

V. Opportunities and Constraints

A. Overview of Opportunities and Constraints

In reviewing and reporting on the existing conditions, redevelopment potentials and market and economic conditions in St. Louis, we have recognized many opportunities that will create a healthy Downtown. We have also identified constraints, which we believe are just opportunities waiting to happen. The following is a summary of those findings.

Location

St. Louis is blessed with a great location, at the crossroads of rivers, rails and roads; it is the “Gateway to the West” and the center of the region. It is close to the geographic center of the US, and has an airport in close proximity providing access to anywhere in North America in three hours or less. The City is also strategically located amongst an excellent highway system, and freight-carrying rail system, providing an excellent opportunity for businesses of all kinds, particularly those requiring distribution of goods.

The River

People recognize the river as an asset, however it has yet to be celebrated. Strategies to bring more people to its edge and to connect it to the City must be developed. The pedestrian connections from Downtown, past I-70, over the Arch grounds and to the water’s edge must be reviewed. The existing jogging trail and bike route along Leonor K. Sullivan Boulevard should be connected to a larger green system within the City and to region. More active use of its waters should be developed.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Freeway System

The existing highway system provides excellent access to Downtown from all directions in the region. This is a great advantage in marketing Downtown for new business, cultural and residential locations. The downside is that the system is a physical barrier to the neighborhoods around the edges of Downtown, as well as the river.

In addition, freeway signing is confusing for drivers not familiar with the area. In several instances, drivers are given too many decisions to consider at one time. To some extent, this is compounded by freeway design. P.M. peak hour traffic congestion appears to be concentrated in the immediate vicinity of on-ramps to I-64 and I-70.

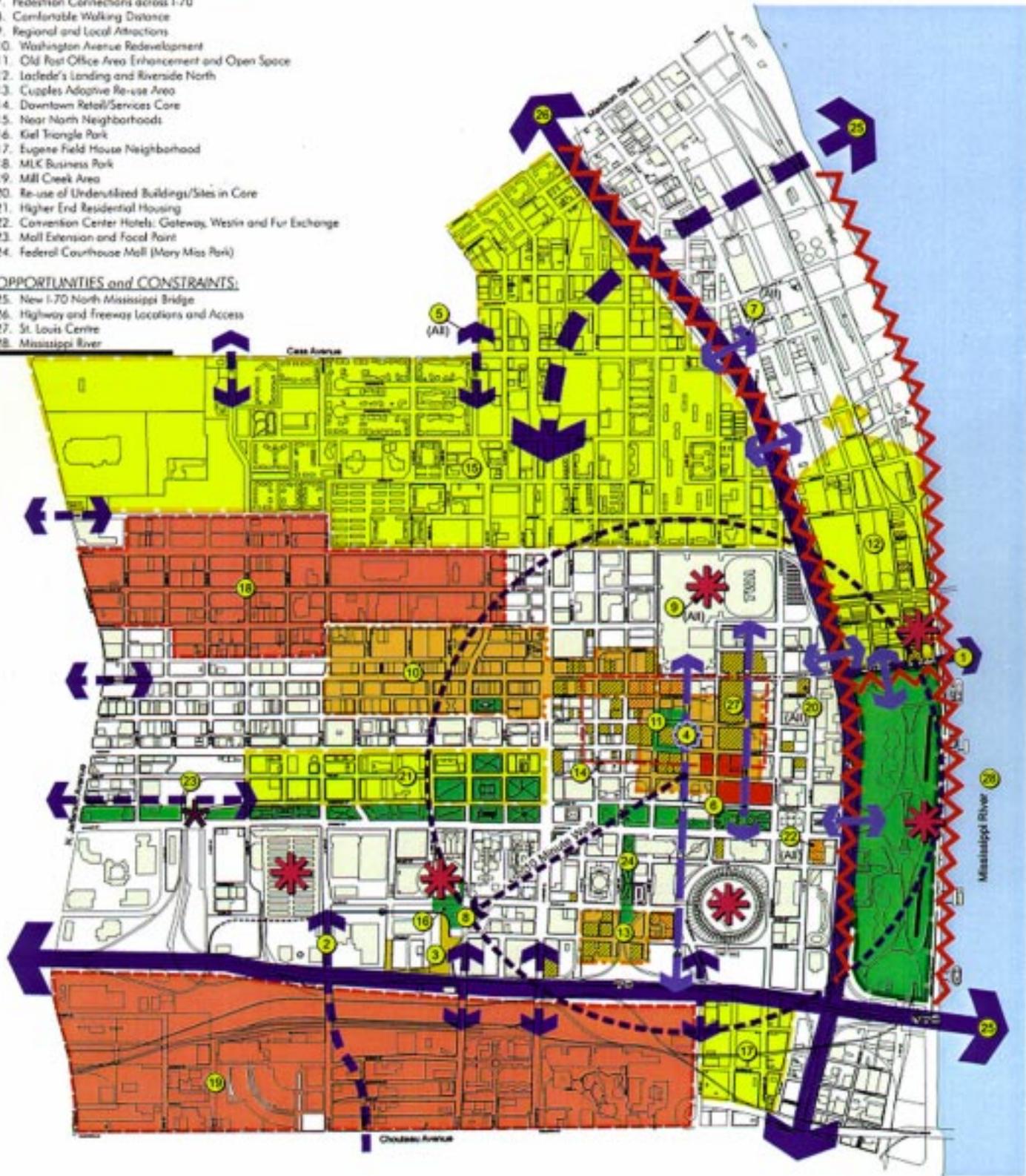


OPPORTUNITIES:

- 1. Eads Bridge Re-decking
- 2. Granton Street Parkway
- 3. Multi-Modal Station
- 4. Downtown Transit Center
- 5. Improvements of Local Street Connections into Downtown
- 6. 6th and 8th Streets Streetscape Improvements
- 7. Pedestrian Connections across I-70
- 8. Comfortable Walking Distance
- 9. Regional and Local Attractions
- 10. Washington Avenue Redevelopment
- 11. Old Post Office Area Enhancement and Open Space
- 12. Laclede's Landing and Riverside North
- 13. Cupples Adaptive Re-use Area
- 14. Downtown Retail/Services Core
- 15. Near North Neighborhoods
- 16. Kiel Triangle Park
- 17. Eugene Field House Neighborhood
- 18. MLK Business Park
- 19. Mill Creek Area
- 20. Re-use of Underutilized Buildings/Sites in Core
- 21. Higher End Residential Housing
- 22. Convention Center Hotels, Gateway, Westin and Fur Exchange
- 23. Mall Extension and Focal Point
- 24. Federal Courthouse Mall (Mary Mas Park)

OPPORTUNITIES and CONSTRAINTS:

- 25. New I-70 North Mississippi Bridge
- 26. Highway and freeway locations and Access
- 27. St. Louis Centre
- 28. Mississippi River



I-70

The current configuration of I-70 isolates the riverfront from the City. It occurs below and above grade, being crossed at only a few points by eastbound streets and narrow sidewalks. Memorial Drive acts as a frontage road with little streetscaping to make the walk along it feel comfortable and safe for pedestrians. The combined width of these streets is a huge barrier for pedestrians to cross between Downtown and the Arch Grounds an. Near Laclede's Landing I-70 comes above ground and transitions into an elevated structure, forcing pedestrians to cross underneath it, in a currently uninviting connection.

Either decking over I-70, as it runs parallel to the river or creating an at-grade parkway would do much to improve the connectivity of Downtown to the river and the Arch grounds and the walking experience of pedestrians. This should be done with high quality connections with enhanced landscape and streetscape.

New I-70 North Bridge

This project will provide important connectivity from the region to Downtown. How it is designed, the height of the elevated structure and where it touches down will have a significant impact on the existing street grid, existing businesses and future land uses. The connection can be designed to minimize the impact on neighborhoods, enhance access into Downtown, and provide economic benefit to Downtown. Since the project is still in the planning stages, the time to evaluate options is now.

Eads Bridge

The redecking of the upper level of Eads Bridge provides an opportunity to create improved pedestrian and bicycle connections across the Mississippi River. The planned design for the upper deck of the Eads Bridge will provide only limited opportunity for cross-river pedestrian and bicycle traffic. The design should be evaluated to provide these enhancements.

Downtown Streets and Traffic Circulation

In general, downtown St. Louis enjoys good traffic and transit access. While some specific improvements may be justified, traffic capacity should not be a constraint on reasonable levels of downtown growth. Except in the A.M. and P.M. peak hours, traffic volumes are well below capacity. Even in the peak hours, capacity is generally adequate.

Because the street network is underutilized, there is an opportunity to create two-way streets out of one-way couplets, or to narrow the pavement widths to create wider streetscaped sidewalks, or to provide angled parking. All of these options would enhance the Downtown pedestrian environment by slowing traffic and providing opportunities for active attractive sidewalks.

Grattan Street Parkway

The proposed connection from the neighborhoods south of Downtown through this new parkway will provide a vehicular link into Downtown currently separated by the freeway.



Utilities and Infrastructure Conditions

The existing streets and sidewalks in many areas of the Downtown are in dire need of improvements. This visual and sometimes physical impediment only adds to the negative perceptions people have of the Downtown. The lack of a working and integrated street lighting, traffic signalization and signage system adds to the disarray. Street repairs and improvements will be necessary throughout the City.

Street use management needs to be improved. There appears to be little or no control of the placement of construction dumpsters or other equipment, nor the timing of their presence on the street. This is compounded by partial street closures resulting from fences around vacant buildings.

Transit

Multi-modal Station

The proposed multi-modal station will provide a node for the existing transit system, as well as provide the future potential for high-speed rail. Not only does this encourage the use of alternate modes of travel, but also this type of facility can be a catalyst for surrounding development, encouraging mixed-use higher density projects. The Spruce Street ramp will, however, restrict development alternatives in that area.

Downtown Transit Center

A centrally located transit center near the Old Post Office would give Downtown an additional access advantage. Provided at grade, in conjunction with a proposed public urban square, it would help activate the Downtown and spur development around it. The addition of a Downtown shuttle to connect to the multi-modal station and circle Downtown is a proposal that is worthy of consideration.

Bus Shelters

New bus shelters will be provided in the next few years. These could be designed as part of an overall street furnishings, lighting, streetscape and signage system for Downtown, which will help improve the pedestrian environment and activity Downtown.

MetroLink

There are four MetroLink stops in the core within a five-minute walk to most locations in the Downtown. This is a tremendous asset that should be used to market Downtown. It is a safe, fast, convenient, frequent and affordable means of transportation, bringing people to and from Downtown who choose not to drive or who do not have cars. Areas around stations are natural locations for higher density mixed use development which can provide minimal parking. This concept is supported by the fact that there is no parking requirement in Downtown.

Any opportunity to expand the system, such as the proposed extension into St. Clair County and the north-south link, should be taken. These will help bring more people into Downtown, which is a goal of the plan and a healthy Downtown.

Cooperative Process

The East-West Gateway provides a forum for discussion and coordinated transportation efforts for eight counties. This collaboration has, among other

things, helped develop the very successful MetroLink system. Continued collaboration can only help the City of St. Louis.

Pedestrian Environment

Comfortable Walking Distance within Core

One of the greatest assets to the Downtown Core is how 'walkable' it is. Almost the entire Downtown Core is within a 10 minute walk from the center of the Core, which is also the location of a MetroLink station (8th and Pine).

Streetscape Improvements

The current state of many sidewalks downtown is fair. Improving the experience of walking in Downtown will be an important enhancement to make people feel comfortable. Replacing and, in some places, widening sidewalks will provide continuous linkages for pedestrians to move through Downtown. Adding street trees, pedestrian lighting, and accent paving will introduce detail and interest, and will also help to separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic, providing a sense of safety. Adding banners and awnings will add color, variety and provide a sense of scale. Implementing a street furniture program will provide an opportunity to create a unifying theme for downtown.

6th Street and 8th Street Pedestrian

6th Street and 8th Street are primary pedestrian corridors where initial planning efforts have begun to instill street level activity. 6th Street is taking on a restaurant focus. 8th Street is the primary connection and visual link between the Convention Center and Busch Stadium. There are also some thriving commercial ventures on Olive Street. The character of these streets and the types of ground level space available support the continuation of retail and public serving uses.

Signalization

Pedestrians pay little or no attention to the traffic signals, but because during most hours traffic volumes are light, conflicts are minimal. The maintenance of the pedestrian signal indications could be improved to correct broken units or burned out bulbs. This may contribute to pedestrian disregard for signals. The proposed resignalization of Downtown is an opportunity to provide an updated coordinated system.

Tourism, Entertainment, Retail and Office

Regional and Local Attractions

St. Louis is fortunate in having great attractions for local residents and tourists in the Downtown. The Arch, Union Station, Busch Stadium, Kiel Center, America's Center and LaClede's Landing attract people Downtown, but additional destination attractions should be considered. Ideas discussed include sports venues, a transportation museum and a Smithsonian Museum, with potential locations on the Mall, along Washington and in LaClede's Landing. The objective is to bring more people Downtown and keep them there, whether it is the work force, tourists, residents from the county or students attending school. More entertainment venues should be provided.



Convention Center Hotels

Construction of the Westin Hotel in the Cupples Station area and the new Convention Center Hotel in conjunction with the Gateway Hotel will bring more visitors and conventioners Downtown. These new uses should also have a multiplier effect on other Downtown businesses.

Lack of Connectedness of Activity Centers

Activity centers exist in the Downtown, but the need for pleasant connections to them is lacking. There is a need to create retail entertainment corridors, connected with well-designed streetscape

Riverfront Festival Sites

The Arch Grounds are the largest area of open space in Downtown and a beautiful site for passive enjoyment. With spectacular views of the river and the Arch as a dramatic framing element, the Grounds present an opportunity for more active uses. Ideas discussed include a permanent outdoor amphitheater for a variety of festivals and related outdoor events. More active recreational uses could also be incorporated into the Grounds.

Downtown Retail

There are great opportunities for retail within the Downtown. Existing street level spaces could be improved for immediate occupancy. The current condition of some of these spaces is an obstacle, much of it being run down and not highly visible. 43% of the existing retail space is vacant. Catalysts for attracting businesses should be explored, such as a single lease structure or improvement incentives. A coherent merchandising strategy should be developed. A determination will need to be made as to where efforts should be concentrated for attracting additional retail, restaurants and service industries so that a critical mass can be supported and successful. An added benefit to the re-introduction of ground floor public uses will be the activity it brings to the street and the liveliness it will bring to Downtown.

Neighborhood Retail

The development of supporting retail uses for residents will be necessary as residential development increases. Dry cleaners, grocery stores and coffee shops are just a few of the typical neighborhood services that will be required.

St. Louis Centre

St. Louis Centre in its current state does not support the vision for a viable Downtown. Much of the building is vacant, with the viable uses being located on the upper floors and inwardly focused. The ground floor is vacant, with access only provided to the upper floors. The ground floor presents a great opportunity for accessible ground floor retail, which would help activate the streets that surround it.

Washington Avenue and Laclede's Landing

Both Washington Avenue and Laclede's Landing offer current entertainment and retail venues, with room for much more. Building on the residential component will bring people to these areas and neighborhood services and entertainment uses will follow.

Old Post Office

The proposal to reuse the Old Post Office and create a new urban square will reinforce the central historic core and celebrate great public architecture. Reusing

the building for a great public purpose and creating outdoor public places for people to relax and linger will bring new activity to Downtown.

Existing Buildings

The Downtown core has a significant number of existing historic buildings that are underutilized, yet have great potential for reuse as residential lofts, boutique hotels, education and cultural venues and unique Class A and B office space. The buildings set a tone and scale for the character of Downtown, framing the street space and emphasizing a strong street grid. Ground floors are transparent and ready to accept new retail uses, such as restaurants, cafes, galleries, office and residential support uses. Re-using the existing buildings offers great cost savings over new construction.

Market numbers show that rehabilitated buildings providing Class A and B office space would be absorbed at a rate of 120,000 to 140,000 square feet per year. The existing building stock in Downtown provides almost limitless opportunities for this kind of product.

Quality Office Tenants

Keeping the current office tenants and attracting new ones are key to creating a vital Downtown. Absorption rates indicate that new Class A office space could be provided and be filled in the current market, and Downtown provides several opportune sites.

Downtown Workers

There are currently approximately 88,000 people working downtown. Downtown could support an additional 21,000, with the build out of the office space identified in the market analysis.

Neighborhood and Housing Redevelopment

Potential Demand for Housing

The market can sustain a wide variety of housing options. Downtown can handle a higher share of the regional market in market rate housing. Potential demand turns into effective demand “right product in right locations.”

“Near North” Neighborhood

The “Near North” area of Downtown has a great deal of underutilized land that could be redeveloped into a neighborhood that would have easy access to the Downtown. This neighborhood would become the gateway neighborhood to the Downtown from the north from the future I-70 connection into Downtown. It provides an opportunity to develop a variety of densities, from single family homes to higher density multi-family, and commercial uses clustered around the I-70 touchdown.

Cass Avenue/Murphy Park

This area includes vacant lands that were once the site of the Pruitt-Igoe public housing development. Like the “Near North” neighborhood, this area provides land for re-creation of the urban fabric through construction of lower density housing.

Washington Avenue Lofts - Redevelopment

Washington Avenue has begun its renaissance as a unique mixed-use district, with the conversions of some buildings into loft apartments, with restaurants, galleries



and nightclubs on the lower levels. This area is an important physical link to Laclede's Landing and to the river from Downtown. This area has already seen some changes, and with continuous growth resulting in a larger concentration of workers and residents, it will become livelier.

Laclede's Landing and Riverside North Neighborhood

The existing historic character of Laclede's Landing presents a unique setting for a mix of loft rehabilitation and new apartments. It is close to the riverfront and has great views. Vacant land to the north of the present Laclede's Landing provides opportunities for lower density construction of townhomes combined with some higher density condominiums and apartments. The development of this area as a neighborhood would provide an identifiable place with an atypical opportunity for residential uses along the riverfront in the Downtown.

Eugene Field House Neighborhood

This vacant land just south of the Downtown has been discussed for redevelopment into housing. The location again provides an opportunity to develop new housing in close proximity to the Downtown.

Cupples Station

Numerous redevelopment proposals have been talked about for this grouping of structures that acts as a gateway to the Downtown from the south. The gamut of land uses, from residential to museums, to hotels, have been proposed at one time or another. With such active interest in redeveloping these structures, this is one area that may turn around on its own without strategic input from the City.

High-End Residential Housing

There is currently a lack of high-end housing in the Downtown but the opportunity is there. This type of product would be developed only in smaller increments and only after a general increase in Downtown housing was established. A prime location for this product would be along the Mall, which provides green space, a forecourt and a great amenity for new Downtown residents.

Other Market Opportunities

Potential Growth Markets

The market analysis shows strong growth markets in industrial uses, healthcare, financial, visitor-serving industries, professional services and high-tech industries. Downtown could become an education and learning center.

Tele-communication Gateway

St. Louis has the opportunity to become a leader in urban redevelopment and create an electronic commerce community to serve the growing global demand. There are several key features regarding the St. Louis site that are unique and which, when combined with a flexible technology infrastructure, provide for few competitive locations. St. Louis provides an excellent opportunity to become the first electronic business center in the world because of its superb location and its accessibility to all modes of transportation.

Technology Infrastructure

Downtown could be revitalized to provide a technology infrastructure that would place St. Louis in the technological forefront of world class communities. This infrastructure would be developed using tested and proven technologies. This

would not be an experimental community. A state-of-the-art St. Louis Development would also create an industrial base dealing in information, with an infrastructure to attract large, global companies while supporting and helping small businesses to compete internationally.

E-Commerce/ E-Business – The Next Big International Business Initiative

The theme for this redevelopment is an integrated urban development that creatively incorporates a number of technology-enhanced uses that would complement the surrounding communities. These uses include high technology employment areas and community-compatible, and smart-home residential neighborhoods.

Hindrances

Brownfield Sites

An excessive number of Brownfield sites exist in the Downtown area which require clean up. These can deter development due to unknown conditions. If these sites were cleaned up and ready to go, development could proceed at a quicker pace.

Perceptions

There are numerous negative perceptions about safety and security in Downtown St. Louis which can be the greatest detriment to a Downtown's survival. Perceptions are formed due to:

- vacant buildings that are neglected and boarded up
- streets that are empty after 5 P.M. and on weekends;
- word-of-mouth comments on perceived crime and homelessness;
- a crumbling infrastructure: sidewalks in bad shape; vacant lots that are unimproved.

Regulations

The existing development, permitting and regulating process needs to be re-organized in order to assure a straightforward process for any potential developer. Many discussions have occurred and articles written about the difficulty and frustration people feel when trying to develop in the City. This frustration even seems to occur internally, where no clear organizational hierarchy and decision making exists. The City is currently undergoing a study to re-organize some of these processes.

