

Business Workshop

**St. Charles Comprehensive Plan
Tuesday, October 4, 2011**

A workshop for St. Charles business owners and members of the development community was held on Tuesday, October 4, 2011 at the Council Chambers at City Hall. The workshop provided attendees with an opportunity to identify issues facing the City with an emphasis on the business environment and development regulations. Approximately 30 individuals participated in the workshop, which was conducted as an informal discussion amongst members of the business community, City staff, and the consultant. The following is a summary of the general comments and overarching themes that emerged in this conversation. Those issues that generated extensive conversation have been summarized in greater detail.

Pedestrian/Transportation Issues

Participants indicated that there are a number of transportation issues that they view as relevant to the business climate in the City. Business owners are concerned about the pedestrian environment throughout the City, but especially downtown. They feel that truck traffic cutting through downtown creates a noisy and visually unappealing place for shoppers, diners, and other visitors to spend their time. They also view parking downtown as an issue that needs to be resolved. Pedestrian issues were not the only concern, however. Attendees are also concerned about traffic patterns downtown, construction on 64/Main, and Randall Road Traffic.

Economic Development

Participants were most concerned with economic development issues. They expressed concern that the east side of the city is stagnant, especially the Charlestowne Mall. They also would like to see some progress made on the First Street redevelopment and the abandoned St. Charles Mall site. In addition to specific development projects, attendees mentioned a lack of business incentives, a lack of flexibility in response to changing markets, and a lack of awareness of the city's economic development efforts. Finally, support for the arts was mentioned as a way to raise the visibility and cultural reputation of St. Charles, which would have positive implications for businesses throughout the City.

Land Use/Vacancies

Land use issues were discussed primarily as they relate to land that is currently vacant in the City. There is a desire to better utilize the riverfront as an asset through things such as a riverwalk, strategic view corridors, and other methods. The old St. Charles mall site is a continuing concern in the community as well, with the potential future development plans creating a great deal of concern amongst community members and business owners. The housing mix in the community is another concern. Business owners would like to see a mix of housing types that promotes economic development in the City and avoids the type of disinvestment that is common in places where high proportions of low income housing dominate.

Urban Design and Aesthetics

Attendees are hopeful that the historic character of St Charles architecture continues to be maintained and refurbished. They also don't want to see such requirements create an unnecessary hindrance to business growth and building renovation. Additionally, the gateways to the city could be improved according to attendees in order to more clearly define the City and welcome visitors.

Maintenance and Infrastructure

Participants would like to see a more concerted effort on the part of the City to maintain the existing infrastructure in the downtown central business district since a well-maintained downtown is more welcoming to residents and visitors and more appealing to outside investors.

Downtown Business Issues

Attendees complained about the difficulty that the City has had in building a stable downtown retail core. Since retail anchors and business diversity are the key to a successful and thriving downtown, attendees would like to see the city more actively pursue a stable retail environment.

Government and Taxes

Attendees would like to see communication between the City and residents/business owners improved upon. They also are concerned about the ability of the City to raise tax revenues and increase the tax base in order to cover the costs of running the city and making necessary improvements and upgrades.