

# Downtown Lawrence Master Plan

## Business Workshop Summary

Thursday, June 6, 2019

Approximately 50 people attended a morning workshop at the Carnegie Building. The workshop began with an overview of the purpose of the Downtown Lawrence Master Plan and the Business Workshop as well as the current stage of the planning process. The remainder of the workshop was dedicated to an exercise, a summary of which is provided below.

*The following summarizes the input received from participants of the Business Workshop. It is not intended to be a complete transcript of what was said nor a recommendation of particular actions.*

### Issues & Concerns

A majority of the workshop was spent by participants identifying a list of issues facing Downtown Lawrence and prioritizing them as a group. Combining some into broader categories, the subjects that garnered the most votes were:

- High commercial rents/property values (16 votes)
- The lack of balance between historic preservation and new growth (13 votes)
- Empty storefronts (10 votes)
- The lack of residential uses Downtown, particularly affordable housing options (9 votes)
- The changing retail market (8 votes)
- Lack of support for existing businesses (7 votes)
- The need to determine the right mix of business/uses Downtown (7 votes)

Other issues and concerns that were discussed but did not receive the most votes were grouped into broader categories and include:

### Land Use & Development

- Need to increase density (2 votes)
- Vacant/undeveloped lots (2 votes)
- Not enough restaurants
- Too many bars and restaurants
- Lack of a grocery store
- Building height restrictions
- Need design guidelines
- Too much historic restriction

### Economic Development

- Lack of diversity among business owners (3 votes)
- Property ownership consolidation (2 votes)
- Lack of small affordable retail space
- Lack of business recruitment
- The approval process for new businesses
- Retail stores and resources moving to West Lawrence

- Lack of people in Downtown
- Lack of citizen involvement in development/redevelopment review process

### Transportation & Parking

- Parking perceptions (5 votes)
- Parking (4 votes)
- Outdated parking meters (4 votes)
- Alleys in need of repair (3 votes)
- Bike safety
- Lack of bike parking
- Lack of designated parking for employees
- Lack of integration to trails
- Poor accessibility for non-able-bodied individuals into storefronts

### Public Spaces

- Homelessness (6 votes)
- Perception of safety (2 votes)
- Trash removal (2 votes)
- Lack of recycling
- Lack of art
- Public perception of Downtown
- Lack of opportunities for events
- Lack of youth spaces

### Projects & Actions

When asked what specific actions should be taken to improve Downtown Lawrence, participants suggested ideas related to development, parking, branding, and more. Ideas included:

### Land Use & Development

- Build more residential multistory apartments (3 votes)
- Create a permanent location for the farmer's market (2 votes)
- Build a grocery store (2 votes)
- Build a convention center, possibly on the riverfront (2 votes)
- Develop the riverfront (2 votes)
- Develop affordable housing
- Create more destinations like the library, arts center, etc.
- Identify streets other than Massachusetts as Downtown
- Redevelop the Allen properties
- Close a block on Massachusetts Street to create a pedestrian plaza
- Research the appropriate mixes of business types for Downtown
- Update the development approval process to be prescriptive
- Develop a tiny home community to address affordable housing
- Better involve the local universities

## Economic Development

- Improve marketing for Downtown businesses, including those that are not members of Downtown Lawrence Inc. (4 votes)
- Create incentives to encourage minority and/or marginalized business ownership (3 votes)
- Levy fines on property owners responsible for extended commercial vacancies (2 votes)
- Update the City's brand
- Redo the Explore Lawrence website
- Provide better wayfinding
- Establish a commercial land trust that can serve as either incubator space or a rent-to-own space to help business owners build equity
- The City should be open to opportunities (businesses and developments) that provide a financial benefit to be able to fund other projects
- Establish rent ceilings
- Develop a tax for online retail sales

## Transportation & Parking

- Install electric vehicle charging stations (2 votes)
- Reframe walking and parking Downtown (2 votes)
- Update parking technology (2 votes)
- Develop a separate walking bridge to North Lawrence
- Address misconception of parking
- Improve bike and pedestrian connections
- Develop unique, creative trails that connect to the waterfront and North Lawrence
- Increase residential density
- Improve the walkability of the bridge to North Lawrence
- Enhance multimodal transportation connections to Downtown

## Public Spaces & Cultural Resources

- Support community spaces and services to draw more people Downtown (2 votes)
- Clean up alleyways (2 votes)
- Create a public bathroom Downtown
- Establish a position for a Final Friday's organizer
- Improve safety Downtown
- Organize more events Downtown
- Build a canopy over the library plaza
- Develop a joint vision among the City, the Chamber and Explore Lawrence.
- Provide free Wi-Fi Downtown
- Designate a space Downtown for year-round performances
- Create a drop-in center for homeless individuals

## Strengths & Assets

When asked what is best about Downtown Lawrence, participants focused on businesses and the community. Attendees mentioned:

- Unique mix of local businesses (14 votes)
- The diversity of the community (9 votes)
- Downtown events (3 votes)
- Walkable (2 votes)
- History (2 votes)
- Public services
- Scale of buildings
- Loyal Downtown patrons
- Civic leaders
- Plentiful and affordable parking
- Not too many chains
- Great foot traffic
- Downtown Lawrence Inc.
- Location
- Cohesion of local businesses
- Heart of the City
- Connection to KU and Haskell
- Vibrant night life