



City of Columbia  
**Downtown Leadership Council Interim Report**  
May 2009



State Historical Society of Missouri

Make no small plans. They have no magic to stir humanity's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high and work, remembering that a noble, logical plan once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency.

— Daniel Burnham,  
architect and Chicago city planner



# City of Columbia Downtown Leadership Council

April 14, 2009

Mayor and City Council  
City of Columbia  
701 Broadway  
Columbia, MO 65201

Re: Downtown Leadership Council Report

Mayor and Council:

The Downtown Leadership Council is pleased to submit this Report in response to the tasks you assigned last year when DLC was formed. We present information on urban design in the greater Columbia downtown area, and include several appendices with information affecting downtown Columbia.

We will present an overview of this report at your work session in early May 2009.

If you have any questions please call me at 449-2683 or any member of the Downtown Leadership Council.

Sincerely,



Nick Peckham  
DLC Chair



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Downtown Leadership Council compiled this report after spending countless hours meeting, walking around downtown, researching and discussing the future of the downtown expanded study area. We would like to thank the City Council for this opportunity and City of Columbia staff for their support. We also appreciate access to Sasaki Associates Land Use and Urban Opportunities Study and Imagine Columbia's Future documents.

We give special thanks to MU Campus Facilities Communications staff, who edited and designed this document, and to Missouri Employers Mutual Insurance, for graciously agreeing to donate the printing of this book.

Thank you to the many Columbia groups that met with the Downtown Leadership Council to offer ideas and suggestions:

Mark Timberlake and John Ott, Columbia Arts District; Don Stamper and Randy Coil, Central Missouri Development Council; Larry Moore, Columbia Chamber of Commerce; Carol Van Gorp and Paul Land, Columbia Realtors; Hank Waters, Columbia Daily Tribune; Vince Schoemehl, Grand Center tax increment district, St. Louis; Carrie Gartner, Special Business District; Sarah Read, Communications Center, on Vision committee process and implementation; Dave Overfelt, Missourian WATCHWORD; Mike Mills, Spectrum Consulting.

And lastly to David Brodsky, Carrie Gartner and Tracy Greever-Rice, citizens of Columbia, for their public input.

It has been our pleasure, and we look forward to seeing and helping Columbia's downtown take shape!



In April 2008, the Columbia City Council appointed the following to the Downtown Leadership Council:

Nick Peckham, Chair, City Council Appointee  
Mary Wilkerson, Vice-chair, Special Business District  
Brian Treece, Secretary, City Council Appointee  
Bernie Andrews, REDI Director  
Randy Gray, City Council Appointee  
Jay Hasheider, Benton-Stephens Neighborhood Association  
Bob Hutton, Columbia College  
Tim Klocko, Stephens College  
Ken Pearson, Boone County Commission  
Glenn Rice, Planning & Zoning Commission  
Linda Rootes, North Central Columbia Neighborhood Association  
Phil Steinhaus, Columbia Housing Authority  
Tim Teddy, Planning & Development Director, City of Columbia  
Bill Thompson, Douglass Neighborhood Association  
Gary Ward, University of Missouri  
Clyde Wilson, East Campus

Billye Clemons, Administrative Support III, City Manager's Office  
John Fleck, Senior Planner/GIS Coordinator, City of Columbia  
Tony St. Romaine, Assistant City Manager, City of Columbia

The DLC studied an expanded 'downtown,' and identified vacant lots, surface parking, and one-story, non-residential buildings as 'opportunity sites.'



The District



## INTRODUCTION

Downtown' is an idea in one's mind as well as an actual location. For decades downtown was the center of community activity, both social and commercial. Yet, today, most downtowns are no longer the only, or even the primary, business district in their communities. They are competing with newer commercial developments.



The District photos

**With the popularity of malls, many downtown merchants, such as the Strollway Centre, top, sought to modernize structures with aluminum siding. Now called City Centre, above, today's revitalization efforts returned the building to its original charm.**

To keep up with the commercial strip and suburban malls, owners covered older downtown buildings with aluminum and installed plate-glass windows and oversized signs to attract customers. Believing that such “modernizing” efforts would make them competitive with newer commercial strips, property owners often destroyed the character of their buildings and their downtowns.

Downtown cannot compete on the same terms with new commercial development because it lacks the features that make for success in newer, planned shopping centers: immediate major-highway access; proximity to affluent suburban households; and unified management. Traditional downtowns can regain economic vitality by implementing a comprehensive strategy that addresses the reasons for downtown decline, while seeking appropriately scaled solutions, reversing the decline and leading to new economic investment.

There is no magic list of projects the city should implement to revitalize downtown. A comprehensive approach addressing historic preservation and our community's distinct features will create an authentic sense of place. Yet, our focus must be more than on physical improvements and marketing.

Downtown Columbia has many strengths, but faces the challenges of a growing population coupled with current economic and environmental issues. A downtown urban design plan will implement a self-help process of incremental, long-term efforts, by renewing local interest in the heart of the community, which, in turn, improves the environment for business.

This report responds to the six tasks for downtown renewal the City Council has given the Downtown Leadership Council. The report presents an overview of urban design, makes recommendations based on our findings, and lists related resources in the appendices.



Urban design involves “place-making,” the creation of a setting that imparts a “sense of place” to an area. Such settings can range in scale from small public spaces or streets to neighborhoods, city-wide systems, or whole regions. Place making is achieved by:

- establishing identifiable neighborhoods
- unique architecture
- aesthetically pleasing public places and vistas
- identifiable landmarks and focal points

All of the above are underscored by compatible scales of development and ongoing public stewardship.

Key elements of a downtown “place” include:

- a lively commercial center
- mixed-use development with ground-floor retail space
- human-scale and context-sensitive design
- safe and attractive public areas
- decorative elements in the public realm
- image-making

Other key elements of urban design:

- Creating a framework that orders elements into a network of streets, squares, and blocks
- Giving form and shape to whole neighborhoods, and character to groups of buildings and to the city, downtown in particular.
- Arranging design of buildings, public spaces, transport systems, services, and amenities.
- Blending architecture and landscape architecture to make urban areas functional, attractive and sustainable.
- Connecting people and places, movement and urban form, nature and the built fabric.



The District

**Ninth Street** between campus and Broadway is a place where college students and professionals alike have created a lasting downtown “sense of place.”

## URBAN DESIGN

The concept of urban design transcends planning and transportation policy, architectural design, development economics, engineering and landscaping. Instead, the concerns of environmental stewardship, social equity and economic viability are drawn upon in creating a vision of “downtown” into which city planning resources and skills can be deployed to bring alive its distinct function and beauty.

An urban design for downtown Columbia will succeed only if the city’s overall growth is considered. Columbia’s population over the next 35 years is expected double. Where will these 100,000 additional people live? Where will they work? How will downtown Columbia take shape as the population increases?



City of Columbia

**Courthouse Square, with tiered seating for concert-goers and landscaped areas for children to play, are side benefits to the government processes in the Roger Wilson Government Center and the Boone County Courthouse.**

Urban Design involves the design and coordination of:

### BUILDINGS

The most pronounced element of urban design, buildings, shape and articulate space by forming the “walls” of the city. Well-designed buildings and groups of buildings work together to create a sense of place. Task 5 of this report addresses some guidelines.

### PUBLIC SPACE

Great public spaces are the living room of our city, places where people come together to enjoy Columbia and each other. Such spaces downtown range from the Courthouse Square, to small, local neighborhood parks, exemplified by the pocket park at Ninth and Walnut streets. Public spaces form the stage and backdrop to the drama of life, making high-quality life possible.

### STREETS

Streets connect spaces and places, as well as constitute space themselves. Defined by their physical dimension and character as well as the size, scale, and character of the buildings that line them, streets range from grand avenues such as Broadway to small, intimate pedestrian streets and alleys found in the central city, Benton-Stephens neighborhood and elsewhere. While Columbia’s network of streets is mostly in place, sections of downtown, however, can still be improved.

### TRANSPORT

Vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian networks constitute the city’s transport system. Keeping each element in balance helps define the quality and character of Columbia, making the city either friendly or dangerous to pedestrians while having a big impact on both energy consumption and the sustainability of downtown. Bus or light rail transit to other Boone County cities and Jefferson City could strengthen downtown Columbia. The Downtown Leadership Council wants downtown Columbia to be “a place to go to – not through.” Transportation is key.



## LANDSCAPE

Greenery — urban parks, trees, plants, flowers and water — is woven throughout downtown. Living flora and soft, contrasting spaces help define the character and beauty of the city. Green, sustainable places also allow people to feel safe and refreshed in the context of community. Green-space will always be a central concern in the urban design of Columbia. The city has many years of experience in developing and maintaining a world-class park system that includes a particular focus on downtown landscaping and hardscape needs.

Compact, walkable places are basic to life and sustainability. The combination of human-scale urbanism (with its mix of utility and services, range of housing options, public transit systems, and daily walking and bicycling) makes for green, sustainable living. Add safe, clean, renewable energy, and true sustainability results (See Task 5).

In an era of dwindling oil supplies and rising energy costs, the need for low-energy-use lifestyles has never been greater. Urban design and sustainability principles and practices allow the creation of enjoyable places to live, work and play while greatly reducing energy-use.

## SOCIAL CONCERNS

- Opportunities for children and the elderly
- Acceptance of diversity
- Safe, interesting streetscapes
- Mutually supportive work, recreation, education, and family needs/activities
- Minimization of crime

Many options exist for harmonizing sound urban design principles with the city's projected growth, including these three:

**Option 1:** Limit the city's expansion. Maintain modest growth to the existing city boundary. Initiate a policy for residential intensification (more housing units per acre), a major departure from recent development patterns that could save the development community land and infrastructure costs.

**Option 2:** Distribute appropriate development. Distribute growth differently along the existing city boundary — as has been done recently — to better use existing infrastructure, including transit and social services.

**Option 3:** Direct development to city growth nodes and connecting corridors, based on where people live, work and play. Here, the primary node is downtown.



The District

Local festivals draw a diverse crowd to downtown. Future mixed-use residential and retail space will allow families to move closer to the city's center.



## URBAN DESIGN

Absent concepts of urban design outlined herein, future city development will consist of suburban housing and automobile-oriented commercial and retail establishments.

### A DOWNTOWN URBAN-DESIGN CHARRETTE

On page 37, the Downtown Leadership Council's key recommendation to the Columbia City Council is a downtown urban design charrette. The technique for an urban design charrette includes consulting with, and receiving input from, all stakeholders in the design of downtown.

The activity would pull together the compendium of community plans (see maps in Appendix B) and the work of related Boards and Commissions (Appendix E) and other interested parties. Appendix B comprises a multitude of plans, hopes, and dreams expressed by many different stakeholders with regard to downtown's future. A downtown urban-design charrette would bring all the diverse voices together for compromise and consensus about the future of Columbia's core.



Sasaki Associates

Sasaki Associates' planners conducted an urban design charrette to gather input from community stakeholders as part of the Campus-City Downtown Land-Use and Urban Opportunities Study, see Appendix D.

Urban design charrettes provide a firm set of recommendations for the future of downtown and have proven to be effective in other communities. The careful selection of appropriate consultants and thorough ground work prior to the event results in an immensely successful process. The forged consensus will reveal the desired community norms for development patterns and design parameters.

The DLC has gained a strong appreciation of our community's involvement in defining and creating a preferred future for this city. Articulating this future will take many minds and voices, both in 2009 and the years ahead. An intense design workshop offers a community-engagement process over a relatively short time for articulating preferences for Columbia's future.

The Downtown Leadership Council recognizes there are many possible futures for Columbia's downtown. We are confident that community leaders and citizens will work to articulate the preferred future; one that is economically robust, socially strong and environmentally sound.

