within walking distance, the Bartle Hall Convention Center will thrive, offering conventioners a new ballroom facility adjacent to the Performing Arts Center, and in the future, an expanded exhibition hall. Within a ten-minute walk of the Performing Arts Center and Bartle Hall Convention Center, a new Arena or other destination attraction on Grand Avenue will anchor mixed-use development within the South Loop District while bridging the connection to the Government Center.

New downtown neighborhoods around the 10<sup>th</sup> Street Library, the North Boulevard, and the East Loop will add to the number of residents already living in Quality Hill, the River Market, and the Crossroads districts. These residents will form a

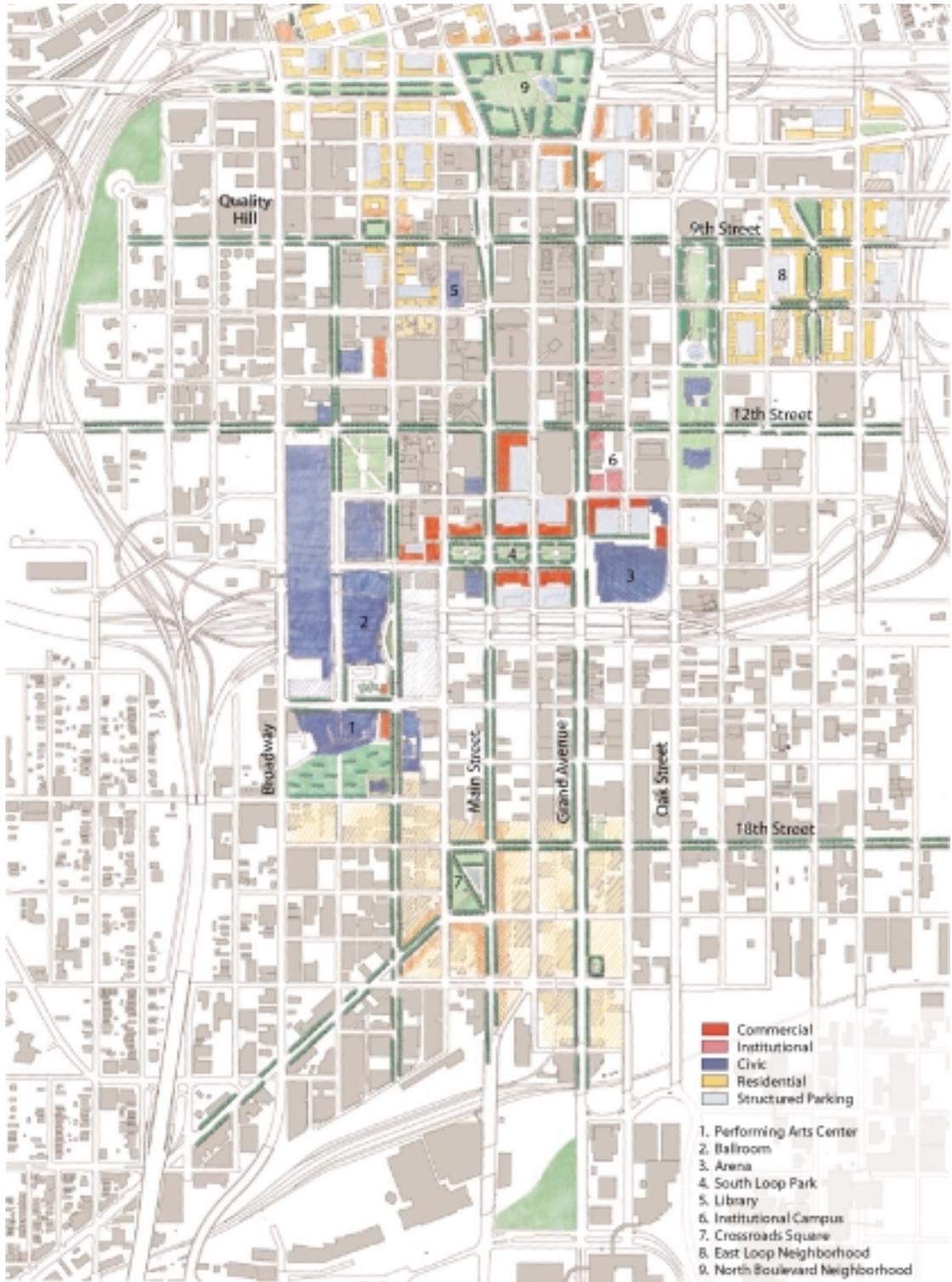


Figure 1. Downtown Development Plan

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constituency that takes pride in downtown, its parks, and its streets, ensuring that they are safe and well maintained. Restaurants and small shops will serve theater and arena patrons, conventioners, residents, and the downtown lunch crowd that spills out of the financial district buildings.

Kansas City will become known for its beautiful downtown parks that complement the system of boulevards within the City (*Figure 2*). Parks will grace each downtown district:

- The West End and Quality Hill are known for Case Park and its magnificent overlook.
- Barney Allis Plaza is in the heart of the Convention Center District, and over time could become more accessible, green, and visible from the surrounding streets.
- Ilus W. Davis Park will become the focal point for the Government District.
- A new park on 9<sup>th</sup> Street will add green space in the Library District.
- A new park extending along the length of the South Loop will provide a setting for new office, supporting retail and restaurants, and other uses.
- The North Loop will become a gracious boulevard, lined with trees, and accommodating residential development and a major new open space or civic destination.

Pedestrians will be able to walk throughout the downtown on shady streets with benches and lighting. On-street parking and two-way streets will make downtown easier to navigate for both pedestrians and cars, and will make parking more convenient, especially for short errands and nighttime

events. Bicyclists will be able to ride through downtown to reach either office destinations or home, or can pass through downtown as part of a larger loop along the Riverfront Heritage Trail and other regional trails. In the future, a light rail transit system will carry people between downtown destinations and to jobs, homes, shopping, and other destinations outside the downtown.

#### Focused Investment

Efforts to shape the future of downtown Kansas City should be directed toward concentrating destinations and people and creating a sense of place. While the quality of the journey between destinations is essential, the compelling feature of successful downtown districts is the proximity of key destinations and the cohesive character that is essential for attracting people. The geographic focus of public investments and development incentives in Kansas City should be clarified to support this overarching goal.

To demonstrate an overall confidence in the future of downtown, public and civic-minded improvements typically lead and serve as catalysts for private real estate investment. These civic and public investments should be made wisely to:

1. Magnify benefits and change perceptions
2. Target underutilized areas that are centrally located
3. Build on substantial public and private investments that have been made over the years and that are ongoing.

The Downtown Corridor covers an area of approximately 4,000 acres, extending from the Missouri River to 31st Street and from the State Line to the

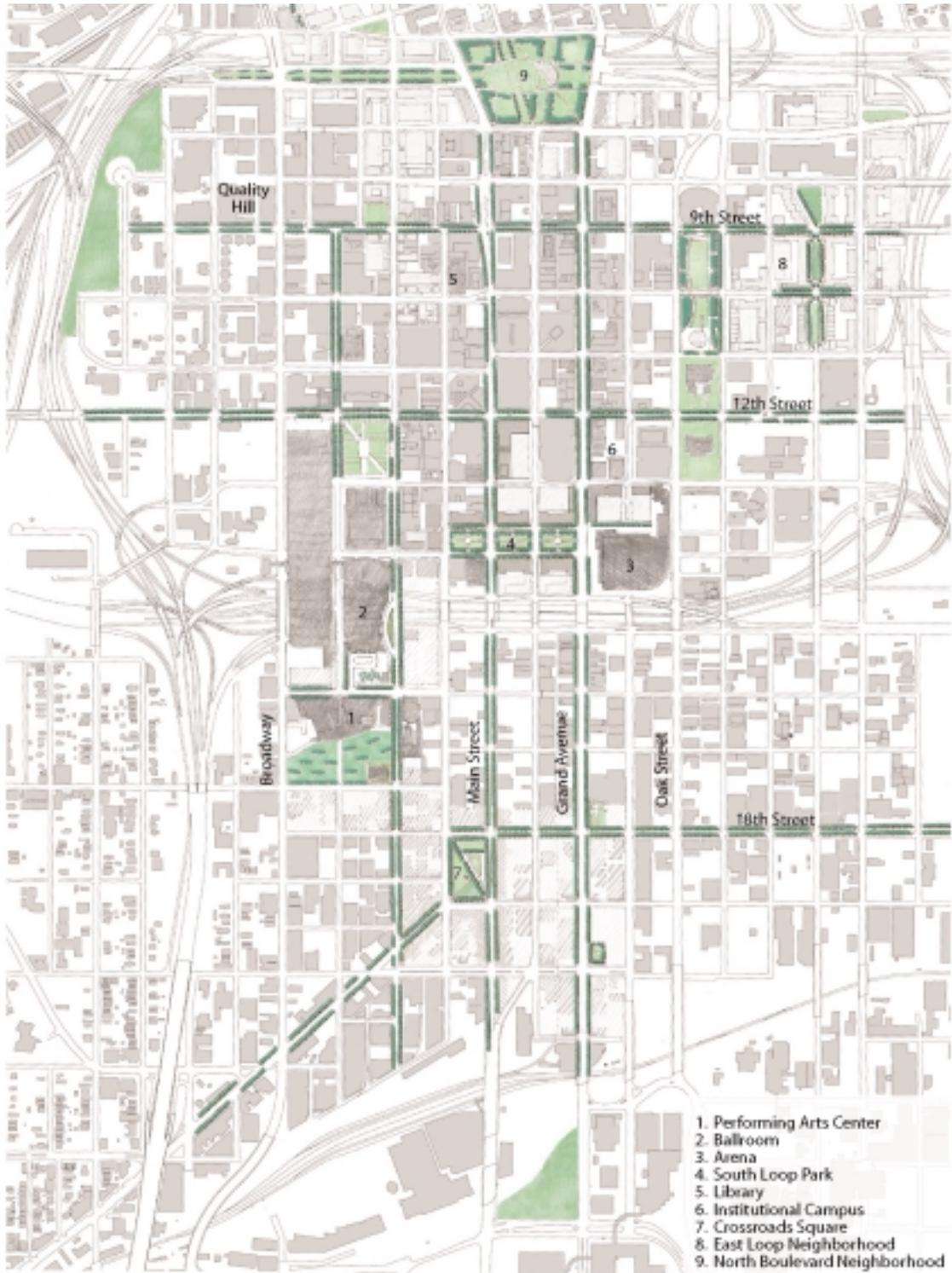


Figure 2. Open Space Framework

Bruce R. Watkins Expressway (*Figure 3*). Through this study, however, we have identified a 300-acre district in the heart of downtown that should become the highest priority for future action. This priority area extends from Oak Street to Broadway and from 9th Street to 18th Street, with a center point located around Main Street and 14th Street. From this center point, every area is within a 10-minute walk, including the following:

- Performing Arts Center
- Municipal Auditorium, Bartle Hall Convention Center, and the proposed Ballroom and Exhibit Hall expansion
- New Library and surrounding redevelopment opportunities
- South Loop redevelopment area
- Proposed Arena/destination attraction site
- Avenue of the Arts and all downtown theaters
- Financial district
- Crossroads at 18th and Southwest Boulevard.

The Priority Area reaches out to connect to the vitality on Broadway, Quality Hill, and the Garment District on the west. On the east, it reaches the new Ilus Davis Park and the government district. Redevelopment within the Priority Area will begin to close the gap between key destinations surrounding the downtown core including the River Market, Crossroads, Freight House District, 18th and Vine, and Crown Center. In this plan, the term “downtown” refers generally to the loop and its immediate surroundings, where the density and activity are the greatest.

**Connections**

While the Priority Area gathers together many important downtown places within a ten-minute walking radius (*Figure 4*), there are many other attractions and destinations in Kansas City that are not within a comfortable walking distance of downtown. The chart below shows the distances between a point in the center of downtown and the following destinations:

<b>Destination</b>	<b>Miles</b>	<b>Walking Minutes</b>
River Market/Steamboat Arabia	1.0	20
Crown Center/Union Station	1.3	25
Berkley Riverfront Park	1.5	30
18th and Vine Jazz District	1.5	30
Kemper Arena	2.0	40
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art	5.3	-
Country Club Plaza	5.3	-

In order to improve connections between these dispersed places, a light rail transit system and related shuttle service offers a comfortable and accessible means of travel for residents, employees, and visitors. In order to maximize ridership, the transit system should connect high-density residential areas to concentrated employment areas, or alternatively, the system should pass through underutilized and vacant land that can be redeveloped for these uses. Within the downtown, the system should serve important destinations such as the Convention Center, government center, and the Performing Arts Center. By identifying now the route for future transit, decisions can be made to concentrate appropriate development near future transit stops.

**Benefits**

As a partnership effort, every participant stands to benefit from an improved downtown. The Convention and Visitors Bureau will find it easier to book shows with a vibrant downtown and many different attractions within walking distance of Bartle Hall. The Chamber will be able to feature

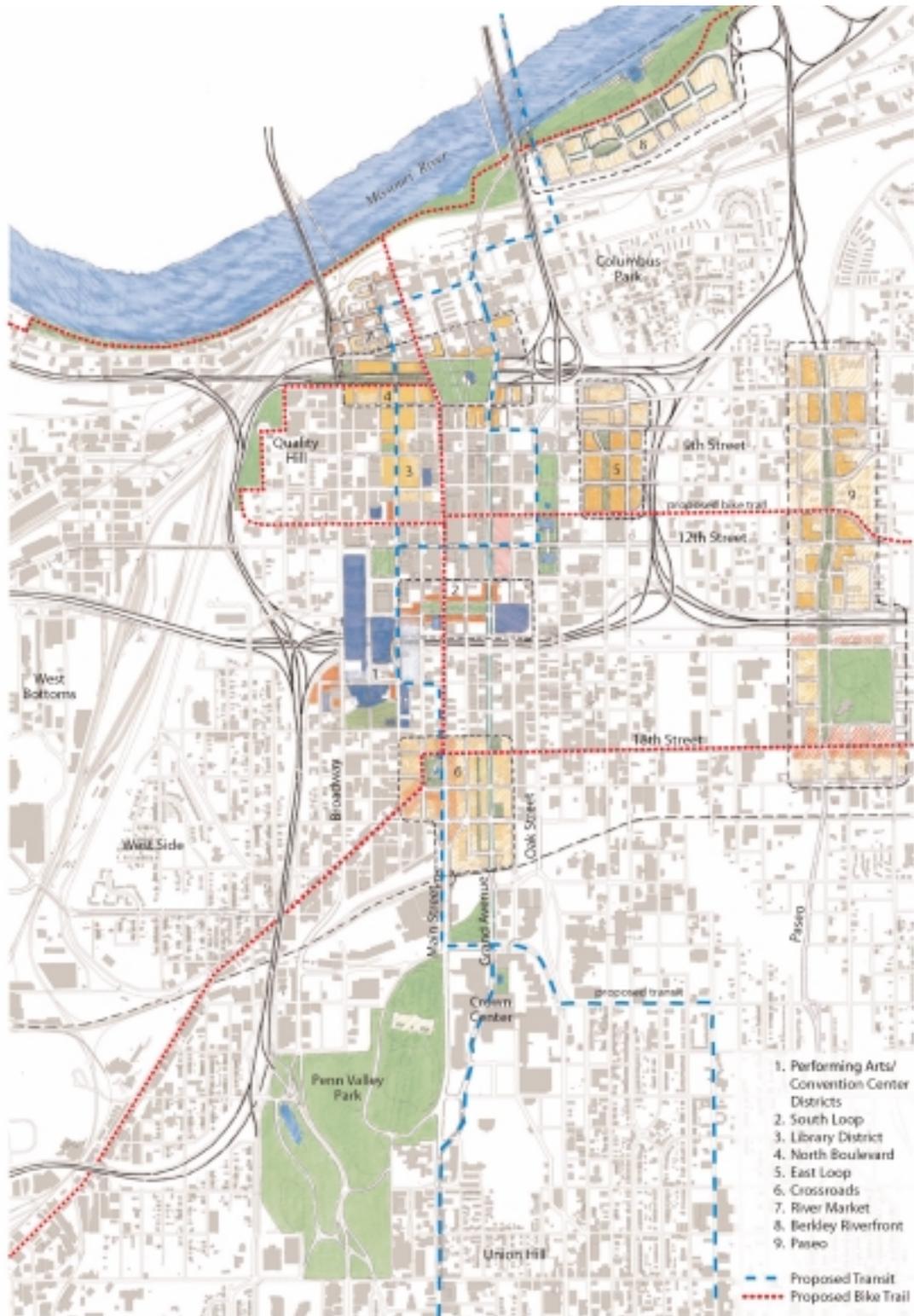


Figure 3. Context Plan

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downtown as a centerpiece for the region, and will be able to offer prospective businesses a choice between a suburban location and a more urbane and lively downtown setting. Existing businesses will find it easier to retain and attract employees in a safer and more attractive setting. Property owners will see their values increase with new public and private investment. The City will realize a stronger tax base over time and a revived downtown as an economic engine for the region. County government also will benefit from a stronger downtown core for the region. Real estate developers and other prospective investors will be able to invest with more certainty, taking advantage of a more even playing field, where tax incentives and approvals are handled more consistently to achieve the goals of the plan. Throughout the metropolitan area, residents will be able to visit downtown, for culture, arts, and entertainment as well as other services, with a feeling of safety and civic pride.

#### Planning Process

The Civic Council of Greater Kansas City initiated this planning process with the following goals and objectives:

1. Create an environment that causes businesses to choose to locate in the urban core
2. Develop priorities (including facilities) through collaboration, to guide the City, and civic and community leaders in allocating resources and planning development in the Urban Core
3. Complete a downtown corridor master plan that incorporates and implements the objectives and recommendations of the FOCUS Urban Core Plan.
4. Build consensus among various entities with an

interest in a prosperous downtown in order to speak with a unified voice on the priorities for Downtown Kansas City, Missouri.

The Civic Council's Urban Core Committee led the planning effort through a collaborative partnership with The Chamber, the Downtown Council, and the City, including the active participation of the Mayor, the City Manager, and the City Planning Director. The Downtown Corridor Development Strategy recognizes that many existing and ongoing plans affect the study area, including the following key initiatives:

- Mayor's River-Crown-Plaza Initiative
- FOCUS Plan
- Convention Center Expansion
- Performing Arts Center
- River Market Development
- Riverfront Heritage Trails
- Wayfinding Study
- Envision Downtown, as part of the Downtown Council's Live Work Play Initiative.

The planning process has involved extensive outreach to stakeholders including the City Council, City staff, the County, the business community, economic development interests, civic and cultural organizations, real estate developers, neighborhood groups, architects, and institutional and other not-for-profit organizations. Initial interviews with stakeholders were held in October 2000. In January 2001, the project team presented the analysis and a series of alternative concept plans for discussion. Draft recommendations were presented in April, and the presentation of the final plan will be made in May 2001.

While this initial phase of the planning process is



Figure 4. Five-and Ten-Minute Walking Distances

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complete, the planning and urban design process will need to continue with more detailed design, as necessary, to define projects, to provide costs and design guidelines, and to test specific design ideas as projects move closer to implementation. The stakeholders should remain involved during this process to ensure action and to continue to shape the final plan and implementation projects.

The Performing Arts Center work session provides a model for open, collaborative planning and design, which could be replicated to address other complex issues. The design of the Performing Arts Center and its relationship to the downtown Loop and to the proposed expansion of Bartle Hall was discussed throughout the planning process. The Consultant team convened a design work session to address the complex issues related to these projects. Participants included the clients and design teams from each of the three projects: Performing Arts Center, Bartle Hall ballroom and exhibit hall expansion, and Downtown Corridor Development Strategy. The work session provided a forum for sharing project information, studying issues and alternatives together, and identifying a proposed solution that met the key objectives of each project as well as the overall urban design goals.

#### Stakeholder Themes

A number of common themes that arose during the stakeholder interviews and work sessions have been addressed in the final plan. They include the following:

1. Revitalization efforts need to be concentrated and focused, with the greatest need in the area within the Loop. The freeways are barriers that are choking the Loop.
2. The Performing Arts Center siting and its rela-

tionship with downtown needs to be addressed, especially in relation to the siting and design of new facilities for the Convention Center.

3. A hierarchy and pattern of streets is needed with a focus on 9th, 12th, 18th, Broadway, Main, and Grand, and with special treatment of the Avenue of the Arts on Central Street.
4. A prominent civic destination is desired. Of the possibilities, there is clear consensus on the Performing Arts Center and the new library. Some participants in the planning process were supportive of a downtown arena, but there was no consensus for a downtown baseball stadium at this time. Additional museums and attractions such as an aquarium lacked the necessary broad-based support to be successful.
5. Downtown should be more urbane, safe, and exciting with theaters, restaurants, and shops, in part supported by more downtown residents.
6. The West End, River Market, Crossroads, and Freight House districts are attractive areas for redevelopment and renovations although incentives are still necessary.
7. Downtown needs more civic parks and streetscape improvements.

The stakeholders also articulated the challenges facing downtown, including the following:

1. Downtown lacks image and amenities compared to other locations in the region.
2. Downtown appears unsafe and unattractive, making it hard to recruit employees and businesses. The presence of more people and activity on the street would help alleviate this problem.
3. Downtown lacks a committed and powerful advocate.
4. The value of land downtown is too high, and may be affected by the presumed availability of TIF agreements. Land assembly could facilitate redevelopment.
5. City incentives for development are not based on clear criteria and have no geographic focus. Uncertainty in development incentive packages and approvals acts as a disincentive.
6. Parking is not addressed in a rational manner either for building renovation or new construction. City participation in parking could be a powerful incentive for downtown development.

#### Downtown Issues

The hills in downtown Kansas City are one of its most striking features, adding drama to the city and its buildings. In the Government district, Ilus Davis Park and the new Federal Courthouse occupy the high ground. The Performing Arts Center will be located on the top of the hill at 16th Street and Central Street. Many hilltops are occupied by resi-

dential neighborhoods: Quality Hill, Union Hill, and the West Side are examples. Other residential areas in or near downtown take advantage of historic buildings, such as those found in the Crossroads and the River Market.

In addition to hilltops and historic buildings, waterfronts and parks typically provide amenities for residential and other developments. From the Loop, however, the river is difficult to reach, and downtown historically has lacked open space. The five-acre Ilus Davis Park is a significant addition to the existing parks in the core, which are Barney Allis Plaza and Case Park. Penn Valley Park, the Crown Center parks, and Berkley Park on the riverfront are significant but not easily reached from downtown.

The Downtown Corridor has a collection of unique destinations that are distinctly Kansas City in their origin and flavor. These destinations are quite dispersed, however, and most are located outside of the Loop, including: the Steamboat Arabia Museum and the River Market area; 18th and Vine area with its celebration of jazz and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum; the American Royal and its horse shows and barbecue events in the West Bottoms area; Union Station/Science City; and the



*City Market*



*City Market*

The Government District represents a significant number of employees and a major destination for many, but a number of vacant lots remain in this area. The Convention Center District features hotels, theaters, and places for assembly, but is notably lacking in street level retail, restaurants, and other destinations for conventioners.

Hallmark Visitor Center at Crown Center. All of these destinations are a 25- to 40-minute walk out of downtown. Other attractions such as Country Club Plaza and the Nelson Museum of Art are over five miles away. Within the Loop are three historic theaters, Bartle Hall Convention Center, and the multi-purpose historic Municipal Auditorium, but few other unique destinations.

The pattern of vacant land within the Loop reveals that the edges of downtown are eroding. The largest tracts of vacant and underutilized land lie in the South Loop adjacent to Interstate 670, in the East Loop adjacent to Interstate 70, and in the North Loop adjacent to Interstate 70. The West End, including Broadway, Quality Hill, and the Garment District, is thriving with a mix of housing, office, parking, restaurants, and open space. The Financial District bustles around the core but becomes softer with many vacant buildings as one moves outward to Grand Avenue or to 10th Street.

## 2. DESIGN AND PLANNING PRINCIPLES

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A downtown plan must be flexible to accommodate changing economic and physical conditions. The illustrative master plan provides a vision, but plans evolve to respond to opportunities and other criteria. We recommend the following principles to guide decision-making and shape the future of downtown.

### Planning Strategies

1. **Concentrate destinations to create a sense of place and magnify benefits.** Major destinations within a ten-minute walk of the downtown center will create a pedestrian-friendly environment, in which destinations reinforce each other to generate a lively character.
2. **Focus investments and incentives to achieve plan goals in a consistent manner.** Public subsidies and incentives should be distributed on the basis of a set of clear criteria that generates private investment and positive transformation over time.
3. **Improve the public realm to add amenities and increase real estate values.** Downtown is significantly lacking in open space and other compelling factors that create positive addresses for development.
4. **Diversify downtown to create a place for culture, the arts, and living, not just business.** Many U.S. cities are transforming their economies to reflect changing transportation and business decisions, and to capture the unique advantages of a central location that offers historic character and an urban lifestyle with arts, housing, and entertainment.
5. **Maintain flexibility to accommodate opportunities without sacrificing principles.** Cities are dynamic with changing economic and cultural forces. The development plan establishes a long-range vision to preserve future options, but must be able to accommodate new opportunities within a strong framework.



*Midland Theater*



*9th Street Corridor*

#### Urban Design Principles

The vision for the future of the downtown relies on a set of essential principles of urban design as they relate to Kansas City. These include

1. Surround the downtown with residential uses, taking advantage of hilltop sites, historic building stock, and riverfront land.
2. Create new parks in each quadrant of downtown, placing them in the heart of redevelopment areas.
3. Buildings should be placed to define open space and street corridors with consistent heights along their facades.
4. Locate ground floor retail on key corners and facades around park areas.
5. Preserve landmark buildings and the historic building stock, which contribute character that cannot be replaced.
6. Streets should be activated by front doors and active ground floor uses.
7. Parking should be placed on the interior of the blocks and/or with the narrow end exposed to the street.
8. Every opportunity for shared parking should be explored before new parking is built, especially with the proximity of the financial district and cultural/civic uses.
9. Upper level buildings should not block street corridors; overhead pedestrian bridges should be limited and, where inevitable, should be light and transparent structures.
10. Use new development, strong pedestrian links, and other means to diminish the barrier of the interstate highways around the loop.
11. Promote the concept of the Avenue of the Arts using both Central Street and Wyandotte Street with a major transition across Barney Allis Plaza.
12. Minimize the impact of service areas on the pedestrian environment.
13. Design so that each phase of development can be experienced as a coherent piece.
14. Respect landforms, topography, and views in the design of new parks and buildings.

### 3. PHASING AND PRIORITY PROJECTS

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The phasing of capital projects provides a strategic game plan that anticipates likely market demand, funding, political support, catalyst effect on other properties, and the balance of private and public investment. The art of phasing is to concentrate investment and public and private development so that each phase succeeds in creating a sense of place. Like a stone in still water, each project should inspire the next so that benefits ripple outward from each major investment.

A phasing strategy allows as many projects as possible to move forward independently, without hinging or tying one project to another. The development plan itself reflects the phasing by placing the most likely projects close together in a key location, so that valuable land is not tied up with the prospect of a long term project that might not happen (*Figure 5*).

The proposed transit system is being reviewed through a separate planning process. Downtown development will benefit from the proposed transit system and its current route alignments. The phasing of downtown development, however, is not tied to the transit line. In other words, civic spaces and private development can proceed ahead of the transit line, although the mix of uses and the location of parking should reflect future transit station development.

#### Roles and Responsibilities

The initiatives and projects listed below provide a work plan for the proposed Downtown Entity, working in concert with the City and other stakeholders to realize the goals of the downtown development plan. Depending on the project, the Downtown Entity will advocate, coordinate, manage, operate, seek funding, assemble land, and develop real estate. The organization of the

Downtown Entity is discussed in more detail in Section 5 of this report.

Because improvements to the public realm are essential, the City's participation and support is crucial. Public policies in every department and at every level should consistently support a shared long-term vision for downtown, and should be coordinated with the mission of the economic development agencies (Economic Development Corporation, Kansas City Area Development Council, and the Land Clearance Redevelopment Authority). The City typically provides funding for utility infrastructure, street improvements, and parks, although it may be preferable for a private non-profit organization to manage these projects. Development is shaped through the City's zoning, building codes, economic development policies, and incentive packages. Eminent domain is a powerful tool that is sometimes necessary to complete the assembly of a block of land. The Downtown Entity must have a strong working relationship with the City so that the two entities support and complement each other.

The private sector includes real estate development, corporate investment, and individual philanthropy, all of which will bring critical capital and vision to shape the downtown. The expertise of private real estate development should be tapped whenever possible to accomplish the plan goals, including residential, office, and retail development. The private market might initially require the assistance of the Downtown Entity and/or the City to close the financial gap on projects, using land assembly, land write-downs, and other incentive to make projects feasible. Corporations affect downtown through initial and ongoing investments in business locations as well as civic-minded improvements or funding of civic projects. Individual and corporate philanthropy in Kansas City has a long track record of investment in downtown ranging from providing

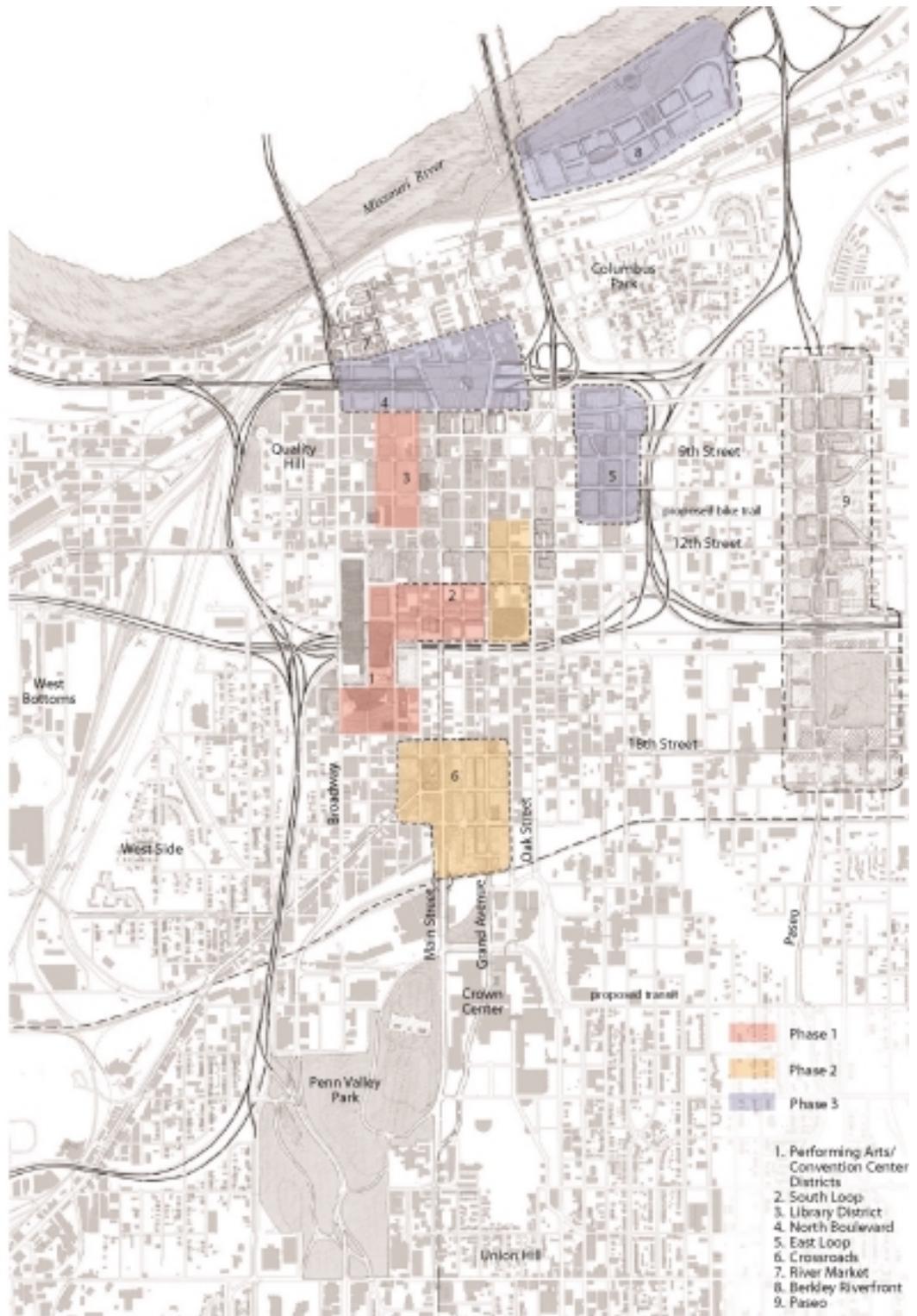


Figure 5. Phasing Diagram

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gap financing for Quality Hill housing to developing the new Performing Arts Center.

The idea of a downtown educational campus suggests the participation of either public or private institutions that might be interested in the benefits of a downtown location or a downtown branch campus. A downtown advocate and development corporation will be necessary to solicit and encourage these institutions to locate downtown and to acquire and renovate the necessary buildings.

#### Years 1 through 5

The priorities in the first five years are to set up a development and management entity and to realize significant new development in the downtown core, specifically the Performing Arts District, the Library District, and the South Loop District (*Figure 5*). Significant office, retail, and entertainment uses should be encouraged to locate within the Loop. Creating new residential neighborhoods within the Loop should be a high priority in the first five years, including zoning changes, building code changes, creation of public open space, land assembly, and development incentives packages. Residential development initiatives in the River Market, Crossroads, and Freight House areas should be supported and encouraged but should be expected to move forward at their own pace.

Some overall improvements to downtown streets, including a two-way system, wayfinding signage, and street trees and other landscape improvements on major streets, will begin to change the image of downtown. During this initial phase, the transit planning and design will begin. Efforts also should be made to identify an educational institution(s) that could benefit from a downtown location.

#### Policies and Organization

- Establish downtown development and management entity
- Establish goals and incentives strategy for new downtown development based on cost/benefit model
- Consider fine-tuning and/or modifying the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program to give preference to the Priority Area in downtown
- Identify parking locations and establish a development and funding strategy
- Ensure consistent zoning regulations and streamline development approvals to support the development plan
- Create design guidelines for new development downtown.



*Performing Arts Center Site*

Performing Arts/Convention Center District

The Performing Arts Center occupies a key hilltop location looking out to downtown to the north and Crown Center to the south. (Figure 6). The building, which is being designed by Moshe Safdie and Associates, will respond to the topography by wrapping around the site to engage Wyandotte Street, the nearby Convention Center Ballroom, and the downtown beyond. The ballet school and other educational campus buildings are aligned along the east side of Wyandotte Street.

The City is proposing a new ballroom for the Convention Center. This facility will adjoin the existing Conference Center and expand across the interstate highway, providing a new front door for the Convention Center along Wyandotte Street. A large plaza high on the hill near 16th and Central Street will open out at the level of the main ballroom floor, offering opportunities for bus drop-offs and/or outdoor events. In the future, these facilities will be served by a transit stop along the proposed Wyandotte transit line.

The Avenue of the Arts, which is concentrated along Central Street north of the Convention Center, will make a transition across Barney Allis



Central Street Corridor



Figure 6. Performing Arts/Convention Center District

Plaza, and continue with active civic and performing arts activities along Wyandotte Street. When additional space is needed to expand the Convention Center exhibit hall (approximately 200,000 gross square feet), this will occur between Wyandotte Street and Baltimore Street, extending across the interstate between 14th Street and 16th Street.

The key implementation steps in this phase include the following:

- Design and build Performing Arts Center
- Design and build the Convention Center Ballroom
- Renovate the Municipal Auditorium to include the National Association of Basketball Coaches facilities. Maintain and renovate facilities as necessary to take better advantage of the building's historic, symbolic, and functional qualities.
- Design and build parking structure(s), encouraging shared use wherever possible
- Improve Wyandotte Street
- Establish incentives package for residential development on appropriate sites

Library District

Some of the most spectacular historic buildings are found within the Library District, including the Library itself (*Figure 7*). These buildings establish a comfortable residential scale, suitable for building reuse and renovation as well as new infill development. In general, the redevelopment parcels are north of 10th Street and extend north toward Interstate 70. In order to create an active and

pedestrian-friendly street, the vacant lot along 10th Street is recommended for residential use, with the potential for some parking in the center of the block. Every effort should be made to identify shared parking opportunities for the Library, taking advantage of the many garages in the area serving daytime business uses. Ninth Street is a major street in this district. Along 9th Street and in the center of the undeveloped parcels, a new park will provide a setting for new residential and mixed-use development. New uses in this area will improve the connections between the downtown core and the River Market area.



Figure 7. Library District Plan



Library District

The key implementation steps in this phase include the following:

- Renovate Library building
- Identify opportunities for shared parking within this district
- Redevelop adjacent parking lot site for residential use with some shared parking
- Establish incentives for residential reuse of historic buildings and for new residential construction within the district
- Improve 9th Street

### South Loop District

The South Loop occupies an important gateway location into downtown (*Figure 8*). As part of the spine of development between the Financial District and Crown Center, office is seen as the prime use in this area, but could be supported by retail, restaurants, and perhaps some housing. New development will focus on a three-block park along 14th Street, anchored at the west end by the landmark Power & Light building and on the east end by a new arena. The arena effectively buffers the jail and the nearby telecommunications building, while bridging the distance between the South Loop and the Government District. The arena is within a five to ten minute walk of the Financial District and the Municipal Auditorium, suggesting many opportunities for shared parking and a rich vibrant district. New parking within the district faces away from the park. In the event an arena is not feasible, another prominent civic destination could occupy this site. Redevelopment in the South Loop will spur investment in adjacent sites, such as the Jones Block and the proposed reuse of historic structures along Grand Avenue.

The key implementation steps in this phase include the following:

- Assemble land
- Establish urban design guidelines
- Initiate developers' RFP
- Plan for shared parking with the Financial District and the Performing Arts Center/Ballroom



Figure 8. South Loop District Plan

#### Downtown Campus on Grand Avenue

The scale of the existing historic buildings along Grand Avenue suggests an ideal opportunity for reuse as an educational campus in the heart of downtown. This campus could be a single institution or a consortium of colleges and universities that are looking for a branch location downtown. Programs might be designed to attract downtown workers and might include technology and businesses coursework. Alternatively, planning and design schools could take advantage of the location for research, study, and proximity to the many architectural offices within the City. Students in the downtown area contribute to active streets and help support housing, retail and entertainment uses.

The key implementation steps in this phase include the following:

- Initiate search for educational and/or research institution(s)
- Acquire vacant buildings on Grand Avenue (11th to 13th Streets)



South Loop District Existing Site

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## Gateways and Access

The following implementation steps are recommended to identify and improve the street hierarchy, as well as to improve wayfinding, orientation, and access within the downtown:

- Improve 12<sup>th</sup> Street
- Implement Downtown Council's Wayfinding recommendations
- Re-establish two-way street system
- Plan for transit system.

## Years 6 through 10

In years 6 through 10, the Performing Arts/Convention Center District will have been transformed and the groundwork for the South Loop district will be underway. The realization of open space and a new mixed-use development in the South Loop should become the highest priority to offer new development sites for office uses.



*Power & Light Building*

During this phase, the prospect of a downtown arena may gather momentum, providing an anchor for the South Loop district. Efforts to create the downtown campus should continue and should be complemented by improvements to Grand Avenue.

New initiatives in this phase involve interventions in the Crossroads area to provide a civic open space at the juncture of 18th and Southwest Boulevard, develop parking structures, and promote infill development as necessary. Over time, improvements in the West Bottoms should distinguish it from downtown and support the American Royal, which sponsors unique events that are authentic to the history of Kansas City.

## South Loop

To continue development within this area, the key implementation steps in this phase include the following:

- Design and build open space
- Negotiate incentives package and select developer
- Develop arena or other civic building/destination attraction as anchor on Grand Avenue.

## Downtown Campus on Grand Avenue

The key implementation steps in this phase include the following:

- Develop educational and/or research campus
- Improve Grand Avenue streetscape.

## Crossroads



Figure 9. Crossroads Square Plan

The Crossroads District has already experienced considerable building renovation and reuse for housing, lofts, galleries, and restaurants. New development will fill in the gaps in the street facades and activities. Stakeholders identified the need for parking to support any further development. New parking structures within the district should be carefully located in the interior of blocks and with the narrow end fronting on the street. A new park at the intersection of 18th Street and Southwest Boulevard, as suggested in the FOCUS Plan, will create a focal point for the community (Figure 9). In this new center, retail uses might cluster around the park. The 18th Street Corridor from the Jazz District and Southwest Boulevard from the Freight House District will meet at this important civic space.

The key implementation steps in this phase include

the following:

- Develop district parking structure(s)
- Design and build Crossroads Square
- Assemble key parcels as necessary to promote infill development.

West Bottoms

The West Bottoms is physically and perceptually distant from downtown, separated by considerable grade differences. In order to minimize competition with downtown, new investment in this area should further enhance its distinct features and history, such as the American Royal, large outdoor events and festivals, and animal shows. In general, office, residential and retail uses should be targeted for downtown wherever possible in order to concentrate development. This suggests that the West Bottoms' revival will proceed on its own steam or be realized in the long term. The key improvements in this area might include an expansive public gathering space – a fairgrounds – that could support American Royal events and accommodate outdoor music events and cultural festivals. The fairgrounds should be linked to the Kaw River, with its boating potential, and to the regional trail system in the area. In this phase, key implementation steps include:

- Develop outdoor public gathering space (“fairgrounds”) near American Royal and Kemper Arena.

Access and Circulation

- Design and build initial transit phase.

Years 11 to 20 and beyond

Once the heart of downtown takes on new life, efforts can begin to shift outward to address surrounding areas. Residential areas in the East Loop, the North Boulevard, and the Riverfront District will further enhance downtown, providing a range of housing choices for people wanting proximity and a downtown lifestyle. In the long-term, the Convention Center plans to build additional exhibition space.

East Loop

With its hilltop location, the East Loop will complement Quality Hill and help encircle the downtown core with new residential neighborhoods (Figure 10).

In the center of the neighborhood, a new park will

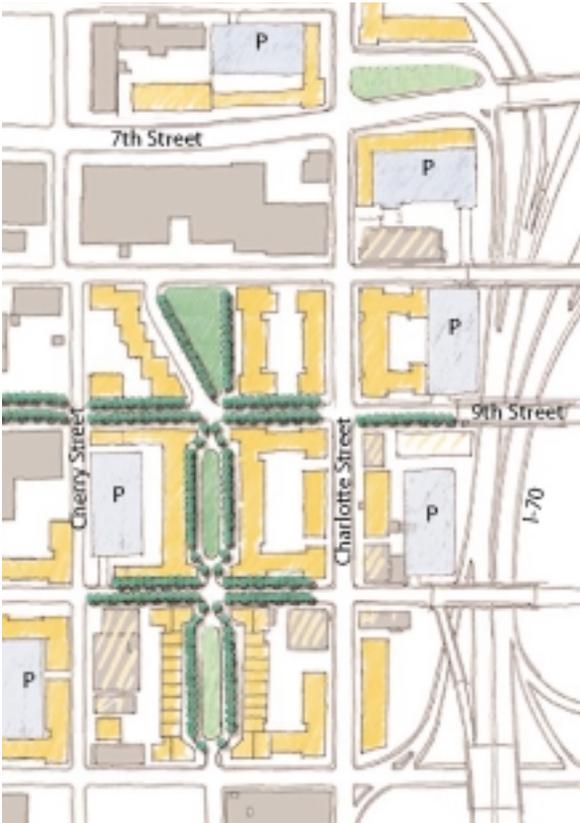


Figure 10. East Loop Plan

establish a different character in this area, improving the setting for housing. High density, low- to mid-rise housing will define streets and park areas and bring enough people to the area to create a sense of community.

The key steps in this phase include the following:

- Assemble land
- Establish urban design guidelines
- Design and build open space
- Initiate developers' RFP and select developer

North Boulevard

The North Boulevard re-introduces Kansas City's famous boulevard system into the downtown area (Figure 11). Following the precedent of many cities, this will involve the removal of a section of the highway to break down the chokehold on the Loop. Within this reclaimed land, the boulevard will help distribute traffic while providing a more pedestrian friendly and green open space setting for new development. The scale of the highway right-of-way would also allow a major new destination park within the corridor, bridging the downtown Loop to the River Market. The vision for this area suggests a long-range goal that may evolve in the long term beyond the twenty-year mark.

While extensive preliminary work would be involved in studying the existing highway system operations and alternative routes and capacity, the summary of key implementation steps in this phase are as follows:

- Close North Loop of highway
- Assemble land
- Establish urban design guidelines
- Develop parks system and boulevard
- Initiate developers' RFP and select developer

Berkley Riverfront District



Figure 11. North Boulevard Plan

A new residential community in the Berkley Riverfront District could blend high density housing types in a semi-suburban setting, offering a distinct product from downtown. This model is well established in Memphis at Mud Island and has been quite successful. While the steps below could respond to earlier opportunity and interest, the riverfront area is seen as too distant from downtown to justify significant focus in the first phases:

- Enhance Berkley Park with a new fountain
- Develop urban design guidelines
- Assemble land and seek developer through RFP process

Convention Center District

- Design and build exhibit floor expansion for Convention Center.

Access and Circulation

- Design and build additional phases of transit system.



Riverfront Fountain Opportunity

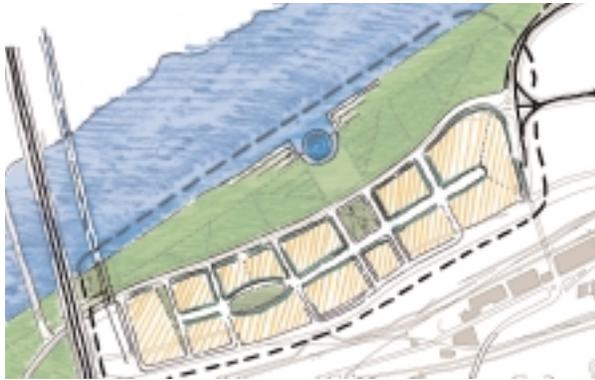


Figure 12. Berkley Riverfront District

and the need to identify a professional team before committing to the capital investment in a new facility. Without a clear consensus on the need or desire for a downtown arena, the final plan sites this facility east of Grand Avenue. Siting the arena east of Grand Avenue frees up valuable real estate in the South Loop in the event that the arena is not developed for many years, if at all. Development in this district, which has been held back for many years by prior development plans that were never implemented, will be able to proceed, transforming this key gateway area to downtown.

#### Alternative Concept for the Arena Siting

The proposed development plan evolved out of an understanding of the likely timing and feasibility of key projects, such as an arena. During the meetings and work sessions, there was considerable discussion over the amount of spin-off benefit from a downtown arena, the relationship a downtown arena would have with the existing Kemper Arena,

Nevertheless, development is often opportunity driven. In the event that funding became available in the next year or so for a professional team and a new facility, it may be appropriate to reconsider an arena site closer to the Convention Center (*Figure 13*). Careful urban design will be required to ensure that this location does not preclude additional development east of Grand Avenue and that connections are made to the government district.

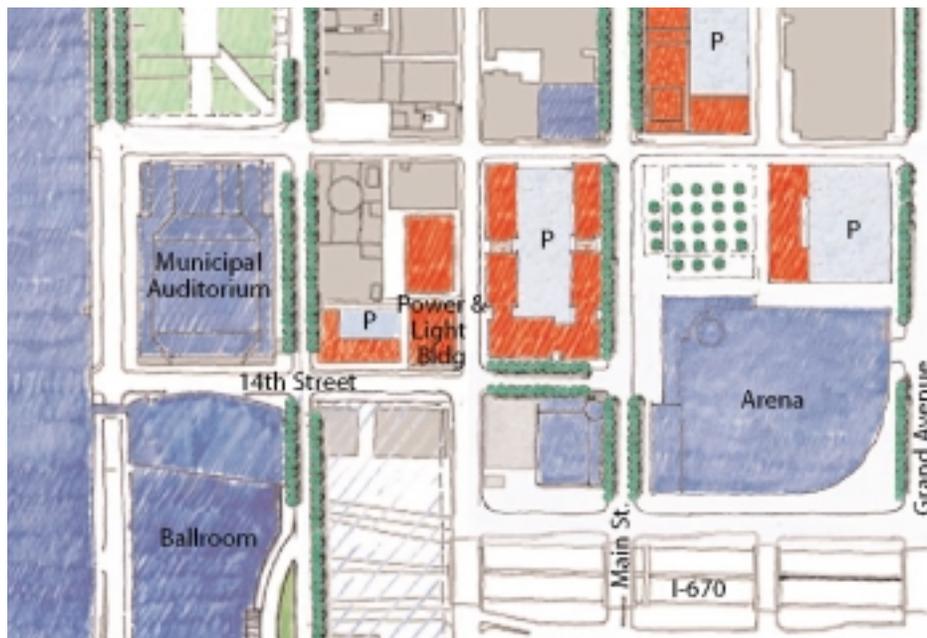


Figure 13. Alternative Concept for the Arena Siting

## 4. MARKET AND ECONOMIC ISSUES

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The following key economic and market issues are covered in the paragraphs below:

- Public Assembly Facilities—Arenas, Conventions, Arts—and their Value to Downtown
- Attractions and “Catalyst” Projects: Aquariums, Museums, etc.
- Housing: Market Support and Development Economics

### Public Assembly Facilities

The web of public assembly facilities in Kansas City is an important contributor to the regional economy. The facilities that are located downtown help to enliven the area and support restaurants and hotel occupancy and other businesses.

### Sports Facilities

Sports facilities have frequently been employed as a redevelopment tool by cities in anticipation that the activities inside the arena or stadium will create sufficient adjacent activity to act as a catalyst for new development in the surrounding blocks.

The evidence in Denver, Cleveland, and other cities suggests that this expectation is met in certain circumstances. In our experience, arenas—particularly those that host two big-league teams—have the strongest spin-off potential. Football stadiums, unsurprisingly, bring little benefit to adjacent parcels, and ballparks fall somewhere in between.

Arenas offer several advantages for a downtown:

- They can host two teams within the same facility (increasing the number of events)



*Bartle Hall Convention Center*

- They can host a wider variety of secondary events (concerts, ice shows, circuses, etc)
- They can augment and enhance convention space.

In Kansas City, the question of a downtown arena raises several key issues. First, the existing Kemper Arena, with a series of planned capital improvements, is seen as generally supportive of the market for events in Kansas City. Kemper carries about \$24 million in existing debt, which is scheduled to be retired in 2005. Simply relocating these existing events, and even a marginal addition of dates to the existing schedule, would bring relatively little regional economic impact. While relocating these events to a downtown site might create additional demand for downtown restaurants and other amenities, the impact would be relatively minor.

If the arena served a major league franchise (NBA, NHL, or both) the impact would be significantly greater. The nature of the patronage for big-league games, and particularly the participation of major regional corporations, would magnify the local benefits to downtown. Such a crowd typically spends more outside the arena, and may be more vested in the success of the enterprise.

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However, development of an arena in advance of a team is a highly risky proposition. In recent years, only New Orleans—with its considerable existing tourism economy and proven ability to host major events—has built an arena “on spec.”

The planned relocation of the Vancouver Grizzlies to Memphis is instructive. Faltering attendance in Vancouver led the team owners to scout new locations. The “shortlisted” cities were Memphis, Louisville, Anaheim, and New Orleans. Kansas City could certainly compete on demographics and market size with these cities. However, at the end of the day the site selection was not about market demographics—it was about corporate support. FedEx and AutoZone, two leading Memphis corporations, made major commitments to the team, including a financial commitment for a new arena.

Other small-market teams may move in the future, indicating that the development of a new arena and recruitment of an existing or expansion franchise may not be a long-term solution. Low attendance in Charlotte, for example, could result in the loss of the NBA Hornets, which would dramatically reduce the out-of-arena spending that occurs in that city’s downtown.

#### Convention Center

Conventions and meetings are important to downtown. Bartle Hall currently hosts about 389 events and has a total attendance of one million. The complex at Kemper hosts fewer events, but the average attendance is larger, at about 1.2 million per year. Many attendees are from out of town and bring new money into the Kansas City economy. In 1999, for example, meetings and conventions generated over 500,000 room nights, sufficient to support about 11 average-size hotels.

Annual room nights booked for convention business expanded by 114 percent from 130,183 in 1992 to 278,906 in 1999. While business has fallen off slightly since the peak years of 1997 and 1998, 304,000 and 309,000 room nights respectively, the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Kansas City believes that the trend will reverse itself in the coming years.

The Convention and Visitors Bureau recently studied its future needs. While the Convention and Visitors Bureau is not immediately planning to expand the exhibit space, it would like to acquire land to make future expansion possible. In order to accommodate the Performing Arts Center to the south, the likely location for the future exhibit space will be east of the existing conference center, spanning the highway.

The Convention and Visitors Bureau anticipates beginning construction of a new ballroom in 2002. Demand for ballroom space increased significantly over the past five to ten years. Kansas City has been unable to accommodate business that requires such space. With the completion of the ballroom, the Convention and Visitors Bureau expects to recapture much of the business that was lost because of disqualification in the past. This action is expected to compensate for the recent downward trend in convention business.

#### The Arts

A third component of the revival of American downtowns in the last decade has been the arts. The positive effects of the arts upon the city are most evident when:

- An identifiable arts and cultural district is present (facilities are clustered in the same general area)

- A mix of facilities is present (museums, theaters, art galleries etc.)
- Appropriate support businesses are present (restaurants, cafes, bars etc.)
- Partnerships are formed between businesses and cultural groups
- The subject matter pertains to authentic strengths of the area

Arts uses can be important economic engines. They have high attendance relative to other facilities, and they are open daily and are alive during weekends and at night. Performances often coincide with opportunities for dining or entertainment before or after the event. The economic punch can be powerful. Denver's more than 300 cultural and science related organizations drew 7.9 million people in 1997, some 41 percent more than the Broncos, Nuggets, Rockies, and Avalanche combined (1996-1997 season).

The proposed Performing Arts Center in downtown Kansas City can be an important new activity generator downtown. It will not generate sufficient activity on its own to spur substantial new private business investment. However, as part of a system of arts uses, supporting businesses, new housing, and public investments in the surrounding environment, the Performing Arts Center could be a catalyst for the South Loop area. Based on our experience in other cities, the impact of the Performing Arts Center on existing facilities is likely to be positive overall. Individual facilities might lose particular events or users, but the general experience of other cities is that a flagship facility of the type proposed will "lift all boats."

### An Attractions-Based Strategy

Other cities of similar size have used various kinds of attractions and entertainment facilities to enhance their downtown areas. Chattanooga, for example, has used several large-scale public projects to enliven its riverfront and downtown. The Chattanooga Regional History Museum, a \$30 million public-private project, is expected to draw 300,000 annual visitors, augmenting the one million visitors drawn each year to the Tennessee Aquarium, which cost \$50 million and opened in 1992.

More modest facilities, with strong thematic linkages to the city, can also be valuable agents for redevelopment. The downtown Louisville Slugger Museum, a private facility that generates annual attendance of about 200,000, has helped create a revival of the West Main Street district in downtown Louisville. The Louisville Science Museum and IMAX Theater is across the street, generating a concentration of visitor activity.

Many other examples exist. Attractions generally require some combination of public and private funding. The most comparable situation in Kansas City is the City's involvement as the major funding entity of catalyst projects in the River Market area, which is generally considered successful. Experience at Science City in Union Station demonstrates the challenges of attracting and sustaining the attendance required to support these facilities over the long term.

Anticipating which attractions would be best for downtown Kansas City is difficult. A successful attraction usually requires the sponsorship and advocacy of a specific regional constituency (like the current performing arts center proposal).

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However, as a preliminary set of criteria, we propose that attractions work best as downtown activators when:

- The attractions are proximate to one another, or where transit linkages reduce the apparent distance
- They appeal to a wide range of demographic segments (children, young adults, older tourists, etc.) over a wide range of daily and seasonal cycles
- They reflect the local heritage and culture of a place

#### Downtown Housing

Kansas City, as in most cities across the country, has seen strong interest in living downtown. A number of successful loft conversions have been completed, and developers are now building new, for-sale housing in the strongest locations downtown. The supply remains relatively small, however, although most observers are convinced that demand exists to support more units. Rents are a key challenge, as they are too low to support most forms of new development, and the supply of buildings that are in strong locations and that are suitable for historic tax credit deals is dwindling.

The Kansas City Metropolitan Area, as defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, is comprised of Kansas counties Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami, and Wyandotte, and Missouri counties Cass, Clay, Clinton, Jackson, Lafayette, Platte, and Ray. The MSA population has grown 12.2 percent since 1990, adding nearly 200,000 new residents, and is projected to add another 98,000 residents in 38,000 households over the next five years.

Multi-family unit permits in downtown Kansas City increased from 182, in 1997, to 410 units in 15 buildings in 1998, dropped to two in 1999, but recovered in 2000 with a projected year-end total of 264 in 2000. About 1,200 lofts exist downtown, and we identified another 600 to 800 units in planning stages. The supply of buildings suitable for conversion in the traditional loft sub-markets—the Garment District and the River Market—is thin. However, the Freight House District, the West Side, and the Crossroads area have substantial potential.

The vast majority of units are rental apartments. Conover Lofts, a new project in the River Market area, is being marketed as condos, with several premium-priced units (as high as \$970,000). The project is reportedly 50 percent pre-sold at an average of \$206 per square foot, well above the experience of previous projects.

Generally speaking, however, achievable rents are sufficiently low that preservation tax credits or other incentives are required to close the gap between actual costs and supportable costs. Low and moderate income housing tax credits would also work but have not been widely used, in part because of a low allocation of credits to Kansas City.

In all but the best units, rents remain below \$1.00 per square foot per month, which developers estimate is 20 to 40 percent below what is needed to support all-in development costs. This means that downtown housing works as long as the costs of land and parking are excluded. At these rent levels, the minimum annual salary required to afford market-rate housing downtown is \$35,000.

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The most compelling new downtown housing model appears to be a moderate-density product of 35 to 45 units per acre, in a mid-rise configuration, wrapped around structured parking. These kinds of projects, which were pioneered by JPI, Post Properties, and others, have been popular in Dallas, Denver, and other similar-sized cities. Rents would need to rise, however, or effective developer costs would have to fall, before these would be feasible in Kansas City.

Tax abatement appears to be a meaningful incentive, adding an estimated four to five percentage points to the developer's return. Abatements are potentially easier to administer, and with much lower transaction costs, than TIF. Local developers see the history of recent TIF projects, particularly in the Freight House District, as problematic.

The Mayor's River-Crown-Plaza initiative, which aims to create 10,000 new units of housing in central Kansas City, is ambitious on the supply side, but realistic as it relates to demand. Our analysis shows that such an initiative would need to capture only a small percentage of area-wide demand to achieve this kind of result. The challenge will be to create incentives sufficient for developers to take the risk of building in the face of what they and potential investors might see as an unproven market.

The community has accomplished this before, with the Quality Hill initiative, where a combination of return-driven private capital, "patient" private capital, and public funding produced a remarkable result. The magnitude of the required incentive will be substantially lower today, but the need for incentives has not been eliminated.

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

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Downtown Kansas City, like many American downtowns, faces significant competitive challenges from other development concentrations in the region, both in the suburbs and in other parts of Kansas City. One aspect of these other places that makes them more competitive is the fact that they are often centrally managed and marketed. This reflects the unified ownership and management structure of these places.

Downtown areas across the country have responded by creating institutional mechanisms to coordinate the actions of individual property owners, property managers, tenants, and city agencies. The objective is to compete more effectively by providing a higher level of service. “Service,” in this context, has many different dimensions: cleanliness, public safety, marketing and promotion, and ongoing development and redevelopment.

Public agencies typically provide services to downtown areas, just as they do for the rest of their jurisdictions. Many cities have discovered, however, that an additional level of service, funded by those who directly benefit, can enhance the economic performance—hence property values—downtown. This usually requires the formation of a business improvement district or, as it is known in Missouri, a Community Improvement District (CID). These special districts, created by local government but usually managed by private, not-for-profit corporations, collect fees from commercial property owners and spend the money on additional services in the downtown area.

The Downtown Council has considered forming a CID in Kansas City for several years. With the completion of this plan, the issue has gained additional momentum, and efforts to gauge its feasibility are now underway.

A CID, or similar structure, is often the core of a successful downtown management effort. However, such an organization is seldom sufficient by itself to accomplish the kind of change envisioned in this document. The specific components of a broad-based downtown redevelopment effort are discussed below. First, however, is a series of performance characteristics for a Downtown Development and Management Entity:

- An entity should have a *steady and predictable funding stream*, making it less dependent on annual appropriations and enabling it to plan for multi-year initiatives.
- An entity should have a degree of *political independence*, or insulation from the periodic upheavals that characterize most local governments. Open channels of communication and a strong working relationship with the City also are essential.
- *Continuity of leadership* reinforces an entity's ability to hold steady on a course based on a long-term vision.
- Because private-sector credibility is particularly important, and because such organizations must deal in a confidential environment, professional staff, a *businesslike approach*, and timely decision-making are key.
- Perhaps most important is a unique *geographic focus* on downtown. The organization must be the lead advocate for downtown interests. Elected leaders and city staff must respond to district-wide or community-wide constituencies. Those involved in the Downtown Entity are not compromised in this manner. Their area of interest is clear and consistent.

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The need to form this type of organization usually leads to a private sector, not-for-profit management structure. Several different organizations, each reflecting a specific mission or scope, usually are organized under a central management umbrella, with a single executive director and one governing board. Each constituent organization may have a governing committee on the board or may have independent boards. The Denver Partnership, considered one of the most successful downtown management entities in the country, has four organizational components, all staffed and coordinated by the Partnership. A prototypical organizational structure might look like the one outlined below.

#### *KC Community Improvement District*

The Community Improvement District (CID) is usually the genesis of the downtown entity. Its focus in Kansas City would be on making downtown clean, safe, and attractive. Funded principally by special property assessments, perhaps augmented by city appropriations, it would supplement city services downtown. CIDs require the approval of both a majority of the individual property owners within the proposed district, as well as the approval of the owners who constitute a majority of the assessed value within the district.

The marketing of such an approach requires an unusually detailed understanding of the level of current city services to help assure property owners and tenants that the CID will not duplicate current City services. Cities of comparable size have annual operating budgets for these kinds of organizations in the range of \$2 million to \$5 million, with assessments of 12 cents to 20 cents per square foot of commercial space. A realistic operating budget and assessment in Kansas City will depend on the specifics of the services plan and on the ability and willingness of property owners and tenants to pay

the assessment.

#### *KC Events*

Downtown promotions and sponsorship and the marketing of special events constitute a central activity for these organizations. Because these functions usually involve significant fee revenue, and because the expenditures may not be directly related to the CID services program, many cities establish separate events-management organizations.

#### *KC Information Services*

Data is the lifeblood of downtown development planning. A competent downtown management organization must establish a strong foundation of data regarding real estate market conditions, demographics, retail spending and sales, and the like. This function adds depth to the planning and informational underpinnings of downtown. Membership dues, foundation support, and limited fee income can fund such an entity.

#### *KC Downtown Development Corporation*

The Downtown Development Corporation is perhaps the most challenging to create, but one of the most important of the various downtown management entities. These organizations are intended to provide private-sector leadership and responsiveness to augment public redevelopment powers. They usually operate by brokering and focusing existing public redevelopment tools such as tax-increment financing, eminent domain, and tax incentives. The City currently is coordinating these functions for downtown and citywide projects. Key activities include the acquisition of priority redevelopment sites, the packaging of projects and the recruitment of developer partners, and negotiation of development incentives—all with a clear focus on downtown.

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Many different models exist. In Denver, for example, Downtown Denver Inc., is a membership organization that advocates for downtown development, working in concert with the Denver Urban Renewal Agency, which operates under clear policy guidance regarding downtown planning and development. Two entities exist in Louisville: a public-sector entity, the Louisville Development Corporation, and a private, not-for-profit organization, the Downtown Development Corporation. Redevelopment activities are shared between the two. Philadelphia's Center City District encompasses a BID as well as the Central Philadelphia Development Corporation, which works in concert with the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation to advance downtown development projects. Washington DC started with the BID, then created a "developer's roundtable," which has just been formalized as the Center City Partnership. It will work with the city's new National Capital Revitalization Corporation, in which are vested the traditional redevelopment powers. These models should be explored further to establish the most appropriate Downtown Entity for Kansas City.

The planning, design and implementation of a downtown development strategy is an ongoing process that will require the input and active participation of many different parties. The recommendations of this plan should be distributed to downtown stakeholders in the public and private sector for their use in moving forward on the priority projects.

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*This report was prepared for the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City, in cooperation and partnership with The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, the City of Kansas City, Missouri, and the Downtown Council, with significant input and participation by hundreds of stakeholders of Downtown Kansas City, Missouri.*