



From Vision to Reality



Citizen involvement is very important. I do not think cities can be progressive without that involvement, and the policies that evolve from citizen participation. The idea for a “downtown” came from two such citizen participation processes and an economic analysis of the City.

Revenues received from businesses pay for much of the operation of a municipality. Business development is very important to the viability of any city and helps reduce the need for tax increases by local governments for operations. Therefore, cities must always look for ways to encourage business investment in a community. The city of Gladstone is 95 percent developed and completely surrounded by Kansas City, Missouri. Our economic development efforts must focus on redevelopment of existing properties, which is much more difficult than simply developing green fields. It is very difficult to compete with development on the urban fringe, despite acknowledgement of the issues caused by urban sprawl.

Recognizing the issues surrounding redevelopment and the need for business investment in our community, it was obvious the first effort needed to address the North Oak corridor. A group of business owners, property owners, neighborhood leaders and the Gladstone Area Chamber of Commerce were convened to work on the North Oak Corridor Study. Several recommendations came from this study, including the suggestion that the City focus on redeveloping pods along the North Oak Corridor. It was obvious to the group that resources were limited and focus on certain areas made the most sense. One of those identified pods was the area surrounding 70th and N. Oak.

Historically, commercial development in Gladstone had occurred along two corridors, N. Oak and Antioch. The City had no commercial center or downtown and needed to find attractive places for commercial interests to invest, in addition to our existing corridors. Not having a downtown area was a challenge, but also an opportunity. Perhaps the City could create a new downtown, as well as provide opportunities for

private investment in our community that would compete with development on the urban fringe and help the businesses that had already invested in the community. A daunting task at best.

The North Oak Corridor Study was completed in 2001. In 2003 the City embarked upon a citizen based strategic planning effort. This was an opportunity to engage interested members of the community in discussions surrounding the long term goals of the city and certainly policy issues that would focus the allocation of the City's resources. This process, called "Gladstone on the Move, Citizens Making a Difference, was a two year effort that involved approximately 300 residents. The North Oak Corridor Study had involved approximately 150 interested parties.

Plan process involved over 600 residents and businesses. The Comprehensive Plan gave us the appropriate planning tools to begin discussing opportunities for investment and growth.

In 2003, the City began acquiring ground within the downtown district to consolidate ownership. This was essential if we were going to compete with large tracts of land owned by a single entity on the urban fringe of the Kansas City region. Developers value the amount of time saved in working with one landowner versus numerous landowners. That process can be very cumbersome and time consuming, many times without positive outcomes. Property acquisition was a key policy issue for participating citizens to support.

The Comprehensive Plan update was completed in 2008. One of the principle planning concepts to arise from that effort was the need to create public spaces within that downtown area. In 2009 the City began planning that space and involved approximately two dozen individuals to assist in developing that plan and identifying potential uses. The plan was completed in 2010, and financing was completed in 2011. This space is called Linden Square and includes an amphitheater, landscaped event space; a space that is converted to an ice rink in the winter months and parking.

The downtown plan also called for a mix of uses including office, residential and retail

spaces. As Linden Square was being planned the City had discussions with Dr. Louis Pollina, a local children's dentist, about office space for his practice. These discussions resulted in an office building at Linden Square for Dr. Pollina's practice, as well as expanded space for Oakhill Day School and concession/restroom space that will assist in the operation of events in Linden Square. A great public-private partnership. Linden Square opened for public use in November 2012. This development has received national recognition for the development of public space, as well as the public-private partnership it represents. Awards have been received from the Kansas City Business Journal, Urban Land Institute, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the Missouri Downtown Main Street Program.

One of the critical issues studied by these citizens was the economic viability, and sustainability, of the City. The discussion included the need for redevelopment and the support for a downtown district. This citizen-driven effort acknowledged the results of the corridor study and recommended the establishment of a downtown district in the 70th and N. Oak area. Another outcome of this process was the desire for a community center, and its location was recommended for that downtown area. The citizen-based strategic planning process was completed in 2005, and the Gladstone Community Center opened in 2008 thanks in part to a great partnership with the North Kansas City School District. There was growing community support for that downtown proposal.

To successfully develop a downtown several changes to our planning and zoning ordinances had to be made. This resulted in an updated Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive

In 2011, the City began discussing the need for a mixed use development (housing and retail) with a firm from Indianapolis called Flaherty and Collins. They were very interested in what





When this project is completed it will mean the investment of \$100,000,000 in our new downtown. Linden Square was developed for approximately \$950,000 and resulted in \$74,000,000 in additional investment by the private sector, and public partners. A pretty good return on investment. These numbers do not include the Community Center, upgrade to the Municipal Pool, improvements to Central Park, and approximately \$10 Million in infrastructure upgrades much of which was paid for by private investment. The City is planning for more growth, and private investment opportunities. These investments help ensure the sustainability of our community, improve the quality of life we enjoy and the pride we can take in our community.

the City was doing with a potential downtown and certainly Linden Square. These discussions resulted in the development of The Heights at Linden Square, a 222-unit luxury apartment complex with 10,000 square feet of retail space at 70th and Locust. This project is currently under construction. In light



of Linden Square and the Heights at Linden Square, a restaurant called Snow and Company is located at 70th and N. Cherry and opened this Fall. This new business completes the total redevelopment of the 70th and N. Cherry intersection.

As I previously mentioned the Comprehensive Plan called for a mix of uses, a development balance, in the downtown area. The next focus was on the development of office space.

Another outcome of the Gladstone on the Move, Citizens Making a Difference, was the policy direction to support the North Kansas City School District and work with the District on community issues. The City and the District, have a long history and a very good working relationship. This was enhanced by the Community Center Natatorium partnership. This relationship has an opportunity to grow even further with the development of a Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS) in our downtown area. Discussions are underway to make this facility a reality for our students and for other partners in the development. These discussions could result in 150,000 - 200,000 square feet of office, education and research space. Again in downtown Gladstone.

All of this happened thanks to the help and input, we received from the citizens who participated in the North Oak Corridor Study, Gladstone on the Move (the citizen based strategic planning effort) and the Comprehensive Plan update. Hundreds of residents helped establish policy, community direction and civic leadership. The results have impacted this community in hundreds of different ways, I have only referred to a few of the impacts in this article.

It is time to begin another citizen driven, long-range planning process. I hope this effort will be as successful as the previous effort and that many of you will participate as it is extremely important as we look forward.

