

Common Thread Project Structure

Steering Committee

Health & Education

Economic Development

Transportation

Recreation/Culture/Historic Preservation

Community Design & Housing

Governance

Infrastructure & Environment

Report of the Common Thread Planning Project

Introduction

The Mayor and Board of Aldermen of the City of Branson set in motion a comprehensive planning project in the summer of 1995, designed to assist them in making decisions for the community. The intent of the project was to seek and clarify community beliefs about the future of Branson. Each member of the Board accepted major responsibilities for the conduct of the investigation, by dividing the task into distinct inquiry areas. In addition, the Board invited other citizens to assist in chairing some of the task forces. Together, the Board and the invited chairs, along with the Mayor, the City Administrator, and the Assistant City Administrator, along with a facilitator for the project, comprised the project's steering committee.

To fully explore the future of Branson, the project sought input from community members in seven areas: Health and Education; Economic Development and Diversification; Transportation; Recreation, Cultural Affairs, and Historic Preservation; Community Design and Housing; Governance; and Infrastructure and Environment. Once formed, the steering committee invited members of the community to participate in the work of the committees. In total, over one hundred citizens answered the call. Individual committee meetings began in September 1995 and continued through March 1996. This report represents the results achieved by the groups.

The committees were free to explore issues as they felt necessary. The steering committee placed before each group only the barest of assumptions: consider the future of Branson over the next twenty years (through 2015), and consider Branson expanding, both in population and in area.

I. Findings of the Health and Education Committee

Health

The Committee envisions retaining a strong community health and wellness center (hospital), under local control. The local hospital must increasingly become involved in a variety of insurance and funding products in order to remain competitive and available to the community in the future. Additionally, local physicians should continue to be involved with the operation of the community hospital.

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The Committee supports a high quality, fiscally sound, and locally controlled ambulance district for the Branson community.

The provision of E-911 services should be centralized into one answering and dispatch center with a goal of improving response time.

The Committee feels that 100% of the expectant mothers in the area should receive prenatal care. Further, the City and County health services should zero in on tracking births in order to insure full administration of vaccinations.

With changes on the horizon in the delivery of public health services, both the City and County health departments need to be well staffed, appropriately funded, and entrepreneurially oriented. These agencies have roles to play in assisting and educating industries about health related issues, in working with day care providers, and in networking school and other health care providers.

The Committee encourages the development of community living centers for senior citizens which offer extended care and access to other community services.

The Committee recommends that the Community Health Improvement Board be continued with community at large representation and the task of acting as the coordinator of regional health and social services. Also, the Committee supports efforts to create a "911-type" number to access health and social services.

The Committee supports the City's efforts in emergency preparedness.

Education

Our schools must be a safe, nurturing, and productive environment for education. Parents and the community, working with school officials, must dedicate themselves to the eradication of illegal drugs, the curbing of alcohol abuse, ending disciplinary problems, and stemming the rise of gangs in local schools.

The Committee supports the efforts of the school district regarding future building needs. The school district is preparing for increased enrollment, and intends to use bonding capacity to keep class sizes as low as possible. The district will continue to pursue a centrally located school plan. Specific plans supported by the Committee include:

- a new high school on a 56 acre tract north of Branson, constructed for 1,200 students but expandable to 2,000 students;

- moving the junior high school to the present high school;

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moving fifth and sixth grade to the present junior high school on the Branson Cedar Ridge campus;

construction of a primary school at the Branson Cedar Ridge campus;

construction of a kindergarten/early childhood/special education center at the Branson Cedar Ridge campus; and,

decommission of the Kindergarten-North and Primary site in town, with the decommissioned building to be used by the City of Branson for programs.

The Committee believes that the City and the school district should work cooperatively to develop the use of the Kindergarten North and Primary downtown as well as to develop the acreage north of Branson.

The Committee advocates minimal busing for the Branson school system. The tradition of single, centrally located schools should continue. The Committee also encourages continued strong community input into curriculum development.

The Committee would like to see increasing educational success in the system, and graduation to mean that students have successfully met appropriate education standards

The Committee encourages all public entities to involve youth in future planning of our community.

Educational offerings for adults should be expanded, especially as the number of senior citizens increases. Existing facilities should be used for these purposes.

The Committee supports interactive education, where learning is typified by student involvement, discussion, and practical application.

The community should create and support early childhood development centers to serve the education and health needs of children from ages six weeks to kindergarten age

II. Findings of the Economic Development and Diversification Committee

The Committee recommends that the City lead the way in an intergovernmental effort to form a regional economic development corporation. The goal of this organization should be the further development of a 12-month economy in the Branson area. Efforts at economic expansion should focus both on traditional industry as well as tourism-related enterprises. With regard to other characteristics of the organization, the Committee recommends the following.

Intergovernmental/Interagency Funding

The corporation should act as an independent entity but should represent both Taney and Stone Counties (as well as the municipalities included therein). Funding for the organization's operations should, at a minimum, be secured from corporate sponsors, Stone County, Taney County, the City of Branson, and the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce.

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors for the economic development corporation should be appointed by those organizations participating in the funding of the agency.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

As a precursor to the establishment of new industries in the area, the Board of Directors should act as a facilitator between governmental entities to insure that appropriate infrastructure, such as roads, water, and sewer, is installed to allow appropriate development to take place.

Paid Staff

The Board of the economic development corporation should hire a paid staff member to oversee the corporation's efforts to attract new and expanded industries. The preferred candidate should have an extensive background in economic development. Other paid staff should be added as appropriate to accomplish the corporation's goals.

Areas of Activity

The corporation should focus on attracting industries that add to the diversity of the area's economic base and that are environmentally friendly. As well, the corporation's staff should maintain statistics on the area to distribute to potential developers.

III. Findings of the Transportation Committee

Mass Transit

The Committee recognizes the need for mass transit in the Branson area. The proposed service areas for such a system should contemplate an area beyond the existing City limits.

With regard to type, it is preferable that the system run on its own, elevated track. Although right of way acquisition costs will be substantial, this method will allow the system to circumvent existing traffic problems.

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The Committee also recognizes that the costs for elevated track systems, including light rails and rubber tire, are substantial and can approach \$20 million per mile. Therefore, any effort undertaken by the City regarding transit should be prefaced by an extensive study of all options available. The need for this study is immediate.

Intermodal Transportation Study

The Committee would encourage not only the City but all local and state governmental entities to follow as closely as possible the recommendations of the Intermodal Transportation Study as prepared and submitted by Burns and McDonnell. This study incorporates all facets of transportation and embodies a comprehensive solution for Branson's transportation needs over the years to come.

Streetscape

The City should re-examine all road construction specifications, including streets and sidewalks, to determine ways in which their visual impact may be minimized.

Routing

The City should work with the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce to develop a method of routing traffic through the use of signage or any other appropriate method. Strategies utilized by other resort communities should be studied.

Trails

The City should work to develop a system of trails to move pedestrian and bicycle traffic throughout the area. These trails should be both recreational and functional in that residents can move between "spheres of interest" without ever using an automobile.

Impact Fees

The City should examine the implementation of impact fees that are assessed based upon the amount of traffic generated by development. The purpose of these fees should be the recovery of roadway improvement costs.

IV. Findings of the Recreation, Cultural Affairs, and Historic Preservation Committee

Parks, Open Space, and Greenways

1. Develop a system of continuous trails, paths, and greenways throughout the community to allow for walking, biking, wildlife, and outdoor classrooms.

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2. Work with the County to identify and set aside land before it develops to insure a future system of parks, open space, and greenways.
3. Maintain the requirements of the current City ordinance that identifies a percentage of land to be set aside for parks and open space in new residential developments. New regulations should put similar requirements on commercial and industrial development.
4. Develop an area within the City park system for large community gatherings. This area would include a band shell and perennial gardens as well as space for farmers' markets, music festivals, and other events of possible community-wide interest.
5. Establish a nature area where old and young alike can learn about the environment and conservation as well as how to appreciate and protect wildlife and habitat. The nature center should provide an arena for field trips and outdoor classrooms.
6. Participate in the establishment of a teen center for the youth of the community for use after school and on weekends.

Beautification

1. Define and beautify entrances to the City, major corridors, parks and public areas through the use of landscaping, impact floral displays, attractive signage, and public art.
2. Require that utilities be placed underground where appropriate, new streets be tree lined, preservation of open space, and landscaping in new developments and the installation of parking lots with less impervious surfaces.

Historic Preservation

1. Make a public commitment to recognize the importance of the community's historic resources and to identify and protect them through a historic preservation ordinance.
2. Establish a cultural/historic museum with a person (or persons) responsible for historic activities within the city and county. Areas of responsibility could include grant/foundation fund applications, education to inform the public on the value of its historic resources and coordination of area cultural events and activities.
3. Pursue opportunities to showcase and preserve musical and artistic styles that are indigenous to the Ozarks.

Arts and Cultural Affairs

1. Assist in identifying options to generate increased and sustained public support for arts and cultural endeavors.

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2. Establish a facility for both visual and performing arts, possibly to be shared with the school district.
3. Place greater emphasis on arts education, particularly to the youth of the community.
4. Pursue opportunities to showcase various musical and artistic styles.
5. Continue funding of a portion of the budget for the Branson Arts Council.

V. Findings of the Community Design and Housing Committee

The Committee recommends that the City take steps to implement development codes and guidelines, including zoning, subdivision and design codes, that provide for the preservation of the unique character of the Ozarks. These regulations should also seek to maintain the existing economic base, protect and preserve the environment and encourage housing availability and affordability. It is the opinion of the Committee that a shift to the innovative design principles espoused in such texts as *Rural by Design* and *Futures by Design* are both necessary to achieve these goals as well as reflective of the way that the community should look and feel. More specifically, the Committee would like to see the following.

Design and Development Criteria

The City should revise all development codes and regulations to insure that local character is preserved and that City staff has adequate flexibility to negotiate for quality development. One specific recommendation from the Committee is the retooling of the City's zoning ordinance. All zones should have appropriate scale and design for building size, parking lots, and street widths, with particular attention being paid to signs. New zoning classifications which the Committee would recommend include Preservation, Target (i.e., targeted for redevelopment), and division of the Commercial Zone into Service, Retail, Tourist, and Light Industrial. The City should also implement a schedule of impact fees which recover the cost of infrastructure installation.

Rather than trying to minimize or stop development, new regulations should seek to promote those developments which fit well into the fabric of the community and promote the design integrity of an area. In planning new developments, considerations such as density, a partial relaxation of fees, or other requirements could be negotiable. Such considerations should only be given, however, when the developer exceeds design goals.

Residential Development

The City should make residential development, and redevelopment, a priority. To accomplish this goal, the City should:

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1. Preserve existing neighborhoods by insuring their stability and integrity.
2. Use flexibility in design to blend new development into existing neighborhoods.
3. Make sure there is a residential component in all rezonings and annexations.
4. Encourage the use of neighborhood improvement districts to provide infrastructure funding for those areas that incorporate design standards identified by the Committee in these vision statements.
5. Promote redevelopment by streamlining approval processes and allowing creativity in design standards.
6. Consider retirees as a viable industry to attract, and therefore, cater to the home-buying, retirement population by allowing accessory dwellings, mixed use development in the tradition of the "village" concept as well as any other amenities that will appeal to retirees.

Environment

The City must protect watersheds and flood plains as environmental assets to the community. Further, the City should incorporate natural features into planning and design concepts. The City should pursue planning policies with a strong emphasis on environmental protection and preservation.

Of particular concern are the "to be" annexed areas surrounding the City. The Committee recommends "preservation zones" be established in areas that are particularly fragile. Additionally, making development conform to terrain rather than making terrain conform to development should be encouraged.

Annexation and Coordination with Taney County

The City should use annexation as a tool to control the design aspects of development on the periphery of the City limits. These efforts should not, however, preclude any enhancement of relations with Taney County. This Committee supports the recommendation of the Economic Development and Diversification Committee to form a public (intergovernmental)/private corporation that is charged with strengthening and diversifying the area economy. As well, this Committee strongly recommends this new corporation be an advocate for design consistency in both Taney County and the City of Branson.

VI. Report of the Governance Committee

Home Rule Form of Government

The City should pursue the implementation of a Home Rule form of government in as expeditious a manner as is possible. Recognizing that, at this time, the City has not achieved the necessary 5,000 population threshold, an independent census should be performed when there is a reasonable expectation that 5,000 persons do reside in the City.

The primary goal of the Home Rule process is to create a City government that is not so strictly limited by State statute in what it can and cannot do. The amount of latitude that the City receives from the approval of Home Rule will allow the Branson community to more easily overcome the unique challenges that it faces.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

The City and County should pursue strategies which allow for greater control and regulation of growth on the City's periphery. Such methods could include agreements which allow the City to help the County with its oversight responsibilities in these peripheral areas. These agreements would only be a portion of a comprehensive program of cooperative efforts to promote governmental efficiency and service provision in the Tri-Lakes area. Specifically, the City and County should focus on the areas of solid waste, community health, transportation, public safety, water, wastewater, and other environmental issues as well as land use. The City and County should both recognize that the existence of cooperative agreements is a necessity but that their implementation should be very deliberate.

Customer Service

The City should implement an ongoing program to improve customer service driven by the idea that government exists to serve its citizens. Improvements should take the form of employee training, technological innovation, and expanded access for citizens. The City should, in the near future, implement a system for complaint tracking.

Future Planning and Leadership

The City should continue to take the lead in providing innovative and visionary leadership in the Tri-Lakes area. The final report of the Common Thread Project should form a basis for City goal setting and planning efforts. The City should update the project report from time to time.

VII. Findings of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee

The Committee has examined several areas relating to environmental protection and its relationship with infrastructure installation. In all affected areas, the City must act in alliance with Taney County, the Regional Sewer District, surrounding cities and counties (including those in Arkansas) and the Federal Government where appropriate.

Wastewater

The City should attempt to continue its policy of environmental protection through the extension of sewer service. New developments on the periphery of the City limits should be connected to Branson's central treatment system. As well, infrastructure should be extended in such a manner that it controls growth by encouraging those developments which conform to the City's plan in terms of land use, growth management, capacities and finances. The City should attempt to recoup costs of infrastructure extension through development of a comprehensive set of impact fees.

Additionally, extension of wastewater collection lines should attempt to eliminate both septic tanks and "package" treatment plants that currently exist.

Water

Water line extensions should follow the same basic parameters as wastewater collection. The City should continually monitor its water treatment capacity and attempt to minimize the draw down of the water table.

Water conservation should be a top priority of the City. This program should be approached from a regional perspective which stresses public education and the cooperation of both public and private entities. Particular attention should be given to conservation during drought conditions.

Solid Waste

The City should continue to explore co-composting and other methods of reducing the flow of solid waste into various landfills. Similarly to water and sewer issues, solid waste disposal should be approached from a regional perspective.

Recycling should be advocated, and practiced, by the City. Recycled products should be used by the City in day to day operations whenever feasible. The City should also encourage recycling through legislative action, including possible passage of a "bottle law," and continued funding for recycling activities.

Stormwater Runoff

The City should lead the way in the regional planning for control of stormwater runoff through the preservation of natural vegetation and drainageways, the redefining of impervious cover regulations and the development of a comprehensive stormwater management plan.

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Appendix 1

Common Thread Planning Project Participants

Ex Officio Participants

Lou Schaefer *Mayor*
Sam Grove *City Administrator*
Rick McConnell *Assistant City Administrator*
Jerry Adams *Director of Public Information*
Frank Balster *Administrative Assistant*

Infrastructure and Environment Committee

John Nygard <i>Co-Chr</i>	Sid Haynie <i>Co-Chr</i>	Dave Reeves
Phil Lilley	Chris Hall	Bill Sheriff
Bill Lund	Mary Ann Bowman	Jack Kornmeier
Linda Hauck	Debbie Redford	

Cultural and Recreation Committee

Ron Huff <i>Chr</i>	Joe Adams	Gail Brookhart
Jean Cantwell	Leo Endicott	Bob Glenn
Bill Godsey	Russ Hoeflicker	Beth Huddleston
Mike Leidecker	Gaye Lisby	Rod Orr
Rod Romine	Cindy Shook	Linn Smith
Lindsay Sullivan	Florence Parnell	

Transportation Committee

Walt Stone <i>Chr</i>	Rex Asselin	Dick Hall
Tom Schaefer	John Bowers	Candy Sullinger
Jack & Cathie Foster	Jeanne Hendricks	Wayne Dille
Jim Woodard	Tim Finestead	Dave Miller

Health & Education Committee

Karen Hall <i>Co-Chr</i>	Bob Simmons <i>Co-Chr</i>	Steve House
Greg King	Russ Russell	Lee Orth
Eric Lomax	Donna Gillispie	Clark Harris
Rick Harvey	Gail Davis	Nancy Wade
Linda Sprague		

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Community Design & Housing Committee

Rick Davis *Chr*
Brent Butler
Jim Heckman
Foster Plummer
John Nilsson

David Akers
David Cushman
Shannon Justus
Don Stephens

Mike Brown
Jim Freeman
Donna Moon
Stan Jinks

Governance Committee

Raeanne Presley *Co-Chr*
Ron Houseman
David Arney
Karen Bisplinghoff

Kevin Huddleston *Co-Chr*
Sara Klinefelter
Cindy Zeller

Wayne Dietrich
Tom Pollo
Mike Booth

Economic Diversification

Bob McDowell *Chr*
Larry Frazier
Al Moon
Pat Shue
Al Zuercher

E. Edd Akers
John Hannah
Bob Pollock
Mark Weisz

Smith Brookhart
Dick Hartley
Ryan Richardson
Ray Wilson

Staff

Tom Simpson
Chance Morgan

Kate Bingaman

Bill Phelps

Appendix 2

Community Survey of Preliminary Vision Statements
Conducted March 26, 1996

As of the deadline, we received 83 completed community survey forms. What follows are the results of the completed forms.

Table 1 provides a distribution of the responses. The survey asked the respondents if they Strongly Agreed with the preliminary goal statements; Agreed with them; had no opinion (Don't Know) of the preliminary statements; Disagreed with the statements; or Strongly Disagreed with them.

Table 1. Distribution of Responses

Preliminary Statements of	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Economic Development	23	35	6	10	9
Recreation and Culture	23	28	6	7	6
Governance	22	38	12	4	7
Infrastructure & Environment	32	29	8	6	7
Health & Education	31	32	6	4	8
Transportation	27	22	13	7	12
Community Design & Housing	22	33	10	10	7

By any measure, the results indicate a positive response to the preliminary visions statements by the overwhelming majority of the respondents. Table 2 details the distribution to determine its consensual attitude to the statements. For this analysis, the responses were converted to a numerical value: Strongly Agree, 5; Agree, 4; Don't Know, 3; Disagree, 2; and, Strongly Disagree, 1.

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Table 2. Details of the Distribution

Preliminary Statements of	Mode	Median	Mean
Economic Development	4	4	3.6385
Recreation & Culture	4	4	3.7857
Governance	4	4	3.7710
Infrastructure & Environment	5	4	3.8902
Health & Education	4	4	3.9135
Transportation	5	4	3.5555
Community Design & Housing	4	4	3.6463

The results indicate genuine respondents' support for the preliminary vision statements and provide a validity check of the findings of the committees. Specific comments offered by the respondents are attached for the review of the Steering Committee. Nothing in the responses indicate the necessity of further work on the preliminary goals. The Committee is urged to move to final draft of the Common Thread Planning document for Board of Aldermen consideration.