

OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC ISSUES

CITY OF KEARNEY, MISSOURI

SEPTEMBER 2006

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Introduction

During the Spring of 2006 the Mayor (Bill Dane), the Board of Aldermen (Jeff Couchman, Jane Lowrey, Alan Gustin and Dan Holt), key City staff (Jim Eldridge, City Administrator, Brian Hall, City Attorney and Wade Wagoner, Community Development Director) and the consultant (Eric Strauss) met to review the important issues that will be facing the City of Kearney during the next four to five years. A previous series of discussions in 2002 developed a document entitled "Overview of Strategic Issues". Given the rapidly growing population of the City, the Mayor and Board of Aldermen determined that it was important to revisit and revise these goals and strategies where appropriate. This document is a result of three meetings held during the period March to June 2006 to review the prior effort, consider the City's accomplishments to date and provide for policies to meet new challenges.

The first concern was to determine whether the rapid growth of population and issuance of building permits that was forecast will continue. In recent years the City has been issuing over 100 residential building permits each year. Recent projections evaluating the rate of population growth between 1990 and 2000 as well as other data still suggest that it is still appropriate to plan that the City will have a population of 11,000 by 2010.

As in the 2002 effort, the goal of this strategic planning process is to continue to provide a document that citizens, City staff, elected and appointed decision makers can use to determine the City's priorities during the next five years. The group strongly feels that the overall purpose of this document is to maintain and enhance the environment that has made Kearney such a desirable location up to this point. In particular, while Kearney may no longer technically be considered a "small town", its residents wish to maintain a "small-town" atmosphere.

As stated before current and potential residents should expect a City that is fiscally responsible. The goal is to provide the level of services that maintains the confidence of residents that their City is providing a strong commitment to maintain the existing quality of life. This conservative approach to raising taxes and to enacting additional governmental regulations must be balanced against the need of the City to provide services to many more individuals. Additional City staff will be needed to maintain the current level of activity because there is little or no additional capacity to provide the level of public services necessary for a community of over 10,000 people. Other issues will require more resources to solve these problems. Elected decision makers will authorize these additional expenditures as they become necessary to maintain the priorities of City residents in conjunction with the overall purpose of City government.

One way to summarize a government's purpose is to adopt a "Mission Statement". Such a short paragraph should provide the citizens of a city with an indication of the philosophy of those individuals charged with the responsibility of determining future public policy.

Mission Statement

The overwhelming consensus of the group is the City of Kearney should adopt a “Mission Statement” to provide a focus for the City’s strategic activities. The following statement was contained in the 2002 version of this strategic Issues Overview but never formally adopted. It should be considered as a start of a discussion by the Board of Aldermen for an adoption of a guide to the overall purpose of City activity:

Kearney should maintain and enhance its small town “sense of place.” The mission of decision makers in the City is to provide its citizens with a variety of activities and living environments that promote a balanced lifestyle. The City has an unlimited opportunity to become the “host” community in the Kansas City region to residents and visitors alike.

Another approach might be to establish a shorter slogan that would capture the attractiveness of Kearney. An example of this discussed at the meetings is shown below:

Kearney is a place you can be proud for your family to call home forever.

Such a policy overview provides for maximum flexibility for the City to maintain its current level of activities while responding to the presence of more than eleven thousand residents within a short period of time. The City would like to enhance its unique and attractive atmosphere of locally owned retail businesses and employers as well as its thriving downtown while recognizing the need for regional functions. The purpose of this Mission Statement is to provide an organizing basis to adopt and enforce policies that give residents multiple opportunities to remain in the City. Kearney should provide housing, educational, employment, retail and recreational options for those residents that want to take advantage of them.

The Mission Statement cannot be implemented on its own. The City will need to focus and prioritize its activities to provide this environment in the future. This Overview contains the same six broad policy areas (Physical Appearance, Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, Infrastructure, Land Use and Citizen Participation) established 4 years ago. The categories provide citizens and decision makers with a sense of direction as well as a benchmark to measure progress. It is desirable as well as foreseeable that as new individuals undertake leadership roles, new priorities will be set. This document, after considering changes from the original Overview, represents a flexible guide to future decisions with the understanding that the needs and desires of Kearney residents may change these priorities.

Objective 1: Maintain the Physical Appearance of Kearney

In order to continue to have a “sense of place” that evokes a small town atmosphere in a large metropolitan area, the community should provide mechanism for promoting the current residential nature of Kearney while providing for appropriate commercial areas.

This objective can be reached through the process of the City adopting a series of shorter goals (e.g. strategies) and defined activities (e.g. policies). Subsequent decision makers should be free to revise this list as objectives are achieved and/or the needs of the residents of Kearney change.

Strategies to Achieve Objective 1

Strategy 1.1: The City should maintain its tree-lined streets

The City should promote the use of trees as landscaping and visual buffers on both public and private property. A combination of incentives and regulation should promote the use of plantings to provide a pleasing environment for the City.

Strategy 1.2: The City should actively encourage sidewalks

Citizen interaction as well as public health is promoted by outdoors activity. Sidewalks, particularly in residential areas, reinforce a “small-town” appearance by providing a method for people to get from one location to another without using an automobile.

Strategy 1.3: The City should clearly define commercial areas

Kearney has already developed retail commercial areas in its historic downtown and along major state highways. Full maintenance and development of these areas, as opposed to allowing unlimited non-residential development anywhere, will maintain the current physical appearance of the City. The City should be very cautious in permitting the development of new commercial areas.

Strategy 1.4: The City should maintain its easy accessibility to Kansas City

Kearney’s location in proximity to Kansas City has been the major reason for recent growth. Access to Interstate 35 should be maintained from all parts of the City. New interchanges with the limited access freeway should be located to provide the greatest amount of accessibility to current residents of the City. This includes interchanges located both north and south of the City.

Policies to Achieve Objective 1

Policy 1.1: Landscape Ordinance

The Board of Aldermen should provide for a Landscape Ordinance that requires all developers to plant trees on both public and private land. The City should maintain the trees in the public right-of-way. Developers should maintain trees on private lots until the lot is sold. Non-residential development should be

separated from dwelling units by extensive screening including trees, landscaping and/or fencing.

Policy 1.2: Flexibility in Lot sizes

The Zoning Ordinance is scheduled to be revised within the coming year. During this process, consideration should be given to allow developers to have flexibility in providing different lot sizes as a part of the same development. This is appropriate for residential areas in certain parts of the City identified as appropriate for that type of growth by the Comprehensive Plan. This type of land use should provide for both larger and smaller lots in the same area to encourage a mix of housing types.

Policy 1.3: Sidewalk Repair

One of the characteristics of a small town is the presence of sidewalks. The City should keep all sidewalks in the older part of town in good repair by underwriting the entire cost of replacement. The current policy of offering a fifty percent (50%) match with homeowners to repair the sidewalks has not been effective to repair the sidewalks in Kearney that most need replacement. The City would select a different area of the community during each year to maintain and improve its existing sidewalks.

Policy 1.4: Recreation Opportunities

As residents with young children move to Kearney, recreation needs become different. The City should commit to provide recreation opportunities throughout the year, both indoors and outside. The City should establish its own recreation goals and work with the School District to construct joint facilities where appropriate and to coordinate policies to achieve the priorities of both organizations.

Objective 2: Promote Economic Development for Kearney Residents

Another attribute of a small town “sense of place” is a location that has employment and retail opportunities for residents, both to own and to patronize local businesses. The City should maintain and develop its reputation as a “host” community, particularly as regards amateur athletic events. This activity could be done in conjunction with creation of a downtown that has an entertainment focus that could attract residents and visitors to the area. Existing industrial plants should be encouraged to expand in the community.

Strategies to Achieve Objective 2

Strategy 2.1: The City should focus its retention efforts on existing small businesses

The City has worked hard to attract new businesses to Kearney. City staff should make a concerted effort to contact local businesses to determine their needs so that any potential expansion of that company would occur in the City.

Strategy 2.2: The City should very carefully consider allowing large national retail chains to build large buildings in Kearney.

Locally owned and operated businesses give the City a unique atmosphere that should be preserved. When national retail organizations seek to locate in Kearney, the City should carefully consider their impact on existing merchants before allowing such development to occur. Such development would normally be appropriate in locations west of Interstate 35.

Strategy 2.3: The City should encourage more retail facilities downtown, particularly restaurants and businesses offering specialty goods.

One method to keep a downtown vital is to provide for establishments that bring residents and visitors to the area throughout the day. There are a limited number of restaurants currently located in downtown Kearney. These should be increased to provide more support for the City as a destination for shopping and recreational activity. Locally-owned businesses should be favored as a way to promote the City's "small-town" image.

Strategy 2.4: The City should promote the idea of tourism

Kearney has current and potential tourist sites that could use more publicity to attract visitors. The City should begin a campaign to promote tourism that enhances the "small-town" image of Kearney as a city with friendly residents. This approach should be coordinated with the efforts of other area cities and appropriate state and regional organizations.

Policies to Achieve Objective 2

Policy 2.1: Coordinated Commercial Zoning

The City's existing commercial land use along Missouri Highway 33, Missouri Highway 92 and downtown should be preserved. Additional development should be concentrated in compact form as nodes that support existing commercial areas. The proposed commercial development west of Interstate 35 should be supported in a way that enhances the continued viability of Kearney's downtown area. Land use compatibility between these two areas should be maintained.

Policy 2.2: Tax Incentives for Industry

The City should expand its tax incentive program to promote the retention of existing businesses as well as to attract new employers. Companies currently located in Kearney should have an equal opportunity to receive incentives from the City to remain in the community. Attracting firms to Kearney that are not currently located in the city should not be the only economic development strategy pursued by the City.

Policy 2.3: Tax Incentives for Retail Facilities

The City should provide an incentive for new locally owned businesses to open in Kearney, particularly in the downtown area. Such incentives could consist of such items as Tax Increment Financing, business retention and expansion services, sales tax and/or property tax abatements for a limited period of time as well as low cost loans from the City. The City could consider other incentives as appropriate. Additional retail establishments would serve as a compatible attraction to the existing downtown retail base to serve both residents and visitors to the city.

Policy 2.4: Entertainment District

The City should draft and adopt an area plan to form an Entertainment District to encompass downtown Kearney and nearby attractions in Clay County. Such a District would use a unified aesthetic approach (e.g. sidewalks and streetlights) to highlight particular tourist destinations. Areas for athletic events and tournaments could also become part of this District, thus providing a focus for visitors to the city. A wireless “wi-fi” communication network could also be part of the District. The purpose of such a District would provide a regional retail experience that is different from the other commercial facilities located in the City. The City should be willing to provide incentives on a temporary basis to encourage businesses to locate in this area. The Entertainment District Plan would be implemented by an Overlay District to the Zoning Ordinance.

Policy 2.5: Expansion of Downtown Commercial Area

The City should plan for the expansion of the downtown area, particularly to the lots that are located east of the current Municipal Building. If the owners of any of these properties are interested in selling on a voluntary basis, the City should strongly consider buying them for future retail expansion in the downtown area. The City should also work with local merchants to provide rear entrances to stores as well as compatible facades for the front of the buildings.

Objective 3: Provide a Range of Park and Recreation Activities for City Residents

Another method to enhance Kearney's distinctive nature is to provide a full range of park and recreation activities. The City has already invested in facilities and staff designed to provide a wide range of services to residents of the City. These programs maintain a traditional "small-town" atmosphere for Kearney. Improving these services in the face of population growth that results in a size of 11,000 individuals will be another way that the City supports a balanced lifestyle.

Strategies to Achieve Objective 3

Strategy 3.1: The City should refrain from building additional sports facilities

The City has constructed an appropriate number of places for organized recreational activity such as playing fields. There are an adequate number of facilities for the projected population during the next decade so the City does not need to undertake additional projects.

Strategy 3.2: The City should plan for a Community Center

The greatest recreational need in the City is for a Community Center to accommodate indoor recreational activities. The City should formulate plans for a Community Center at a specific location with a specific set of improvements and work with the School District to implement such plans.

Policies to Achieve Objective 3

Policy 3.1: Rehabilitate Existing Structures

The City should investigate the purchase of outmoded existing structures for use as a Community Center. A good example of this type of structure that the City already owns is the old police station in the downtown area. Other governmental units (e.g. the School District) should be invited to join with the City in locating a Community Center. The City should promote programming of monthly activities at such a facility.

Policy 3.2: Survey of All Residents

The City should send a survey to all households to determine the demand for recreation services. The City should also determine interest on the part of its residents to pay for such improvements. The City should use the results of such a survey to set the priority for expenditures for parks and recreation in the immediate future.

Policy 3.3: Investigate the Feasibility of a New Park on the West Side of Town

The City should investigate the feasibility of providing a new park west of Interstate 35 in anticipation of proposed residential development in that part of Kearney. Such a facility might include a picnic area, a skate park and room for additional baseball and soccer fields when the need for such facilities becomes clear. Money for this new amenity might be generated by the park fee imposed as a part of the subdivision review and approval process.

Policy 3.4: Additional Fees for Non-residents to Use City Facilities

The City should analyze the feasibility of imposing an additional fee on non-residents to use city recreational facilities for organized activities. Kearney residents already support public facilities located in the City through their taxes. An additional fee would reimburse the City for the added expense of administering programs that also benefit non-residents.

Policy 3.5: Coordination of Recreational Programming

The City should plan to increase the number of recreational opportunities on land that it currently owns. The City should actively use all its existing properties to increase recreational opportunities for its residents. The City should work with the Kearney Area Development Organization to promote joint activities with other area communities.

Objective 4: Provide Additional Infrastructure to Meet the Needs Generated by the City's Expanding Population

Increasing the City's population to 11,000 residents continues to place burdens on the City's infrastructure. As land develops west of Interstate 35 into commercial space and residential areas south and west of the present developed City, decision makers must integrate these new areas into the existing community. Governmental facilities must keep pace with the needs of new residents. This may entail extra investment in community facilities while maintaining a level of services that City residents have come to expect from their government.

Strategies to Achieve Objective 4

Strategy 4.1: The City should seek to provide ways to lessen traffic congestion

Traffic will continue to increase along arterial streets during the next five years. The City should continue to plan for alternative traffic routes directing through

traffic away from residential neighborhoods and seeking to increase the capacity of arterial streets where commercial facilities are located.

Strategy 4.2: The City should continue to require storm drainage control for new development

The City has adopted policies that require the detention and/or retention of storm water drainage in newly developed areas of the City. This policy should continue with provisions to increase the amount of water held back on a temporary basis in newly developed subdivisions to ease the pressure on older areas of the City where no storm drainage facilities exist.

Strategy 4.3: The City should plan for the linkage of the eastern and western parts of Kearney

Interstate 35 represents a potential barrier between the undeveloped western part of the city and the developing eastern part of Kearney. The City should plan for bridges and/or underpasses to link both areas of the community to improve access to local facilities and businesses. This is particularly true north of the proposed commercial development to be located west of I-35.

Policies to Achieve Objective 4

Policy 4.1: Complete the annexation of land to the Southeast of the Sewer Plant

The city is in the process of having all of its facilities located within its boundaries. This includes the sewer plant that is operated by the City southeast of its current boundaries. The land located between the plant and the rest of the developed areas should also be brought into Kearney. This annexation will provide for the orderly extension of services into the area

Policy 4.2: Evaluate Downtown Parking

There is a shortage of both short-term and long-term parking in the downtown area of Kearney. Parking must be available to those who come to shop for a short period of time as well as for those who work all day in the downtown area. The City should conduct a parking study to determine the need for additional facilities. The City should be prepared to build additional parking facilities to provide support for downtown development. There is vacant city owned land that is available for the construction of off-street parking lots.

Policy 4.3: Seek Additional Federal Funds

The City should investigate the possibility of seeking additional federal funds for special infrastructure improvements. The City should contact elected federal

officials and federal government agencies to determine its eligibility for special projects. The City should determine if it has special needs for roads, sewer, water or drainage improvements that can be partially met by outside funding sources.

Policy 4.4: New Municipal Facilities

The City is rapidly outgrowing its current offices. The City will soon open a new police station replacing the current facility located in the downtown area. The City should also plan for a new municipal office and municipal court building to accommodate the additional staff required by a doubling of the population within the next decade.

Policy 4.5: New Community Center

The current meeting space available for city residents to use is inadequate. The space utilized for a Senior Citizen Center is not permanent and needs to be expanded. In particular, a facility should be provided in the downtown area that allows meals to be served to city residents as well as to provide a focal point for local activities. A location near the newly renovated museum might be appropriate to encourage further interest in the older part of the community.

Objective 5: Continue to Plan for Balanced Growth and Development Particularly in Residential Land Uses

The City will need to plan for additional housing units during the next decade. The City has successfully managed a process through which an adequate supply of land has been provided in the past. This guidance must continue if the City is to accommodate additional growth in the future. The City should maintain its “small-town” atmosphere by ensuring that no one type of housing or of land use is over represented in a balanced mix of development. In order to assure the continued growth of Kearney, the City should work with adjacent landowners to determine their willingness to voluntarily annex into the City as a condition for receiving City services to their property.

Strategies to Accomplish Objective 5

Strategy 5.1: The City should promote voluntary annexation

The City should always attempt to initially bring unincorporated land into the municipal boundaries with the consent of the landowner. The City will always accept voluntary annexations into the City by adjacent landowners. The City will annex unincorporated land without the agreement of landowners only when there is a good reason for the City to expand its boundaries.

Strategy 5.2: The City should maintain its current land use image

The City should maintain its current “small-town” image of smaller detached lots located in subdivisions. The City should not annex any existing three to five acre parcels into Kearney unless it is necessary to provide public services for undeveloped or redeveloped parcels of property.

Strategy 5.3: The City should continue to protect the historic area of Kearney

The area of original settlement of Kearney has a continuing significance for the community. The City should use the upcoming revision of its land use regulations to protect the area around the origins of the community from incompatible land use development. The Zoning and Planning Commission should consider controlling the type of land uses through zoning in the historic district to maintain its viability.

Policies to Achieve Objective 5

Policy 5.1: Potentially Consider a Property Maintenance Code

The City has recently reviewed and strengthened its nuisance control system. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all housing units, particularly those that are owner-occupied, will remain in good repair. The nuisance control approach shows great promise as a way to promote compliance with City Codes. Special attention should be paid to exterior appearance of structures so as to not cause negative impact on neighboring properties. If this system does not prove to be as effective as desired, the City should consider enacting a property maintenance code similar to ones currently in effect in nearby cities.

Policy 5.2: Potentially Consider a Rental License System

The City wishes to avoid the situation where non-owner occupied residential homes become a problem in Kearney because of a lack of maintenance and upkeep. The City currently has an effective and informal system of monitoring the exterior conditions on these homes that is effective. This method relies principally on tenant concerns and neighborhood violations. If this proves to be ineffective, the Board of Aldermen and the Mayor should consider a system of annual licenses for all rental homes.

Policy 5.3: Promote the Use of “P” Zoning

The City wishes to provide flexibility to landowners who develop housing within the City limits. One way to achieve this goal is to allow the mixture of housing types and lot sizes within a single area to respond to the needs of consumers. Such an approach is difficult to do under the City’s current zoning ordinance. In addition to a general review of the City’s land use regulations, the City should

allow the use of “P” zoning that provides for variation between land uses in a smaller area. Such “P” zoning can be a single district or can be an aspect of each district if approved by the City.

Policy 5.4: Add to Existing Subdivision Amenities

As part of creating the “small-town” atmosphere in the newer subdivisions in the community, the City has increased the amount of improvements and amenities available to residents. This has occurred as a part of the subdivision plat approval process. Homeowner associations were formed with the encouragement of the City to provide for the maintenance of these new facilities. This trend should continue. Kearney’s newer areas could include additional tree planting, extra public landscaping, continuous sidewalks and decorative lighting. This would add another incentive for homeowners to move to Kearney as well as providing a benefit to improve the physical appearance of the City.

Objective 6: Promote Citizen Involvement in City Activities

Active participation by Kearney residents in local government should extend beyond participation in elections. Furthermore, citizens should be encouraged to take an interest in municipal affairs other than when their own personal economic interests are involved. The City should distribute more information to its citizens on a regular basis. The City should organize forums for interaction among its residents on a targeted basis.

Strategy to Achieve Objective 6

Strategy 6.1: The City should encourage citizen participation

The City should schedule citizen meetings around times that a large number of citizens would be interested in coming to City Hall. This might include adoption of a budget, community festivals or a sale event in downtown. A particular theme might be chosen and a local sponsor secured to increase public interest in the event.

Policies to Achieve Objective 6

Policy 6.1: Annual Report to the City

Each year the City Administrator should issue a newsletter on annual accomplishments of the City government. The Mayor already has a newspaper column to provide timely information and announcements. This should continue. As a part of that document, Kearney’s property tax rate should be compared to other nearby communities giving proper credit to the School district. Such a

newsletter would list those policies contained in this document that the City was going to implement in the upcoming year.

Policy 6.2: Involve Existing Neighborhood Associations

Each year members of a certain subdivision’s neighborhood association should be invited to attend a meeting at City Hall to discuss neighborhood concerns. All members of that subdivision should be contacted with advance notice of the meeting. A particular issue should be highlighted by emphasizing those concerns specifically affecting that area. A summary of the meeting would be provided to residents of that area.

Policy 6.3: Assist in the Formation of Benefit Districts

If a homeowner’s association is not able to maintain the amenities currently available in a subdivision or cannot repair existing facilities, the City should assist in the formation of benefit districts. These mechanisms provide all affected property owners with a chance to take responsibility for the public improvements that they value. The City will assist in the formation and administration of these organizations to provide a secure source of funding to keep up the attractiveness of existing subdivision. The City would be able to provide for the continued maintenance of subdivision common areas through a stable funding source.

Conclusions

This document represents an agenda of strategic issues developed by the participants listed in the Introduction. It is the consensus of the group that all these issues should be examined at some level during the next three to five years. No specific priority was assigned to the implementation of specific policies.

More importantly, it was the consensus of all the individuals involved that this Overview of Strategic Issues be officially adopted by the Board of Aldermen. In this way it could become official City policy as well as an indication to the citizens of Kearney that their leaders had clearly thought about the future direction of the City.

Each year, the Mayor, the Board of Aldermen, Planning & Zoning Commission¹ and the City staff should review this document and decide which, if any, issues need immediate attention, further consideration or significant change. This document will continue to be important as a guide to future to future policy decisions only for so long as the decision makers believe it is current.

If this process has been successful, a future group of leaders can meet and examine the progress of the solutions to City problems contained in this Overview. At that time, those individuals can formulate a new list and undertake the same examination of strategic issues for that time period.

¹“Planning and Zoning Commission” was added to this strategic plan upon review and approval of a Comprehensive Plan amendment by the Planning & Zoning Commission on September 10, 2007.