

The Urban Society of Kansas City

**What's Next?
2006-2020**

November 2006



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Introduction: Four Goals

Living in an average city has never appealed to us. Measuring ourselves against the standards set by typical mid-sized American cities has never been enough. We are the Urban Society of Kansas City. We are dedicated to making Kansas City a great urban place by any measure.

Today Kansas City does not measure up. Its once vital urban fabric has been ripped apart by short-sighted, anti-urban ideas. It lacks the population density necessary for economic and cultural vibrancy¹. It has sprawled, and in the process, has become a poor environment for pedestrians². Its public schools are bad, its municipal government inefficient, and its crime rate relatively high.

The Urban Society believes that many of these issues can be addressed through basic changes in municipal law, policies and practices. Drawing upon what has already worked in other cities and searching for the best strategies for revitalizing urban areas, we now make a series of practical recommendations for our elected and appointed governmental officials, and for all civic-minded individuals.

We have four specific goals for Kansas City by 2020.

First, we need **100,000 new housing units in the city**³. Cities require density or else they become lifeless. Without population density, street life dies off, the economy flounders, mass transit fails and the place becomes boring and lackluster. Kansas City's population density is too low, and needs to be increased through extensive infill housing that will range from single-family homes to high-rise apartments.

Second, we seek **round-the-clock mass transit available within a five minute walk from everywhere** in the city. Without this, the automobile remains the dominant mode of transportation, and its effects scar the urban environment, making conditions especially difficult for pedestrians.

Third, we need **1,000 new storefront businesses**. Street-level commercial activity is vital to a city, providing benefits ranging from shopping and service choices for its citizens to jobs, improved street-life and heightened security. It is shocking the degree to which our city's commercial sector has withered since World War II, leaving the city with less variety than its suburbs—a complete inversion of the natural economic order. As with population, the city's commercial density must greatly increase.

Fourth, we must **infill 95% of the city's vacant land** (including surface parking lots). Each gap in the city's fabric degrades the pedestrian experience, with surface parking a particularly cancerous blot. Since the 1930s, the city's fabric has been torn in too many places, and it is time to weave it back together.

Achieving these goals will transform this city. It will be impossible to achieve these goals without changing municipal laws, reviving the school district, fostering the arts, revamping our economic development policies to spur entrepreneurial activity, implementing better policing policies, and addressing a host of environmental issues. It is a daunting task. But with any overwhelming assignment, the best place to begin is with simple, fundamental and achievable objectives. Here, it means we must change the way we are building the physical environment of the city. The first step is to adopt a new set of design guidelines for the city's physical environment.

¹ Of the nation's 50 largest metro areas, KC ranks 48th in population density.

² According to the Surface Transportation Policy Project's 2002 report, "Mean Streets," only three of 49 metro areas over a million in population have a lower percentage of people who walk to work. <http://www.transact.org/PDFs/ms2002/MeanStreets2002.pdf>

³ In this report, the term "city" roughly refers to the portion of Kansas City, Missouri bounded by the Missouri River, State Line, 85th Street and the Blue River.



Step 1/Adopt Urban Design Rules (“The Orange Card”)

Without venturing into the realm of taste and style, we can identify right ways and wrong ways to construct the streets, sidewalks, pathways, buildings and parks of our city. For over 50 years, we have been doing it the wrong way—applying suburban principles to an urban place. The results have been disastrous: intersections too wide for pedestrians to safely cross; commercial streets turned into huge traffic arteries that snuff out street-front shops; buildings that deaden the sidewalk with long, blank walls; one-way streets that create confusion and harm retailing; parking policies that strip commercial districts of desperately needed on-street parking; zoning laws that discourage mixed-use development and require vast parking lots. But to begin the remedy, all that is required are good principles and political will.

The Urban Society has distilled these principles into 16 clear rules for proper urban design—nine for the public realm and seven for private property. We have published these rules on the front and back of an orange card the size of a business card, and intend to issue an “Orange Card” to violators of such rules, much as red and yellow cards are used in soccer to indicate penalties.

Design Rules for Public Property *(see Appendix 1 for examples)*

The worst offender when it comes to bad design is the City itself. City departments are spending our tax dollars to deliver city-scarring “improvements” such as widening intersections. The following guidelines are simple and clear—and cost nothing to implement. They should be the everyday yardstick used to evaluate what is done by the city and others to the property we hold in common—the public realm.

1. Permit curb cuts no more than 10% of sidewalk length
2. Keep corners clear of obstructions for pedestrians
3. Maintain or reduce street width at intersections—do not widen!
4. Maximize on-street parking
5. Eliminate one-way streets
6. Maintain tight corner radii (less than six feet/ten feet on major thoroughfares)
7. Require street trees
8. Allow traffic lanes no more than ten feet wide
9. Maintain consistent appearance of streetscape elements (eg. poles, meters, trash cans, seating)

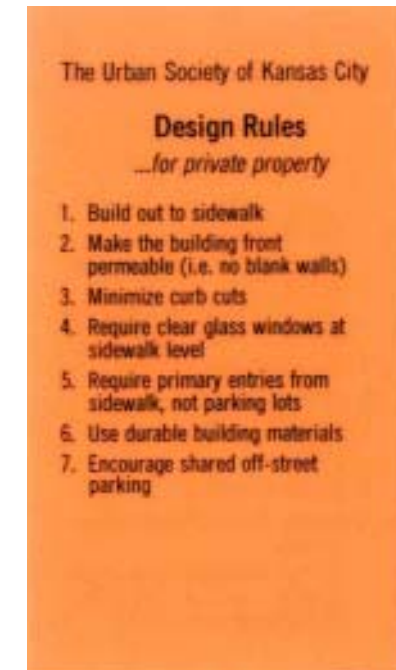
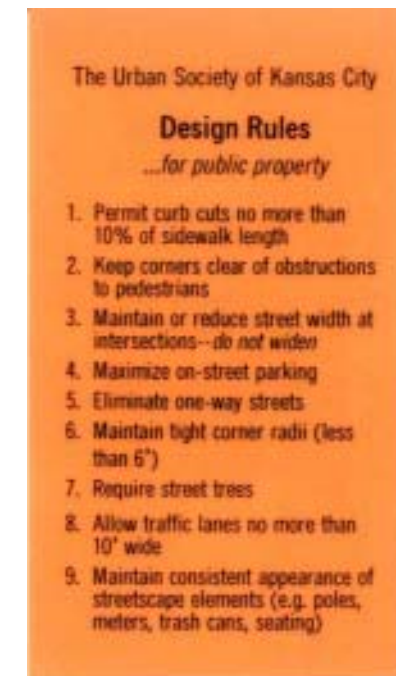
Design Rules for Private Property *(see Appendix 1 for examples)*

The City has a thick code book of rules, almost all of which pertain to how the building serves its occupants and visitors on the inside. Overlooked is how the building works on the outside: whether it reinforces vibrant street activity, lessens crime, and respects its environs. At a minimum, construction should adhere to the following principles:

1. Build out to the sidewalk
2. Make the building front permeable (i.e. no blank walls)
3. Minimize curb cuts
4. Use clear glass windows at sidewalk level
5. Establish primary entries from sidewalk, not parking lots
6. Use durable building materials
7. Encourage shared off-street parking.

Municipal Ordinance for Adopting Design Guidelines

Appendix 2 is a proposed ordinance that the City Council should adopt to require all City departments to adhere to these guidelines, and a call for independent agencies (such as the Economic Development Corporation) to require compliance with the guidelines as a prerequisite for economic development subsidies of any type.



Step 2/Six Programs to Improve our City Today

Substantial improvements to the city needn't take years or cost millions of dollars. Headline-loving politicians are too often locked into thinking that only major construction projects are worthy of their time, and while such projects do indeed create jobs and are a visible symbol of civic momentum, often the more mundane items have a greater effect. The Urban Society proposes six projects to begin reshaping our city immediately.

#1: Change Parking Restrictions to Maximize On-Street Parking

On-street parking is good for the city and its pedestrians, and vital for shops lining the streets. Parking garages are not only street-deadening, they're expensive. A healthy city has as much on-street parking as possible. Our on-street parking policies are far too restrictive. Many of what should be primary commercial streets have been strangled by parking restrictions and now serve merely as car-sewers, their shops badly hurt by the lack of parking near the front door. We should be creating 500 new on-street spaces a year by eliminating obsolete parking restrictions on major downtown and arterial commercial streets. All six- and seven-lane commercial streets in the city should be reduced to four-traffic lanes with permanent on-street parking on both sides, starting with Main Street through Midtown.

#2: Eliminate One-Way Streets

The city has begun to selectively eliminate one-way streets Downtown. It's time to accelerate the work and finish off the remaining one-way streets both downtown and elsewhere. Most are an anachronism dating from when the Downtown streets really were congested, and many serve the purpose of attempting to funnel cars to the freeway as quickly as possible. We should no longer be interested in how quickly a car gets to a freeway and out of Downtown; we should be concerned about whether the city is pedestrian friendly. Let's finish this job by 2010.

#3: Ban Strip-Mall-Style Development

Lest you think that strip malls are a disease that afflicts the suburbs only, we call your attention to the new strip malls on 39th and on Main Streets in Midtown. Both pull the shops far from the sidewalks (from 40 to over 80 feet away) to make room for parking. They could not be more detrimental to pedestrian traffic unless their owners hired someone to hose pedestrians down as they passed by. Let's make sure they're the last of their kind.

#4: Align Tax Abatement Subsidies with Public Policy Objectives

The City has used various tax subsidy programs to spark development for nearly three decades and now developers are fully addicted to their use. Whether or not such subsidies are now needed, it is certainly foolish to subsidize anti-urban development. And yet that is still commonplace. Unfortunately our public bodies do not believe they have the mandate to judge projects based on their effect on street life, a misguided view that should change.

#5: Remake Major Intersections

The City *has* been working to redesign many major intersections, only with the wrong set of principles, attempting to shoehorn suburban elements into tight urban intersections, adding left turn lanes, right turn lanes, and mast-arm signals to speed traffic flow and, ostensibly, increase safety. While wonderful for drivers wishing to move quickly, the effect on the pedestrian environment couldn't be much worse. The City should be following an opposite set of design guidelines for its intersections, and should fix the ones that have been botched. The street should narrow at the intersection (reducing the time it takes a pedestrian to cross) and slowing traffic. The corner should have a small radius, which makes the turn tighter (and therefore slower), and gives the pedestrian more room and protection. The corners should not be filled with unnecessary obstructions, including multiple streetlight and signal poles. There should be no dedicated right turn lanes and limited use of left-turn lanes. The pedestrian crossing signal should come on automatically with each cycle of the light and not require pedestrians to push a button. In sum, a complete change is needed in the attitude toward intersection design.

#6: Demand Better Corporate Citizenship and Leadership

Over time, it has become acceptable for the city's major corporate citizens to occupy cheap buildings and grub for tax abatements by playing one jurisdiction against another. This shortsighted behavior hurts the city, and we should not ignore nor condone it. Public opinion should support good corporate citizenship and decry poor citizenship. Corporate leaders should behave as leaders and help elevate the city's standards of design, and citizens should expect that from our major law firms, banks and other leading companies.



On the Plaza: Making the most of the street



Strip Mall on Main Street in Midtown



Retrofitting intersections that are too wide

Step 3/Strengthen and Connect Neighborhoods and Districts

Kansas City needs to get serious about planning for our many neighborhoods, specifying guidelines that will lead to pedestrian-oriented areas, land-use (zoning) rules tailored to the neighborhood, transit routes that connect these neighborhoods, and policies that encourage mixed-use, dense development. Effective plans require a tremendous amount of work, but there is no substitute for a set of rules that clarify what can be done where. Our current set of rules doesn't work, and the result is that they are thrown aside (through the zoning variance process) for nearly every project. A system that lacks effective rules leads to one that doesn't have any rules at all. The unfortunate outcome is one where strip malls are built on Main Street because it is "easy" and quality urban development is throttled because it is time-consuming and expensive.

Zoning and Land Use

As the word implies, "zoning" defines different zones of the city and how property can be developed and used within the zone. Twentieth Century inventions in urban planning used zones to separate uses of different types, creating places that were all residential, commercial or industrial. Zoning essentially outlawed mixed-use development – the backbone of life for a vital urban place.

Recently, new types of zoning codes have been developed that are "form-based," with more emphasis on a project's character and relation to the street than its use. These codes create zones that apply a widely different set of rules based on whether the area is a downtown, an urban district, an urban neighborhood, a suburban neighborhood or a rural area. In an urban district, buildings are usually required to hug the sidewalk; in suburban areas, they must be set back from the street by a minimum of so many feet. In a suburban area, a project might be required to have at least so many parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor space; an urban project might be prohibited from having more than a certain number of parking spaces.

Revamping the zoning code is the first (and easiest) step in making it legal to build urban forms short of invoking the zoning variance process. Kansas City is behind other cities and overdue in reworking its code. Early reviews of a lengthy process underway indicate that the final result will be disappointing.

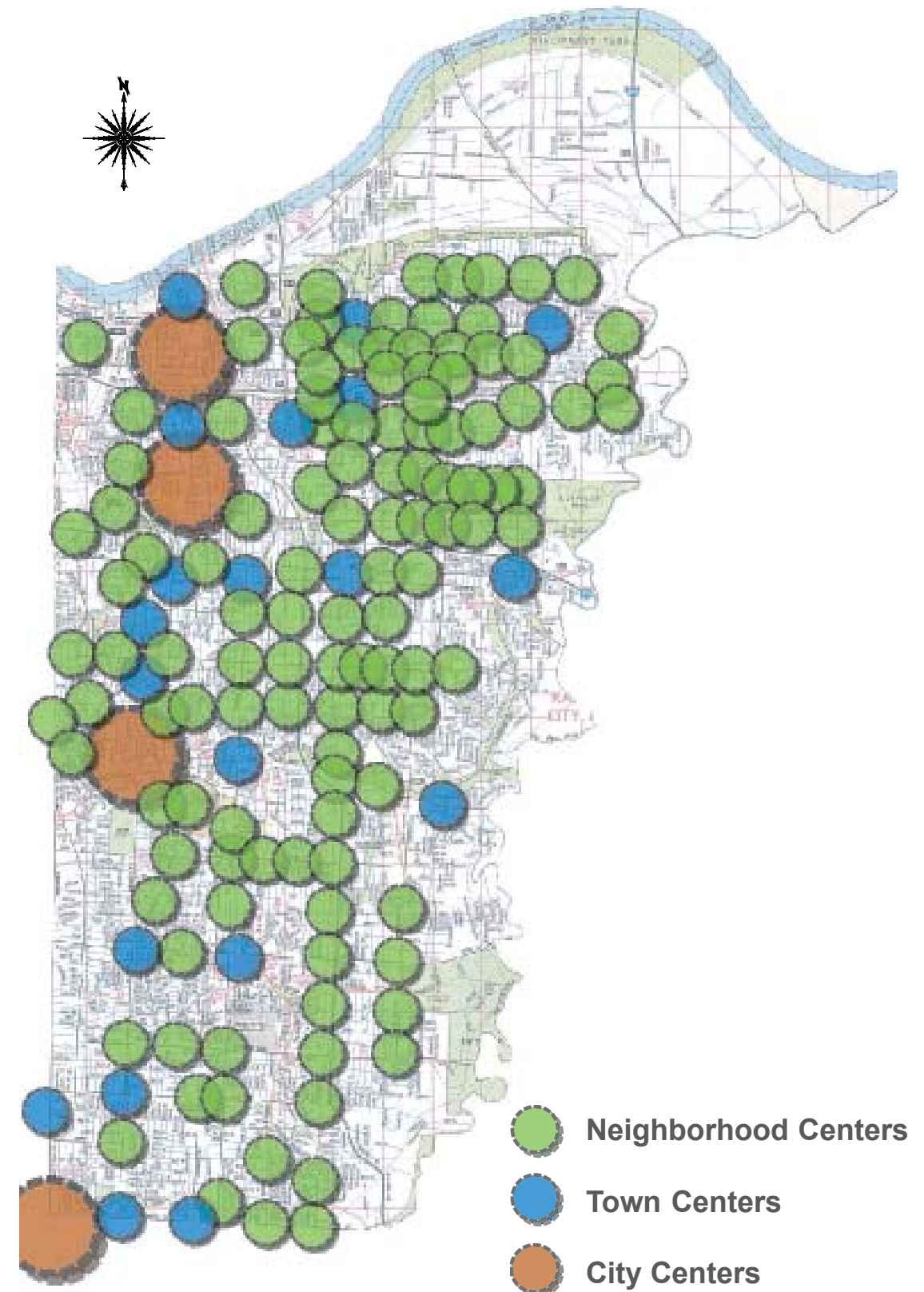
The second (and most difficult) step is applying the code to actual areas through modifications to the City's Land Use map—a process likely to take a very long time. That is why detailed neighborhood plans are so important. A properly run planning process will result in a Land Use map for the neighborhood that implements the principles of form-based zoning—bringing us back to a more rational moment in our history when the construction of well-designed urban places was routine, not astonishing.

Planning for a Hierarchy of Neighborhoods

There are three types of neighborhoods within the city, as noted below.¹ All neighborhood types should have a distinct center (served by public transit) and be walkable, with the neighborhood boundaries approximately a five minute walk from the center (or ten minutes in the case of city centers such as Downtown or the Plaza).

- *City centers* have the tallest buildings and are the most dense. Functions of city centers include a wide array of shopping, cultural centers, many entertainment options, large offices, hotels, abundant restaurants and hospitals. They should sit at the nexus of rapid and local transit lines. Most residents of the city will visit a city center at least once a month. City centers should be pedestrian oriented and have a walking radius from the center of approximately 10 minutes. Our city centers are **Downtown, Crown Center and the Plaza**.
- *Town Centers* are important hubs for weekly activity for people living in a large sector of the city. Each town center should have a grocery and drug store, and will often have a few restaurants, convenience shopping, a school, churches, small offices, a hardware store and a small theater. Town centers should be pedestrian oriented (with a five minute walking radius), and their center is often marked by a rapid transit stop. Kansas City has over 20 town centers (listed in Appendix C).
- *Neighborhood Centers* are small in scale and support daily activities for the people living in the immediate vicinity. Neighborhood centers should be no more than a five minute walk from the edge of the neighborhood, and should contain everyday functions such as a coffee shop, bar, restaurant, gas station, convenience store, small civic space and small workplaces. Kansas City has over 40 neighborhood centers.
- For a master plan to be effective, it must contain detailed plans for these centers of activity, which should describe: (1) the general character of the center, (2) allowed building heights and density, (3) specific zoning for each parcel, (4) use restrictions, (5) parking and transportation facilities, and (6) public amenities.

¹ Recently the city has unfortunately changed its master planning structure to use 16 districts as the elemental planning unit. These districts are too broad to result in meaningful plans.



Rapid Transit Routes

It is beyond the scope of this report to specify all of the city's transit routes, but we do recommend eight rapid transit corridors needed to link the city and town centers, thus forming the primary structure of the city's overall transit system. We anticipate all of these routes will initially be built as bus rapid transit (BRT) systems like the city's current and sole rapid transit line, the MAX.

The City should encourage dense development surrounding BRT stations and along these transit corridors, and parking requirements in these areas should be greatly relaxed. Typical spacing of these stations should allow all points on the route to be within a five-minute walk to the nearest station.

Frequent service is crucial for the rapid transit lines to work. We should seek to have five-minute headways¹ along BRT corridors during the day. Reducing bus time at the stop is also critical, and can be done by elevating the platform so passengers need not climb bus stairs and by introducing off-vehicle fare systems that prevent passengers queuing at the front of the bus to pay their fare. Routes should be as straight as possible. Stations should be built as small community centers, with excellent maps of the surrounding neighborhood, comfortable seating, protection from rain and cold, and even space for a coffee shop or newsstand.

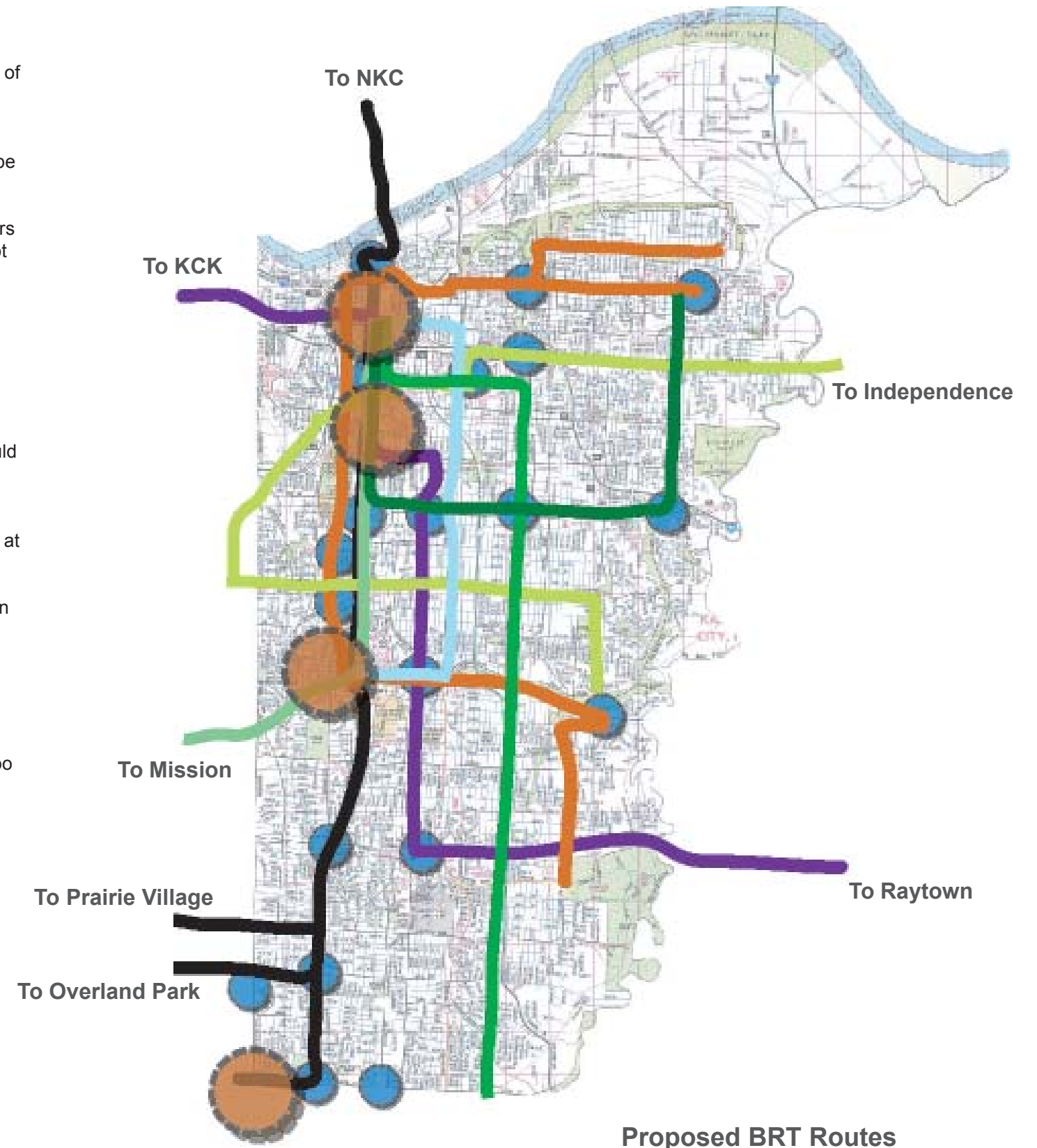
The map shows eight BRT lines serving the city. In general, each line has been designed to serve a sector of the city by connecting neighborhood centers to town centers as directly as possible, and connecting town centers to one or more city centers, again, as directly as possible. Each town center is served by one more lines, and most of the lines run along the city's densest corridor, giving nearly all neighborhoods rapid access to Downtown, Crown Center and the Plaza. The system would place rapid transit within walking distance of much of the city's population, and would be supplemented by local routes that would fulfill our goal of a five-minute walk to transit anywhere in the city.

Several of the lines could be extended along transit corridors into areas that are outside the geographic scope of this report, including the Northland, Kansas City, Kan., Mission, South Kansas City, Raytown and Independence. The convergence of lines at Union Station would enhance plans for commuter rail.

We estimate the cost of building this system at less than \$500 million, including more elaborate stations in city centers and town centers than have been provided with the current MAX line, covering the city with rapid transit for far less than it would cost to build a single light rail line.

Streetcar Circulator

Because of poor planning decisions in the past, the city has a hyper-extended downtown. The City Market, the loop area, the Crossroads, 18th and Vine and Crown Center all have some elements of a typical downtown, but none have all, and they are too distant from each other to function as a single district. We propose a "Downtown" circulator streetcar that would connect all of these areas, allowing them to come much closer to functioning as a single place.



Proposed BRT Routes

¹ Headway is the average time between buses along the route.

Crossroads Neighborhood Plan

Introduction

As one of over 60 neighborhoods in the city, the Crossroads has many issues in common with the others and a few that are unique to it. Situated between Downtown and Crown Center, the Crossroads (an area that some once wanted to bulldoze for a giant park) is now the center of a thriving artistic and creative community. Accelerating development of the areas rich trove of old buildings is causing huge increases in property taxes for all, threatening to drive out the artists and galleries. Some property owners want the area to be a late-night entertainment district; some desire residential and oppose the noise and trash that come with bars and clubs. Major developers are proposing construction of luxury high-rise condos, while many in the area believe that would be incompatible with the 3-4 story character of much of the district. All are struggling with parking issues. The Crossroads' dynamic environment makes it an excellent area to use as an example of the above planning concepts applied to a real neighborhood. Crossroads: Neighborhood Boundaries

Sometimes merely trying to define a neighborhood's boundaries is tough. Such is the case with the Crossroads, where the area's eastern and western boundaries are the subject of a pitched debate.

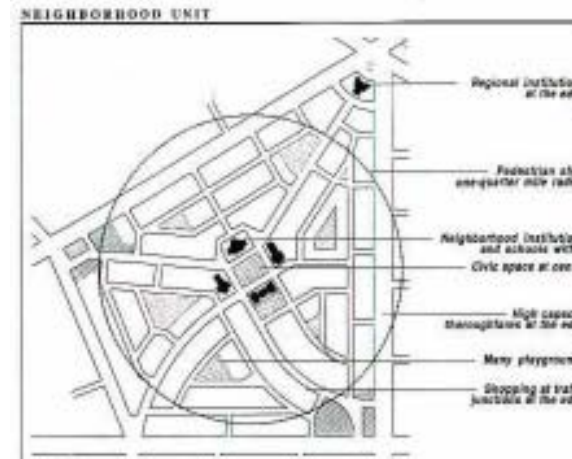
Neighborhood size is best determined not by population nor area boundaries described by convenient shapes on a map, but rather by an area wherein the majority of residents are likely to walk to a neighborhood square or center. This size is based upon an average of 1,320 feet radius, which represents the five to seven minute duration the majority of people will walk before choosing to drive. The center typically contains some mixture of civic, commercial & residential activity, and is often at the intersection of two major streets. It should be highlighted by an important transit stop. Higher population densities immediately adjacent are desirable to generate the commercial and civic vitality of the neighborhood center.

For the purposes of this plan, we propose that the center of the Crossroads is on Main Street between 19th and 20th streets as that is the location of the MAX transit station. The five-minute walking radius sweeps in much of the area typically considered to be the Crossroads, reaching to Union Station and to the future site of the Performing Arts Center. The neighborhood center also has other characteristics important to its being a center: it is or can be developed as the densest part of the neighborhood and sits near the junction of Main Street and 20th Street.

Because Broadway is such an important corridor on the western edge of the neighborhood, we have included the whole stretch from Truman Road to the railroad tracks within the neighborhood boundary, and our walking radius takes us to Oak Street to the east.

Crossroads: Transit Corridors

Crossroads should be well served by BRT lines. The neighborhood's primary station would be at 19th and Main, the current MAX station. It would also be served by the key hub at Union Station and other stations on Broadway, including one near the Performing Arts Center at 16th and Broadway. Four north-south routes would stop at both Union Station and 19th/Main. One east-west line would serve the 19th/Main station. One north-south line would serve the 16th/Broadway station.



1929 Neighborhood Unit Diagram
Clarence Perry



Crossroads Neighborhood & 5-minute walk radius



BRT lines that operate like rail lines





Crossroads Transit Lines

Crossroads: Zoning and Land Use

Our zoning should be primarily based on design and character rather than usage, which should play a much lesser role. The Crossroads example does this by addressing building placement, development density and building height. Exceptions to the general guidelines will still be allowed, but buildings conforming to the rules will receive approval through a greatly streamlined process.

The Crossroads plan shows the most intense areas, allowing for towers up to 12 stories, in designated T6¹ zones. The remainder of the neighborhood, with the exception of two civic sites, is zoned for T5. T5 is a mixed-use zone, but has a height restriction of four stories. These are the suggestions for the next 15-20 years of development, as to what should be allowed by-right. Exceptions are allowed, but require a special approval process

Land Use Map

-  T6
-  T5
-  Civic



Crossroads Neighborhood T Zones

Crossroads: Late Night Activity

Each neighborhood has particular issues that require special consideration in its plan. The Crossroads is mixed-use throughout the whole neighborhood, allowing for a dynamic mixture of uses block to block and creating the possibility for lively streets nearly everywhere. Without some usage restrictions, however, late-night businesses (those open after 11pm) could locate anywhere, and severely harm residential usage. We propose to limit such late-night operations to a designated zone between Main and Grand. Doing so creates predictability for new development and accommodates both residents who are fine with round-the-clock bustle and those who prefer a bit more sedate environment. Businesses with later hours can be allowed by exception in other areas, but they would require special approval.



Late Night uses on Grand Blvd.



Crossroads Late Night Zone

¹ T-zones refer to a system developed to zone a city based on "transects", or types of neighborhoods or areas with a similar character, ranging from rural areas (T-1) to center cities (T-6).

Crossroads: Parking

If developed to the density we recommend, the Crossroads neighborhood would need roughly 4,000 parking spaces, assuming a significant increase in transit riders and walking (but not a wholesale abandonment of the automobile). About 1,000 spaces can come from better use of on-street parking (such as the Urban Society's plan to increase parking on Baltimore by over 100 spaces with diagonal striping and elimination of two unneeded traffic lanes). We estimate that 1,000 spaces will come from development of private garages. That leaves a shortage of 2,000 spaces.

We recommend that a civic parking authority build five garages of 400 spaces each scattered throughout the neighborhood. The garages would be open to the public and would be used to satisfy the parking demands for the development of surrounding buildings and vacant property.

We estimate the public subsidy would be less than 20% of the total cost of the garage. Because the garages would be shared use, they would support both day and night users, making them much more efficient than the typical garage that sits empty half the time. The garages would ideally be positioned in the middle of their blocks, enabling all four sides to be wrapped with shops, residential, restaurant and office space, which would help cover the cost of the garage. Developers would be given strong incentives to use this parking, and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) would be reduced to projects with private garages.

Such strategic thinking about parking design, financing and management is critical to the success of Crossroads and other City neighborhoods. Additional tools that should be on the table include payment in-lieu fees for parking, so that small businesses can pay into a fund instead of providing parking on-site; reduced parking requirements in targeted zones to avoid suburban-style parking lots; and market-based metering of on-street parking, so long as the revenue generated stays in the neighborhood for improvements.

Crossroads: Street Design

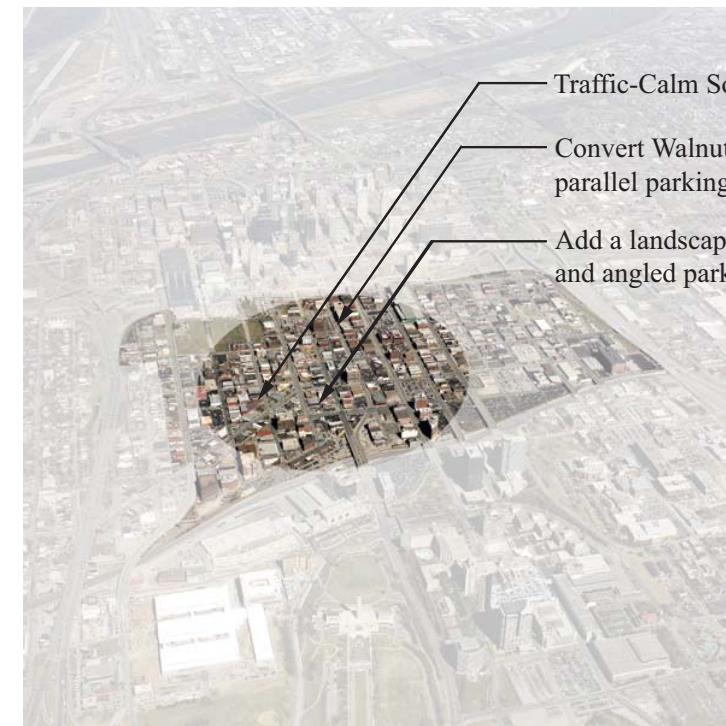
The design of our streets is crucial to creating a walkable environment. Like most of our neighborhoods, the Crossroads has many streets where the design of the street itself is hostile to pedestrian activity. The illustration on the right shows a few potential changes that, while small in dollar value, would have dramatic impact on the experience of walking around the neighborhood.



Good use of shared, hidden parking



Potential Crossroads parking garage locations



- Traffic-Calm Southwest Blvd
- Convert Walnut St to two-way with parallel parking on both sides
- Add a landscaped median to 20th Street and angled parking

Street Design suggestions in Crossroads



Good urban streetscape

Step 4/The Hard Stuff

Reconnect Schools to Their Neighborhoods

There was a time that the nearby school served as a focal point of the neighborhood. In addition to serving its primary role as a school, it was a community center—a focus of activity all day long, all year long. Today our schools are isolated fortresses. The billion-dollar desegregation program that failed to increase educational quality or integrate the schools did leave the city with upgraded facilities that include first-class gymnasiums, pools and auditoriums. Those facilities are underused.

We offer no magical solutions to the primary challenge for our public schools, which is to fulfill their purpose as academic institutions. However, we do believe that the schools can again become central to the community, with the surrounding population again caring what happens to the school and becoming involved in its programs. We recommend that school facilities be put to use for after-school community meetings, locations for decentralized city hall functions (see below), and that their recreational facilities be made available to the community. The city should not build new community centers apart from the schools and should integrate the recreational facilities that are now so often duplicated by the Parks and Recreation Department. The Parks and Recreation Department should be given jurisdiction over the school's grounds with a mandate to develop those areas for the use of both the school and the community. We believe this would be an important step in getting even residents without kids in the district to care about the fate of the nearby public school once again.

“Broken-Windows” Policing and Community Courts

“Broken Windows” policing refers to attacking all crime by controlling petty crime, including panhandling, vandalism, and codes violations. It operates on the assumption that signs of disorder (e.g. broken windows) attract criminal activity of all kinds. This approach to cracking down on crime has been successful in producing major reductions in crime when coupled with a general economic revitalization and a re-establishment of pedestrian activity within the city.

For this kind of policing to work, more police must be assigned to foot and bicycle patrols, and the police must be given the tools to track and target hot spots of criminal activity. It must also be coupled with drastic changes to the municipal court system, so that perpetrators are not simply turned out to the street after a mere slap on the wrist.

The concept of community courts addresses this need. Courts are placed in neighborhoods throughout the city, and those guilty of municipal infractions are sentenced to immediate community service, which is performed right in the same area where they have committed crimes. Alongside the court facilities are located social services to help the perpetrators address the problems in their lives that spur criminal behavior, including drug rehab programs and job assistance.

Improve Access to Key Municipal Government Functions

We recommend that the concept of a municipal “action center” be moved into town centers throughout the city (ideally locating them in schools), improving citizen access to these important problem-solving functions of local government. These dispersed action centers would work directly with neighborhood associations (also given office space in the same school) and citizens to address planning and zoning issues, codes violations, infrastructure needs, animal control, weed control, and policing and security issues. District council members would have an office in the most important town center within their districts.

Lop the Loop

The Missouri Department of Transportation built freeways in the 1950s and 1960s that tore through many healthy Kansas City neighborhoods, nowhere with greater ill effect than with the downtown freeway loop. While officials thought doing so would aid in access to downtown and reduce traffic problems, it actually enabled the flight from downtown and disrupted the street grid, causing more congestion. Its effect on the pedestrian environment and the health of neighborhoods in and around downtown was terrible.

Fifty years later, we face a potential billion-dollar-rebuilding of the downtown freeway loop and its approaches. Current plans by MoDOT will compound the original disaster with larger freeways, fewer access points and more one-way streets carrying heavy traffic loads serving to feed the freeway monster.

Recently, New York, San Francisco, Milwaukee and Portland have removed freeways, and enjoyed the resulting success of reduced congestion and reinvigorated downtown neighborhoods. Many other cities are considering the same. Why not here?

We recommend that the northern leg of the loop (the Sixth Street Expressway) be filled in and become an at-grade boulevard (opening up many blocks now used for freeway ramps to development). The south leg should be completely covered.

And we shouldn't stop there. Many wonderful cities (most outside the U.S.) have freeway systems that simply stop short of downtown. How much better would our urban center be with no freeways, with at-grade boulevards carrying traffic in and through the city? It might increase travel time across downtown by five minutes. Is that a price we would be willing to pay? The Urban Society believes these are important questions to ask.

Mitigate the Effects of Sprawl

Tax subsidies that were meant to renew blighted areas of the city have mutated to support construction projects almost anywhere in the city, and now are seriously eroding the city's tax revenue. And these subsidies grow without limit. We recommend that property-tax abatement and tax-increment-financing programs be limited to the urban core (bounded by the river to the north, Van Brunt Boulevard to the east, 75th street to the south and, of course, the state line to the west). We call for the total subsidies available in a given year to represent no more than 1% of the previous year's tax revenue, and that the boards which control project approvals provide subsidies only to proposals of the highest merit, as graded by their adherence to the Urban Society's Design Rules for Private Property and total incremental job growth.

Encourage Risk-Taking to Broaden Revitalization

The city's risk takers are artists and entrepreneurs, and Kansas City has many reasons to foster growth in these sectors of our community. Artists have been a leading force in revitalizing blighted areas of the city, most vividly demonstrated in the Crossroads. Kansas City has a growing national reputation as a great place for artists. Entrepreneurial activity is key to job growth and wealth creation, and wealth creation is important to ensure a strong philanthropic community. Both groups play a leading role in an economy that is increasingly based on knowledge, information and creativity.

Yet public policy does little to encourage these key groups, and often inadvertently penalizes them. Artists and galleries move into blighted areas, and their presence usually generates revitalization. Then the artists and gallery owners are often driven out by the increase in property taxes and rents caused by rising property values—made all the more unjust because the developers who follow them avail themselves of property tax abatement programs. Add this effect to the relatively meager public support for the arts in Kansas City and it becomes clear that the contribution made by the artistic community is exploited by the community but not returned in any meaningful way.

The proposed abatement of property taxes for cultural purposes in the Crossroads is a welcome first step to support the arts community. Another way to foster direct support for artists would be for civic leaders to begin enacting elements of the arts community-based plan for visual artists (www.charlottestreet.org/vac).

For entrepreneurs, the city is an unwelcoming environment. No economic development incentives are targeted at this sector. Relatively high tax rates, inhospitable state laws concerning bankruptcy and bureaucratic red tape retard the growth of the entrepreneurial sector of the city's economy, causing the suburbs to take the lead in this crucial area.

The city needs to become much more aggressive in supporting both of these segments if we expect to have the flourishing economy and cultural scene necessary to become a great community.

Appendix 1: Design Rule Examples

For Public Property

1. Permit curb cuts no more than 10% of sidewalk length

This pedestrian friendly stretch of 39th Street near State Line contrasts with a nearby stretch of the same street (below) that is riddled with curb cuts. Curb cuts create a dangerous environment for pedestrians in this block and act as a deterrent for pedestrian activity in blocks to the east, therefore undercutting 39th Street's value as a pedestrian corridor.



Good: 39th & Bell



Bad: 39th & Genessee

2. Keep corners clear of obstructions to pedestrians

Even vending boxes, a trash can and a fire hydrant, when well placed, do not create obstacles for pedestrians at the corner of Ward Parkway and Broadway, while an unsightly jumble of traffic lights and utility poles carelessly placed at the corner of 39th & Pennsylvania make worse an already dreadful intersection.



Good: Ward Parkway & Broadway



Bad: 39th & Pennsylvania

3. Maintain or reduce street width at intersections—do not widen

Two intersections on Brookside Boulevard just blocks apart illustrate the effects of an ill-conceived street “improvement.” The realignment of Main Street to connect to Brookside Boulevard was an opportunity for traffic engineers to increase traffic flow around the Plaza, and in so doing, they created one of the worst intersections for pedestrians in the city. Ironically, this confusing intersection works poorly for autos, too.

Just a few blocks south, a much smaller intersection at 51st Street allows safe car, pedestrian and bicycle flow without the need to open a huge gash in the urban fabric.



Good: 51st & Brookside Blvd.



Bad: Cleaver Blvd & Main Street

4. Maximize on-street parking

Less than 10,000 cars a day traverse this wide stretch of Baltimore in the heart of the Crossroads. On a sunny Saturday, a group of rogue urbanites flouted traffic regulations and parked their vehicles on the diagonal to demonstrate the feasibility of a plan crafted by the Urban Society, Public Works, the Crossroads Community Association and local property owners. The plan adds more than 100 on-street spaces in 6 blocks by adding 45 degree angle-in parking on both sides of the street.



Good: Baltimore Ave with angled parking



Bad: Baltimore Ave before the makeover

5. Eliminate one-way streets

One-way streets cause faster traffic (because drivers have to pay less attention), are confusing, and reduce needed traffic flow for street-front retailers. They have a very negative effect on the pedestrian experience and retail viability downtown.

Many streets were made one-way to expedite travel to the freeways and to reduce "gridlock." This traffic engineering theory was another bust, and re-conversions to two-way streets have improved both traffic flow and pedestrian experience. Now the street grid works as was intended. This should serve as a lesson to those who use traffic capacity as the only criterion in street design.



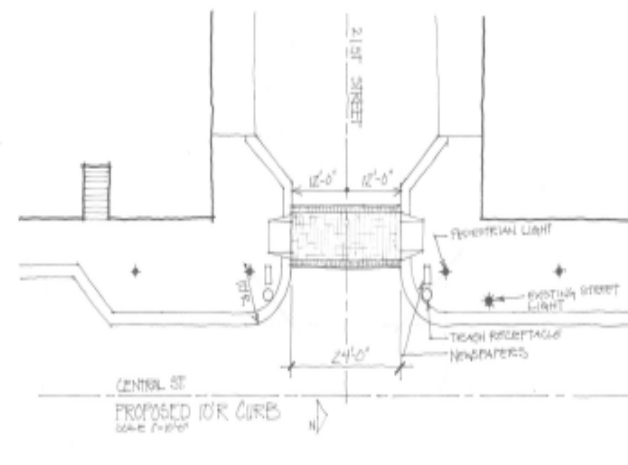
Good: Re-done Baltimore Ave.



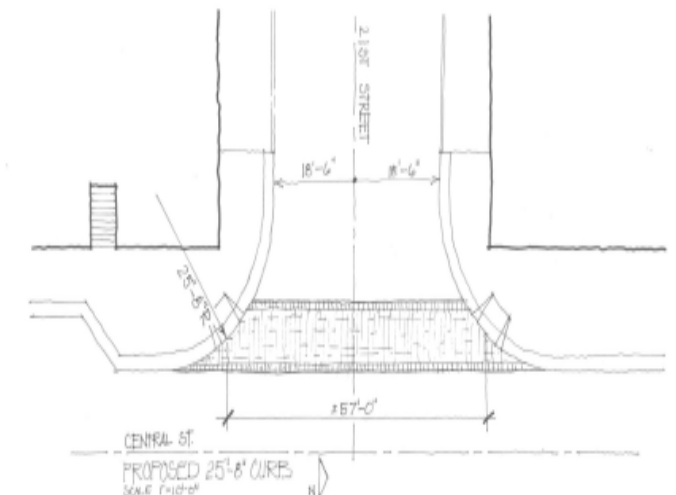
Bad: Wyandotte Ave. currently

6. Maintain tight corner radii (less than 6')

This seemingly insignificant design detail is actually critical. This example in the Freight House District shows the impact on pedestrian crossing distance when the large radius specified by typical traffic engineering standards is used rather than a tighter radius. In this case, a pair of curb extensions allows the distance to be cut less than half of that proposed by the City Engineer. The complete focus on ease of fast turning for drivers creates an intersection that is unsafe to cross when walking, especially for those who don't walk very quickly.



Good: Intersection neck-down



Bad: Large turning radii

7. Require street trees

The benefits of street trees become painfully obvious in these contrasting images. Even with little sidewalk room to work with, this stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue in Westport is more intimate, secure and beautiful thanks to its well-maintained trees. This same street two block north (right photo) manages to achieve all the ambience of the city's tow lot.



Good: Pennsylvania Ave south of Westport Rd



Bad: Penn Ave north of Westport Rd

8. Allow traffic lanes no more than 10' wide

Take a walk down Westport Road to observe the importance of traffic-lane width. In the heart of Westport, where the pedestrian environment is good and urban life thrives, lanes are tight and cars move slowly. West of Southwest Trafficway, the lanes widen considerably (even though there are the same number of lanes), and cars move quickly. The difference becomes more apparent when one tries to cross the street at Westport and Wyoming compared to Westport and Pennsylvania.



Good: Westport Road @ Broadway & Penn



Bad: Westport Road @ Wyoming

9. Maintain consistent appearance of streetscape elements (e.g. poles, meters, trash cans, seating)

A city can in fact accommodate a wide variety of street furniture and accessories without it having to look trashy. These 2 examples show how just through care in keeping things organized a more attractive street can be maintained. Beauty is important in the built environment, especially if we wish people to walk repeatedly down the same paths.



Good: 47th & Central



Bad: 39th & Bell

On Private Property

1. Build out to sidewalk

39th Street's gap-toothed and dull pedestrian environment took another hit last year with this strip mall. In contrast to the blocks further east, this example will never enhance walkability or encourage anything besides people zipping in and out quickly in their vehicles.



Good: 39th & Bell



Bad: 39th & Clark

2. Make the building front permeable (i.e. no blank walls)

Office Max technically met the Main Street corridor guidelines while still managing to degrade the street with its sideways facing store and blank walls. In a cynical nod to the guidelines, the walls were designed to look like windows were once there (they weren't), but have now been covered with cinder block. The street trees mitigate the damage a bit..

In another city, a grocery store uses large windows, awnings and a primary entrance on the corner to entice shoppers inside.



Good: Building welcomes major street



Bad: 42nd & Main, building turns back on street

3. Minimize curb cuts

Similar to Item 1 in previous section

4. Require clear glass windows at sidewalk level

The ability to see and be seen is a key amenity of urban living. People like to see other people, whether inside or outside – it makes the street scene interesting. Too often, we allow storefront businesses to darken the window glass, which detracts from the experience of walking by a store. These examples show a good and bad method, and that we can use time-honored methods such as awnings to shield the interior of spaces from the sun, while still allowing visibility.



Good: Clear windows & awnings



Bad: Shaded windows

5. Require primary entries from sidewalk, not parking lots

Even building a building up on the street is not enough if the parking lot determines the entry. That's the case with this new structure at Linwood & Main, which turns its orientation completely away from the streets. We have countless examples of how to do it well – there are no excuses otherwise.



Good: Door opens to sidewalk in Brookside



Bad: Door opens to parking lot at Linwood & Main

6. Use durable building materials

Variety in building design is good, but cheapness is not. We can both strive for diversity and quality in our new structures. This duplex in a Midtown neighborhood is not just poorly designed, but it's also built of shoddy materials. Such construction does nothing to stabilize neighborhoods or enhance the life of the city. On the other hand, well-built buildings have the advantage of having many lives in both use and reuse.



Good: 39th & Bell



Bad: West Plaza neighborhood duplex

7. Encourage shared off-street parking

Parking is a resource that is vital to the success of any urban neighborhood. It's a resource that is truly wasted when it's only used for 8 hours a day, by a particular user. We need to be more creative with our use of off-street parking, to allow for multiple users, and ultimately, for more economic efficiency. The explosion of single-use parking garages has permanently deadened many blocks of downtown.

In addition, the design of garages should serve to benefit the pedestrian. At a minimum, all garages should have ground-floor storefront spaces with active uses. These are particularly good places for incubating small retail and arts operations. Even better is to essentially "hide" the garages in the middle of the block, so that only their entries and exits are visible.



Good: Parking is shared & mostly hidden



Bad: Single-use parking on Walnut St.

Appendix 2: Proposed Design Guideline Ordinance

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR ORDINANCE NO. 060015

Accepting the recommendations of the Urban Society of Kansas City; adding a new section to the Kansas City, Missouri Municipal Code in order to require compliance with the design guidelines put forth in the Design Guidelines for Public and Private Property.

WHEREAS, Design Guidelines for Public and Private Property were developed by the Urban Society of Kansas City and final drafts were ready for public review during 2007, and

WHEREAS, the Kansas City, MO Planning Commission reviewed the Design Guidelines and conducted a public hearing on the Guidelines that commenced on <date> and was continued for additional public testimony on <date> and

WHEREAS, at the conclusion of the public hearing, the Planning Commission considered all public input received and on <date> forwarded a recommendation to the Kansas City, MO City Council for adoption of the Design Guidelines, and

WHEREAS, the City Council has considered the Planning Commission's recommendation and held its own public hearing and has determined to adopt the amendment to the Kansas City Municipal Code set forth in this ordinance; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF KANSAS CITY:

Section 1. The Design Guidelines for Public and Private Property as set forth in the Resolution attached hereto as Exhibit A are hereby approved and adopted as valid and incorporated herein by this reference as if set forth in full.

Section 2. Code Amendment. A new Section <number> is hereby added to the Kansas City Municipal Code to read as follows:

A. The Design Guidelines prepared by the Urban Society of Kansas City and attached to the ordinance codified in this section are hereby adopted and incorporated into this section by this reference as if set forth in full. All development within the city of Kansas City shall comply with the Design Guidelines.

Section 3. The Council hereby finds that:

- (a) Good cause has been shown for the establishment of Design Guidelines,
- (b) Economic development entities including, but not limited to the TIF Commission, the Planned Industrial Expansion Authority and the Land Clearance Redevelopment Authority will require compliance with the guidelines as a prerequisite for public subsidies of any type.
- (b) The Design Guidelines conform to the comprehensive plan for the development of the City as a whole;

Section 3. Severability. If any section, sentence, clause or phrase of this ordinance should be held to be invalid or unconstitutional by a court of competent jurisdiction, such invalidity or unconstitutionality shall not affect the validity or constitutionality of any other section, sentence, clause or phrase of this ordinance.

Appendix 3: Rapid Transit Lines

LINE 1 - MISSION / MAIN

9th/Main - Main Street South - Union Station - Plaza - Shawnee Mission Pkwy west to Mission

LINE 2 - BROOKSIDE

NKC south on Oak - River Market - west to Delaware - south on Delaware/Main - Downtown - Union Station - Plaza - south on Brookside Blvd to Brookside - south on Wornall - Waldo. Branches to Prairie Village via Gregory/71st; Overland Park via 75th & Metcalf; Ward Parkway Center via Wornall & 85th

LINE 3 - TROOST

KCK east on 12th to West Bottoms - 12th/Main - south on Main - Union Station - east on 27th - south on Troost - Linwood/Troost - 47th/Troost - 63rd/Troost - east on 63rd - Swope Park - Raytown

LINE 4 - PASEO

9th/Main - east on 12th - 12th/Paseo - south on Paseo - 18th/Paseo - Linwood/Paseo - 39th/Paseo - Cleaver/Paseo - west on Cleaver to Plaza

LINE 5 - LINWOOD

9th/Main - south on Main - Union Station - Linwood/Main - east on Linwood - Linwood/Troost - Linwood/Paseo - Linwood/Prospect - Linwood/Van Brunt - north on Van Brunt/Hardesty to Hardesty/Independence

LINE 6 - NORTHEAST / BROADWAY / CLEAVER

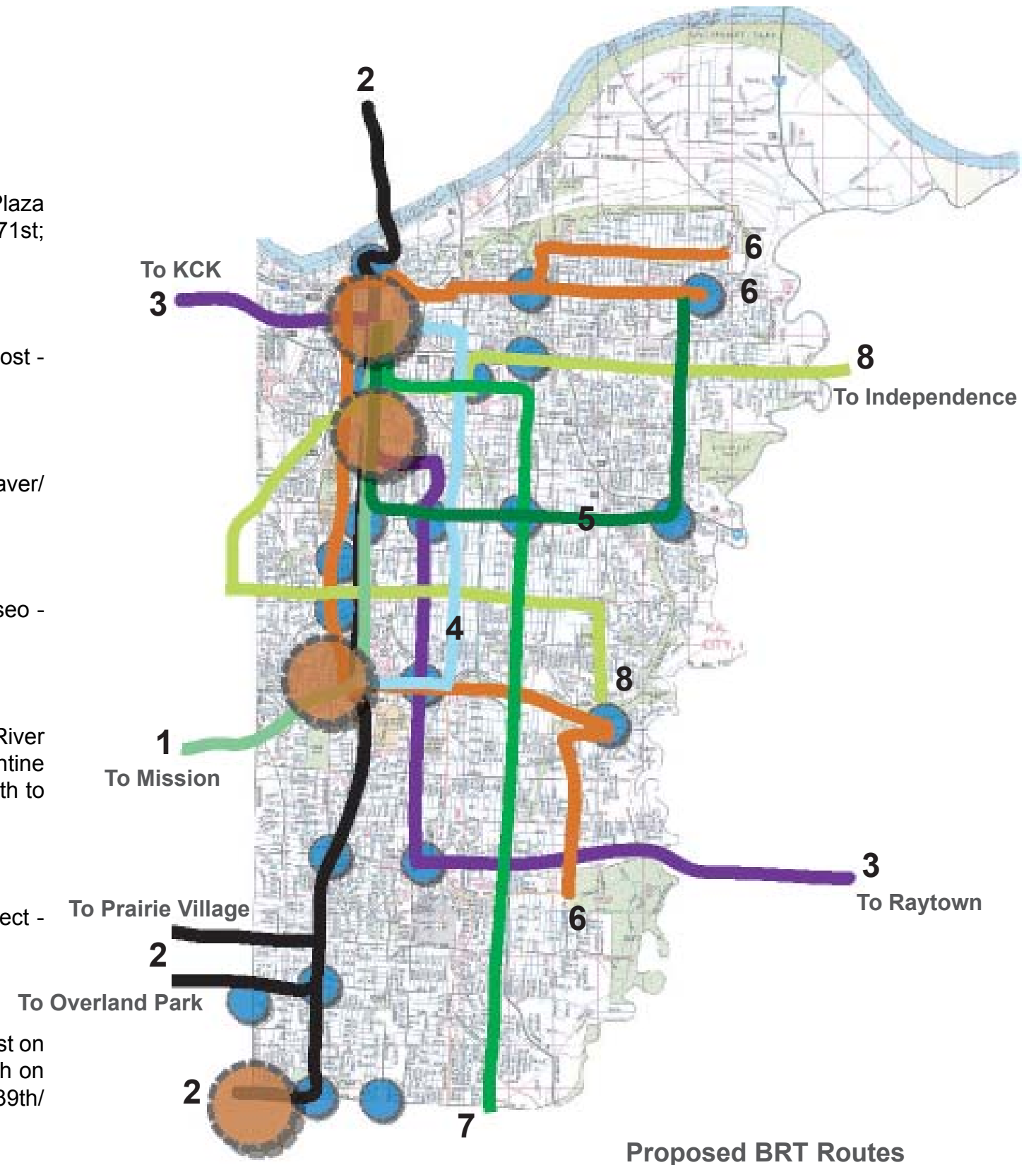
Branches starting at Belmont/St. John's & Belmont/Independence - west to Benton/Independence - west to River Market - west to Broadway - south on Broadway - Downtown - SW Blvd/Broadway - Pershing/Broadway - Valentine - Westport - Plaza - east on Cleaver - Cleaver/Paseo - Cleaver/Prospect - Blue Parkway Town Center - south to Swope Parkway - Swope Park

LINE 7 - PROSPECT

9th/Main - south on Main - east on 18th - 18th/Paseo - 18th/Prospect - south on Prospect - Linwood/Prospect - 39th/Prospect - Cleaver/Prospect - 63rd/Prospect - 85th/Prospect

LINE 8 - INDEPENDENCE / 39TH

Independence west on Truman Road - Truman/Prospect - Truman/Paseo - south on Paseo - 18th/Paseo - west on 18th - Crossroads - 19th/SW Blvd west - 19th/Main - SW Blvd/Broadway - SW Blvd west to Rainbow - south on Rainbow KU Med - east on 39th - 39th/Broadway - 39th/Main - 39th/Troost - 39th/Paseo - 39th/Prospect - 39th/Cleveland - south on Cleveland to Blue Parkway Town Center



Appendix 4: Hierarchy of Neighborhoods

	Neighborhood Center	Town Center	City Center
General Description:	Small scale. Focus of daily activities for surrounding neighborhoods within 5 minute walk	Medium scale. Focus of weekly activities for a number of Neighborhood Centers linked to the Town Center by transit. Radius of Town Center is also defined by 5 minute walk.	Large scale. Focus of monthly activities and a center of activity for the entire city. Size of City Center defined by 10 minute walk.
Common Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coffee shop Bar Restaurants (one or two) Gas station Small hardware store Convenience store Small civic building Small public space or park Small-scale workplaces Transit stop (likely on connector route) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grocery store Drug store Dry cleaner Hair salon Laundromat Several restaurants Hardware store Medical offices/clinic Small theater Special events hall Small offices Park with pay fields School Churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clothes shopping Furniture stores Cultural centers Many entertainment options Hospital Large offices Big theater Stadia Large park Major transit hubs Hotels Abundant restaurants
Locations	<p><i>Approximately 55 in city. Some examples:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 39th/Wyoming-State Line Columbus Park 63rd/Prospect 9th/Jackson 55th/Brookside 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> River Market Independence Ave/Prospect Ave Sheffield (Independence Ave/Hardesty/Wilson) Truman Rd/Prospect Ave 18th and Vine Jazz District Crossroads Arts District Linwood Blvd/Main Street Linwood Blvd/ Troost Ave Linwood Blvd/Van Brunt/31st Street Valentine (Valentine Rd/Broadway) Westport (Westport Rd/Pennsylvania Ave) 47th St/Troost Ave Blue Parkway/Kensington Brookside The Landing Waldo Meadow Lake Pkwy/State Line 85th St./Wornall Ave. 85th St./Holmes Rd. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downtown Crown Center Country Club Plaza

Appendix 5: Next Mayor's To-Do List

- Complete 15 (of potential 55) neighborhood plans
- Adopt new zoning ordinance
- Pass the Urban Design Rules ordinance
- Hire a Director of Pedestrians
- Narrow Main Street, Truman Road and the Southwest Trafficway to four traffic lanes, increasing on-street parking.
- Inaugurate one new MAX line per year
- Create 500 new on-street parking spaces per year