

Conclusions to Broaden the Debate

There is a large shortage of parking in the South Grand Business District. The success of the district and the high density of floor area in the historic commercial buildings in the district have combined with the absolute auto-dependent nature of people today to make the original historic land planning of the area nearly obsolete. Only people's attraction to the historic charm force the conflicts of inadequate parking and compact urban character to work as they do now (typically it is difficult to finance a commercial building if it has little or no dedicated parking). As it now exists, there is just not enough land in the area to park all of the cars that are likely if all of the uses are fully occupied and successful. Vacancies of some office and retail spaces are evidence of the parking problem, as business property owners have told of prospective tenants that have gone elsewhere due to the lack of parking in the district. If the South Grand Business District is to remain competitive in the region, and desires to consistently attract high quality tenants, the district will need to improve parking conditions as soon as possible. The Short Term Solutions will be the quickest manner to begin addressing the parking problem.

The parking solutions proposed in this study present a systematic approach to create new parking over time to gradually improve the amount of parking available per square foot of business square footage. Some of the solutions are small and independent enough that small business owners can implement them when the adjoining residential property is put on the market. In fact, residential property owners that are within the designated areas will have a whole new market of potential buyers for their homes since they have potential for use by the Business District as shown in this plan. As implementation proceeds, the City will need to assure that there are no "leap frog" developments that attempt to place parking on a residential lot if it is not directly contiguous to the back of the business district property. Development of these parking solutions must begin with the properties closest to the business district and work outward without skipping over an existing residential lot.

What is certain, it will take a large and coordinated community effort to achieve the parking solutions shown in this plan. The coordination will involve residents, business owners, City agencies and elected officials. The City of St. Louis, like so many older cities, has been losing the competition with its surrounding suburbs for the last 50 years. All successful major retail shopping malls are in the suburbs, and retail development is heavily weighted to growth in the suburbs. Residential populations continue to move to the suburbs in the St. Louis region, as shown by the most recent census. Due to this suburban orientation, when developers finally come to a successful urban commercial district such as South Grand, they often bring their suburban design and planning approach with their project. Witness the Walgreen's recently built just south of the Business District.

Refocus Debate For More Equitable Funding Distribution

Ironically over these last 50 years which encompass the decline of urban America, all owners of urban real estate, whether they are residents or business owners, have been subsidizing their suburban competition through the Federal Highway program. Every day for the last 50 years, urban land owners that drive a car are paying fuel taxes that largely pay for developing projects like the 16 lane width I-55 south at Arnold, the Highway 141 outer belt, multiple bridges with rush hour sized multi-lane widths to St. Charles County, or the billion dollar Page Avenue Extension. Billions of infrastructure dollars have been spent in the name of economic development of suburban and rural America. Most likely, urban landowners never need or ever use these highway systems at the peak rush periods. While the structure and design of sprawling suburban locations require massive rush hour highway widths, urban communities need high-density transportation solutions – parking garages, lighting, and higher density of uses; all of which are part of the daily needs of urban communities. There are built-in bias to the current Federal Highway funding system that favors building new highways, bridges, off-ramps and sound walls in sprawling suburban and rural areas over the

transportation needs of traditional town center and older urban areas like the South Grand Business District. While Walmart needs the massive highway system, traditional commercial districts need smaller scaled, higher density transportation solutions. Parking structures are part of this transportation need, but the small districts typically lack the funds to make them possible.

Business owners and residents around the South Grand Business District should work together to attract additional State and Federal funding to assist the economic development of all Town Center, Main Street or other urban styled commercial areas in the City. Business owners and residents around the South Grand Business District should work together to change the slanted system that favors sprawl suburban development over compatible and compact urban development.

The local conflict should change from the fractured resident versus business owner debate over demolition of homes to a much bigger picture debate of equitable distribution of Federal Funding for economic development, since that is exactly what the massive Federal Highway system is all about – economic development of suburban and rural areas. The suburbs would be impossible with out a subsidized highway system. It is these last 50 years of bias funding that has suburbanized American thinking and lifestyles to the detriment of urban commercial districts and neighborhoods. Unify; work together to change the public policies that cause all places like the South Grand Business District to struggle to grow and compete regionally.

Read more in the recent Brookings Institute article, Slanted Pavement, at:

<http://www.brookings.edu/es/urban/publications/ohiogastax.htm>