

NOTES FROM APRIL 22 PUBLIC FORUMS



Location: Johnson County Community College

Recorder: Bettse Folsom

A REGION OF VIBRANT PLACES

1. Maintain and develop healthy downtowns and vibrant places throughout the region. (4)
2. Focus on revitalization and infill projects in older communities. (16)
3. Develop dynamic corridors of economic, business and housing activity along major transit routes. (21)
4. Create major employment centers at strategic locations to maximize the region's competitive advantages. (0)

Discussion

- I would definitely think the third one because if you have housing, business and economic activity, you don't need a car. Linking housing and mass transit minimizes [the need for] vehicles.
- The third is the most important. One of the areas you don't see is what to do about the suburban areas [that are] already out there? [You have to] develop corridors that will connect them.
- I am interested in the second one; we have developed so much in the [suburban] communities already.
- To support what she just said, when you start infilling these areas, you bring in new growth and new ideas, and the areas regenerate themselves.
- We need to be careful that we don't forget our past [history].
- Don't fill what is already there; you need to keep the history and bring in new stuff. Develop the older first; get rid of the trash to enhance the old.
- Number 2 is the most important. [It's] ... about sustainability, [moving water] out south, and infilling the downtown areas where the structure ... is currently there. All [you do is] change a few items like parking and sidewalks, [and] you enhance a neighborhood; [it's] a very quick fix. Employers like to locate where the people are; they will locate in strong residential area. The infill is the most important: [it's more economically feasible and requires less] infrastructure.
- Three and four tie together; [you can] look as one in the same. If you don't have ... transit routes connected, they are a waste of time and money.
- I hear a conflict between them: you need to have a healthy downtown, but if we continue to put [corridors to downtown] as our first priority, we are going to continue to struggle.
- Participant question: When they talk about healthy downtown, are they talking about Overland Park and Lenexa or other areas? [Does this mean] developing vibrant places all over or just central downtown?
- Participant answer: The Mid-America Regional Council attempts to address the other areas. One of their dilemmas is that they don't think of Kansas City as a [single city]; they attempt to address all the areas at the same time. Each area wants to keep its own identity. How do you attempt to keep them up and enhance [them] while keeping their identities? It is a big area to cover.
- About strategy Number 3: Currently the transit is bus; [I] don't think it will work to convince people to change their [habits]. How that would work unless it was something permanent like rail?

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- I see two and three are related (others agreed). ... I don't picture bus as being something to invest in.

A CONNECTED REGION

1. Develop a robust transit system. (35)
2. Develop a system of regional trails. (0)
3. Maintain our existing roads to a high standard. (2)
4. Maximize the use of the region's existing highway capacity. (1)

Discussion

- I am not sure I understand what Number 4 means.
- Facilitator: [There can be] land restraints [on] building new roads; [this could also mean concentrating on getting] more than one person per vehicle. [There are different] ways of managing the traffic flow.
- Number 2 [is] regional trails. [Is that for] cyclists?
- Facilitator: The regional trails are recreational trails ... linked ... together.
- We have been building for one mode of transportation for 50 years. Until we can get [to a point] where everyone can move equally around the city, we won't become a vibrant city. Trails are made by coincidence.
- In Number 1 we fail to address the walkable trails in our community ...
- With Number 1, it all needs to be interconnected so it doesn't stop. Right now we have three cities in [the region] and three bus systems that do not connect. [You can't get from] Johnson County to the airport.
- I rode the bus yesterday, and [there were] people from all over the area. One of the strategies is equity: it should benefit those in the urban core (others agreed).
- ... As we age, transit becomes an identifier. What we have struggled with is [serving] the aging population and [implementing an] equitable system ...
- I was going to add on what [another participant] was saying: [in] the aging and disabled communities, a lot of the needs are the same, depending on how you define your transit.
- [We have to develop transit services based on] social justice and equity (many others agreed).
- Having moved from two large cities, the highway is really good in Kansas City, [but you] don't have to do that to the highway [if you have a] transit system.
- We need a mass transit, but people don't want to get rid of their cars. But [transit] should be a combination of everything.
- Facilitator: Johnson County has [historically] not been favorable to regional transit. How much of a priority should [it] be? What would need to happen to view transit ... regionally?
- [What's the] definition of [a] robust transit system? It is not mass [transit] only, but multimodal transit —everything combined.

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- Facilitator: [So] you want robust in the broadest possible [sense] and the maximum usability.
- [We need to explore] greater use of the existing highway system without putting more concrete on the ground.
- Johnson County [needs] to buy into the fact that they are part of the Kansas City metro area.
- Facilitator: What would it take to view [transit] more favorably?
- It would take transportation within Johnson County, not just to downtown.
- Successful development of the Metcalf plan [would] go a long way to create some momentum.
- Take it from a different perspective: ... Johnson County may be the economic engine of the area now, not Kansas City.

A GREEN REGION

1. Promote energy conservation and use of renewable resources. (19)
2. Develop programs to maintain drinking water quality, reduce runoff and improve stream quality. (3)
3. Generate less trash and recycle or reuse the waste we do generate. (11)
4. Improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. (4)
5. Protect and restore the region's natural amenities. (2)

Discussion

- The first one to promote energy conservation should be energy efficiency; they are not the same. And how the conversation is framed is different.
- Lifestyle is part of the problem.
- The one I am most concerned about is "generate trash and recycle." That relates to everyone and creates awareness [that] leads to [the rest of them].
- That was a no-brainer because of carbon dioxide [outputs] and [our large] carbon footprints. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions should be number one and part of surviving. [There also needs to be more] research.
- I just had a comment on Number 2. In this area we already have that; it should not be developed, but implemented. MARC and the Public Works Association address stormwater runoff. It is not the fact we have the problem, but [we] should be more aware of it.
- [Is there an] appetite to restrict development on farmland and [use] more acreage to grow homegrown food? [We need] creative ideas for policy changes to reduce garbage going into landfills.
- Farmland and natural areas: What do you think?
- I wasn't from this area and [was] shocked that prime agricultural land (that is [how it's actually defined]) [is being covered up with] asphalt. [After that happens], it's lost forever. Coming from the Southeast, [we're] very envious [of the soil here]. Trying to preserve it would be good (many others agreed).

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- Growing food locally and using the land for that purpose [would] reduce greenhouse gas emissions because of [reduced transportation].
- One of the biggest challenges in limiting our growth is the development of sewer systems; that is a major hurdle in this region.
- Tragedy of commons: all would have to restrain themselves from taking more than their share and ... using up good farmland.
- The council is influenced by developers [who] vote for them.
- Concerned about a balance of quality of life: open space is really important and we should all be concerned about this.
- Facilitator: Do you have any creative ideas to reduce garbage
- You could do what a lot of Europeans [do] and charge by the bag. There is no economic benefit for not doing that, and if [there's] a penalty, [people] wouldn't [throw away so much] (many others agreed).
- [It's a] matter of education [about] what [people] can recycle and what they can't. Go to [a] homeowners' association — they will make changes in communities. Everyone has to do their part, and we will reduce the [waste going into our] landfills.
- We should have Deffenbaugh to buy everyone a composter.
- We used [to] recycle glass, but [we] stopped recycling [when we learned it's all going] in the landfills. If you [take] any glass to a recycling [facility], it goes to a landfill. They lied to us.