Maryland Heights Economic Development Strategic Plan

May, 2024

City Of Maryland Heights

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Gratitude is extended to the following individuals and groups for their invaluable insights and contributions:

- Economic Development Commission

- Pattonville High School

- City Council Members

- Visitor Convention Bureau leadership team

- City Administrator, Tracey Anderson

- Community Development Director, Michael Zeek

City Of **Maryland Heights**
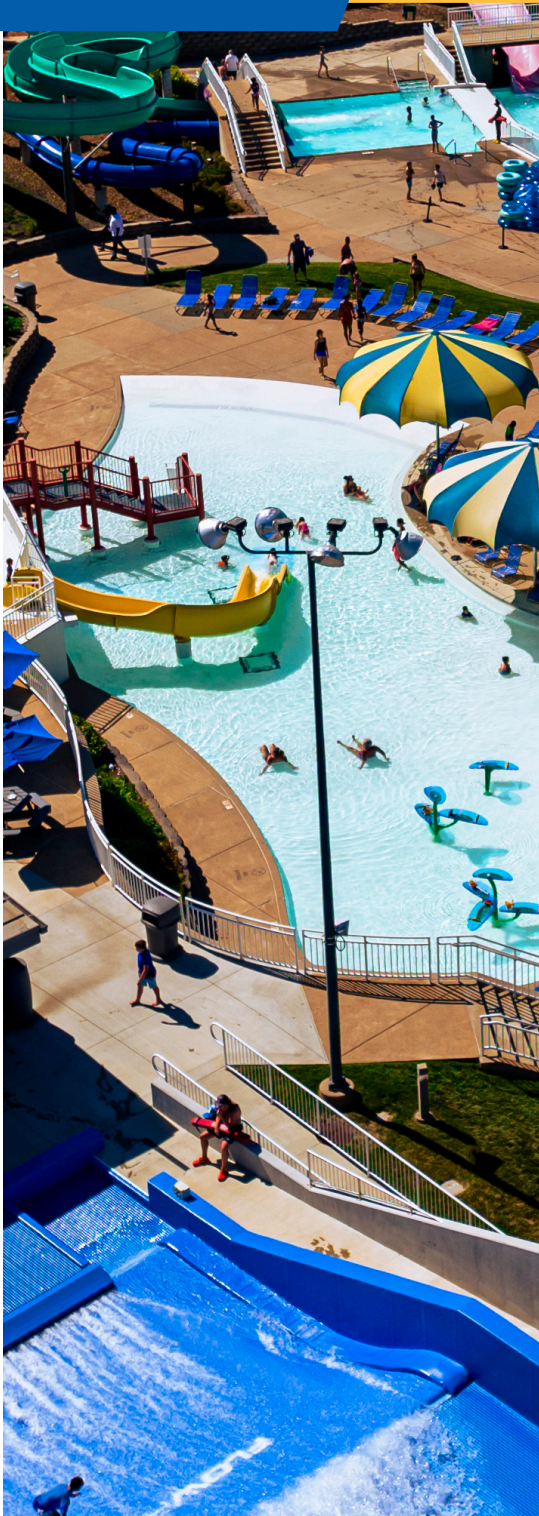
Maryland Heights is a strong community with a proud history as a hub of commerce and activity. Its residents love in its safety, its sense of community and its diversity. The City's leadership has charted a clear course that has made Maryland Heights a model of working together for the community's good.

As the City grows and as local and global currents change, strategic planning becomes imperative. To stay ahead of these changes and make strategic plans for the future, the City is has undertaken its very first Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP).

This Strategic Plan provides an analysis of the critical factors influencing the City's economic growth trajectory. The analysis extends beyond local trends, placing Maryland Heights within the broader national context and unveiling a strategic assessment of strengths and opportunities to guide the City's economic development efforts.

The City and the Economic Development Department (EDD) have made commendable progress on many fronts and been effective at undertaking and successfully completing several challenging and transformation projects. Specifically, the EDD has been remarkably successful in catalyzing real estate development. Going forward, the EDD will need to continue to catalyze increasingly complex, yet critical real estate projects while also: elevating the Department's branding, marketing the community and local businesses, fostering a robust local business network, and increasing inclusion. Specifically, the EDD will need to work toward transforming existing office parks into dynamic multi-use hubs, encouraging knowledge exchange among businesses, and reinforcing the City's identity.

To shape a future that reflects the community's diverse voices and aspirations, the plan outlines several focal areas:

1. **Real Estate Development:** Championing innovative and flexible real estate projects that cater to the evolving demands of a multi-generational community.

2. **Riverport Business Park Revitalization:** Transforming Riverport business park into vibrant, multi-used spaces that foster creativity, collaboration, and economic/community synergy.

3. **Retail/Restaurant Enhancement:** Elevating the consumer landscape to support a thriving local business environment that appeals across different generational demands.

4. **Housing and Neighborhood Redevelopment:** Developing diverse housing options that are sustainable, and aligned with the preferences of Millennials, Gen Z, and beyond, enhancing community livability.

5. **Local Business Network:** Building a supportive network that facilitates learning and collaboration among businesses, fostering a dynamic economic ecosystem.

6. **Branding and Positioning:** Strategically enhancing Maryland Heights' brand to attract a diverse range of investments, talents, and businesses, reflecting the City's vibrant community culture.

7. **Economic Development Commission/City Communication:** Broadening the diversity of the Economic Development Commission and amplifying their voices, ensuring that decision-making reflects the multifaceted perspectives of the community.

II PROJECT BACKGROUND

In September 2023, the Economic Development Department engaged Better City, LLC to assist in crafting its initial economic development strategic plan. The strategic plan is to reflect the community's vision and priorities, provide insights into Maryland Heights' economic landscape and prospects, and become the Department's 'playbook' for the next 10 years.

The project of creating the Strategic Plan included stakeholder engagement and economic, real estate, and demographic data research. The interviews and focus groups, included:

- ED Commission focus group

- Pattonville High School focus group

- Individual interviews with several City Council Members and the Visitor Convention Bureau leadership team

A comprehensive analysis of economic data and market research was also conducted. This analysis offered insights into the City's economic trends and guided the formulation of strategic recommendations. Additionally, previous plans, studies and surveys pertaining to economic development were reviewed and used as a framework, enabling the leveraging of past insights to create a more comprehensive and impactful Strategic Plan.

By aligning the recommendations with evolving economic trends, the Strategic Plan aims to maintain relevance and efficacy, addressing how these various elements interconnect and influence the community's economic future.

III ROLE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The Economic Development Department is responsible for driving sustainable growth and prosperity within the City and fostering a vibrant economic environment to enhance Maryland Heights' position as a regional hub for business, investment, and quality living.

The following are the current and future responsibilities of the Department, essential for executing the strategies articulated in this Strategic Plan:

Key Roles

- **Development Initiation:** Initiating development projects that align with community goals, the Economic Development Department acts as a catalyst for growth.

- **Business Development and Industry Recruiting:** Proactively seeking and attracting new industries and businesses, identifying opportunities, and actively pursuing leads to broaden the economic base.

- **Business Community Relations Coordination:** Functioning as the central interface and liaison between the City and the business and development community, facilitating effective communication, addressing concerns, and fostering strong relationships.

- **Brand Promotion and Marketing Strategy:** Promoting the Department's brand actively, positioning the area as a prime business and investment location while showcasing economic development successes and potential.

- **Business Retention and Expansion:** Supporting the growth and retention of existing businesses by creating a business-friendly climate, offering incentives, and facilitating access to resources and networks.

- **Economic Research and Data Analysis:** Conducting research and analyzing economic data to inform decision-making and policy, monitoring trends, assessing market conditions, and evaluating the impacts of policy.

- **Business Community Engagement Facilitation:** Maintaining open communication with local businesses, residents, and other stakeholders to increase inclusion and encourage social and economic mobility.

- **Community Development Department Partnership:** Engaging in partnerships and consultations with the Community Development Department to develop ideas for community development and land use.

- **Small Business Support:** Providing support to small businesses through guidance and assistance to foster their growth and stability.

- **Sustainability and Innovation Promotion:** Promoting sustainable economic practices and encouraging innovation, including supporting green businesses and technological advancements.

As the Department's responsibilities continue to expand to encompass sustainable economic growth, the current team is stretched thin, managing ten different areas of economic development. Consequently, there is a pressing need to add *at least one new member* to the team. This additional team member would provide critical support in key areas such as business retention and expansion. Their expertise and capabilities will be essential in managing the expanded scope of work and contributing effectively to the Department's objectives.
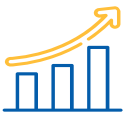
Community Goals

Understanding the goals and visions of the community goals is critical to creating plans and strategies that will result in progress and change that is meaningful to the residents. These goals form the foundation of the Department's vision for the City's economic future, providing a clear path for development and progress.

During the focus group sessions, participants articulated their ideas about the City and its future. These Community Goals reflect the ideals and visions of residents and stakeholders of Maryland Heights.

Vibrant Community Atmosphere	Foster a vibrant community atmosphere by embracing and celebrating the City's increasing ethnic diversity, and maintaining its friendly, casual environment with a small-town feel.
Strong Business Retention and Expansion	Focus on business recruitment, retention, and expansion, ensuring existing businesses thrive and attracting new businesses that align with the City's vision. This includes leveraging the City's prime location and developing marketing strategies to showcase its strengths.
Resident-focused Development and Enhanced Quality of Life:	Meet the retail, service, and housing needs of residents to foster social cohesion, economic growth, and civic engagement. This includes diversifying grocery options and improving access to various amenities.
Cultivated Culture, Diversity, and Inclusivity	Encourage a culture of inclusivity and diversity, where individuals can express themselves irrespective of their background, making the City a welcoming community for all residents.
Active Community Engagement and Participation	Foster a strong sense of community and social interaction, with more opportunities for community gatherings, and participation in cultural and recreational events.
Diverse Housing Options	Address the need for revitalization of aging buildings and expand the diversity of housing options to cater to a broad range of residents, thus enhancing the city's attractiveness to new residents and businesses.
Leveraged Tourism and Technological Innovation	Explore opportunities in tourism and adapt to future technologies impacting the City, such as online shopping, AI, EV infrastructure, remote work trends, and autonomous vehicles.

Strengths	Opportunities
High quality of life: safe environment, abundant parks, top-notch schools	Development potential at Riverport Business Park
Consistent tourism flows from sports tournaments and recreation	Untapped demand in the retail sector
Office space inventory	Potential for mutual support and success within the business community
Lively and engaged community	Potential positive impact of diversity and inclusion in the City leadership
Easy accessibility via airport and major highways	Initiatives for walkability, e.g. 'Town Centers' to increase vibrancy in the City
Recent investments in retail, dining, and entertainment	Attraction of young professionals and residents for growth opportunities
Integral to the St. Louis Metro area	Improvement of the Department branding for investment enhancement
Stable City Government	

See Appendix A for extended explanations of the Strengths and Opportunities.

V STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN

This document section contains the comprehensive 10-year strategies to guide the Economic Development Department's focus and efforts.

Strategies

1. Real Estate Development

2. Riverport Business Park Revitalization

3. Retail / Restaurant Ecosystem

4. Housing and Neighborhood Redevelopment

5. Local Business Network

6. Branding and Positioning

7. Economic Development Commission / City Communication

1. Real Estate Development

The Economic Development Department of Maryland Heights actively supports and encourages real estate development within its jurisdiction, demonstrating a strong commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment. The Department has a track record of engaging in significant real estate projects, ranging from logistics centers to residential and mixed-use developments. A continued strategic focus on driving real estate development projects is crucial for sustaining and enhancing the City's economic growth and competitiveness.

Outcome Objectives

- Continue driving real estate development projects

- Ensure projects are meeting investment objectives

Key Findings and Analysis

Strategic real estate development is fundamental to shaping the Maryland Heights' economic landscape. It involves more than just utilizing vacant land; it's about sculpting the City's economic fabric, driving job creation, and drawing in the industries and residents that align with the City's vision.

Job Creation and Economic Growth

Job creation through new commercial, industrial, or residential developments is a vital outcome of strategic real estate development. However, a balanced approach, avoiding overemphasis on specific development types, is crucial. Mixed-use developments, which blend residential, commercial, and industrial spaces, offer more diverse employment opportunities, and contribute to the economic vibrancy. Studies, including one by the Urban Land Institute, underscore this by emphasizing that commercial development investments generate more jobs than residential investments.[1] Moreover, the Brookings Institution's analysis of 51 metropolitan areas in the US found that cities with higher land-use intensity experienced faster job growth.[2]

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[1] https://uli.org/?_gl=1%2Aund8eu%2A_ga%2AMTQ3Mjk0NTIwOS4xNzAzNjIxMjY4%2A_ga_68JJQP7N7N%2AMTcwMzcwMjkwOC40LjEuMTcwMzcwMzczMi4wLjAuMA..#ulip=globalnav-uliglobal
[2] https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019.06_Bass-Center_Geography-of-jobs-report.pdf
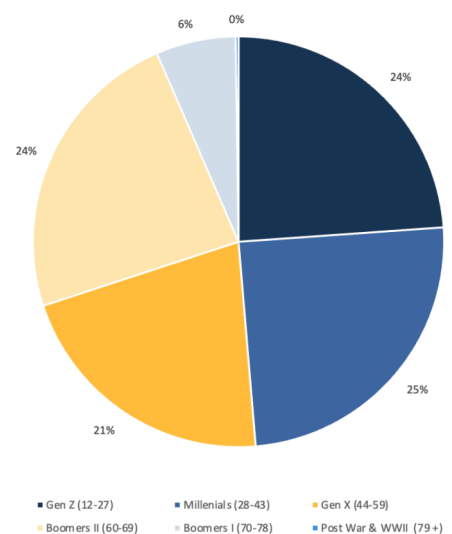
City Goals

- **Quality Housing**: We will be proactive in maintaining and improving our housing stock to stabilize population and home ownership in our city.

- **Building Community:** We will create connections between people and places to enhance the sense of community in our city.

- **City Services:** We will strive to preserve and continually improve the level of service enjoyed by residents and businesses in our city.

- **Financial Stability**: We will continue to utilize sound fiscal policies and prudent budgeting to ensure long-term stability in our city.

- **Safety**: We will provide responsive, proactive and effective enforcement of laws and codes in order to maintain a safe environment for residents, businesses and visitors in our city.

- **Economic Development:** We will enhance and diversify our economic base in order to maximize our commercial space and developable land, create jobs, maintain financial strength of local governmental jurisdictions serving our residents, and improve the quality and appearance of our city.

Community Development and Urban Revival

Thoughtfully planned real estate development can rejuvenate the Maryland Heights' neighborhoods, creating walkable, accessible communities that attract talent and enhance the residents' quality of life. This aligns with the trend of knowledge workers preferring urban settings with walkability, and a concentration of services and amenities.[3] The demographic shift , marked by the arrival of Gen Y (Millennials) and new immigrants, emphasizes the preference for urban, interactive environments that offer career opportunities, social diversity, and cultural enrichment.

According to an analysis by the Urban Land Institute, Millennials, the largest demographic cohort in the United States (Figure 1), seek interactive environments that nurture diversity and entertainment. They prefer flexible working situations, wish to live in stimulating neighborhoods, and are comfortable with less individual space. New immigrants and less well-educated young people, on the other hand, seek environments

Figure 1: National Generational Cohort Distribution

Legend: Gen Z (12-27), Millenials (28-43), Gen X (44-59), Boomers II (60-69), Boomers I (70-78), Post War & WWII (79+)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

that allow for financial and cultural growth.[3] Therefore, the Department must consider these demographic shifts in their development strategies.

Diversity and Sustainability

The Department can steer developments to incorporate mixed-use areas, green spaces, and energy efficiency. This approach creates diverse, sustainable urban environments, appealing to environmentally conscious businesses and residents. Research by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory[4] and the Urban Land Institute[5] supports this, indicating that mixed-use, walkable developments can significantly reduce transportation emissions and energy consumption compared to car-dependent, sprawling developments.

Strategies

The Department has been very successful at catalyzing real estate projects. These projects represent a foundational pillar in the City's economic growth and sustainability. Sustaining the momentum of existing projects ensures a steady progression in economic development. Also, since the real estate and economic markets are subject to frequent changes driven by factors such as technological advancements, demographic shifts, and economic cycles, a regular check-in enables the City to respond proactively to these changes.

Ongoing Real Estate Projects

Ensure continuous progress on current real estate developments.

- Actively engage the Department throughout the development process to ensure alignment with the City's strategic goals.

Implement a comprehensive software platform to effectively track and manage incentives by utilizing either internal software resources or external, industry- specific platform such as Civic Serve. Expected benefits include:

- Streamline the process of tracking and managing development incentives, thus enhancing efficiency.

- Minimize administrative overhead and ensuring incentives are utilized precisely as intended, optimizing resource allocation.

- Increase transparency and accountability in how incentives are allocated and utilized, fostering public trust.

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[3] https://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/WhatsNext1.pdf
[4] https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy13osti/55634.pdf
[5] https://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/Land-Use-and-Driving-Low-Res.pdf

- Provide critical data and analytics to support more informed decision-making processes, enabling a data-driven approach to urban development.

- Identify trends, assessing the impact of incentives on development, and leveraging insights to guide future strategic and policy formulations.

Investment Objectives

Annually review programs and investments for development projects to reflect current market demands and trends.

- Regular reviews of programs and investments ensure they stay relevant and effective in the face of changing market conditions, such as shifts in housing demand, commercial space requirements, or economic fluctuations.

Update the Maryland Heights economic development website quarterly with the status of developments and policy changes.

- Make information on developments and policy changes readily available to the public.

- Provide up-to-date information that aids businesses, investors, and residents in making informed decisions.

Publish an annual report that details the state of development projects and the evolution of policies, with a focus on their alignment with market demands. This would:

- Provide a comprehensive overview of development progress and policy adjustments, evaluating how they meet current market needs.

- Highlight achievements and identify areas for improvement.

- Serve as a strategic communication tool with a wider audience, including potential investors and important regional or national stakeholders, showcasing Maryland Heights as a forward-thinking and strategic participant in economic development.

- Establish a benchmark for future policymaking and development efforts, aiding in tracking the City's long-term advancement and guiding strategic adjustments as needed.

Key Metrics

1. Number of new parcels entering development:	Count and track the number of new projects that enter the development phase.
2. Incentive management efficiency:	Ensure up-to-date information in the incentive tracking system, utilizing software platforms.

2. Riverport Business Park Revitalization

Commercial office space, totaling 3,388,437 square feet, has been a significant part of the City's commercial real estate market for several decades and brings thousands of workers into the City every day.

Many urban areas, post-pandemic, have experienced excess office space inventory because of factors including shifts in work patterns - such as the rise of remote work, and economic trends. Cities and business districts find themselves grappling with vacant or underutilized office buildings which were once bustling centers of corporate activity. This surplus presents both a challenge and an opportunity to reimagine these spaces for future utility.

Outcome Objectives

- Have a vibrant commercially viable business park that attracts a diverse mix of high-growth industries and businesses.

- Integrate a range of dining, entertainment, and recreational amenities within the business park to enhance the work-life balance for employees and attract visitors.

- Implement strategic initiatives to reduce vacancy rates in the business park.

Key Findings and Analysis

In the rapidly changing world of work, the concept and utilization of commercial office space are undergoing significant transformations. The future of office spaces is not just a subject of architectural and real estate development but also a reflection of evolving work cultures, technological advancements, and shifting business priorities.

Current State of Office Space
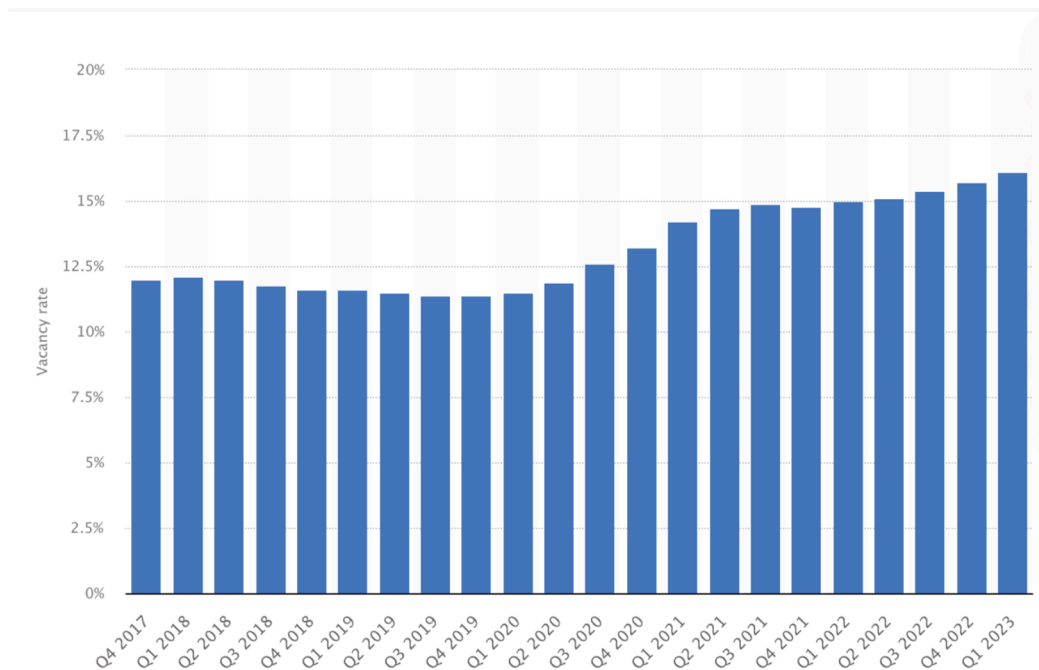
Figure 2: Maryland Heights Real Estate Analysis

Building Type	Inventory (sq ft)	Vacancy Rate	Net Absorption	Market Rent (q ft/yr)
Industrial	12.1M	4.9%	266K	$8.03
Office	5.1M	18.9%	-155K	$21.87
Retail	101K	5.6%	-836	$20.82
Multi-family	2,615 (units)	9.8%	-115	$1,230 (unit)

Source: CoStar, Q4 2023

Vacancies

In 2023, the Maryland Heights office market, including key areas like the Riverport Business Park, had a wide spectrum of vacancy rates, with an overall rate of 18.9% which is actually better than the national average of 19.6%. The national figure represents the worst vacancy rate since the statistic was first tracked in 1979 and before 2020 the rate stayed under 12.5%. Nationwide, it is estimated that 11% of all leases will be up for renewal in the next year which will put additional downward pressure on vacancies. [6]

Figure 3: National Office Space Vacancy Rates over Years

Source: https://www.statista.com/statistics/194054/us-office-vacancy-rate-forecasts-from-2010/

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[6] https://www.investopedia.com/commercial-office-vacancy-rates-don-t-tell-whole-story-7507372.

Rental Rates

Despite high and rising vacancy rates, average asking rent per square foot, rose 3% to $21.87 in 2023. This increase goes against the national trend where average rents fell by 1.4%. [7]

The rise in lease rates- despite the falling occupancy is likely attributable to larger inflationary pressures in the region. As the general cost of goods and services have risen, landlords have faced rising operational expenses, including property maintenance, utilities, taxes, insurance, and repairs. To counterbalance these growing costs, local landlords have raised lease rates. This is reflective of the regional trend that is driven by highly sought-after office submarkets, such as Clayton, where prime assets command premium rents due to their desirability and strategic location. [8]

Recently, mixed-use office projects that provide high-quality office spaces, like Forsyth Pointe in Clayton, have come online and have command higher rates. [9]These projects not only provide office space but also revitalize areas and create neighborhoods that integrate sports, culture, and entertainment venues, thereby making them more appealing for businesses and their employees .

The rising lease rates in the market, however, are inconsistent with the condition of and high vacancy of local inventory. It is unlikely that rate increases will be sustainable in the future as supply of older office product exceeds demand.

Net Absorption Rate

There was a negative net absorption of 154,697 square feet of office space from October 2022 to October 2023 – meaning that there was 3% decline in occupancy during that period. Combined with the negative net absorption of 533,679 square feet in the prior 12-month period and there has been a total decline of 13.3% in occupancy over the last two years. [10]

Strategic Importance

The office space sector has played a significant role in the city's economy since the Riverport Business Park first opened in the 1980s. Riverport Business Park has supplemented and complemented the light manufacturing and office products in the Dorsett Road industrial area. Serving as the commercial anchor for the northern section of the City since its inception, maintaining its vibrancy and relevance is critical.

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[7] https://www.commercialedge.com/blog/national-office-report/#:~:text=The%20average%20U.S.%20office%20listing,1.4%25%20year%2Dover%2Dyear.

[8] https://rejournals.com/cbre-report-st-louis-office-market-remains-in-limbo/

[9] https://www.commercialsearch.com/news/work-tops-off-on-250m-st-louis-area-office-project/

[10] CoStar Analytics report for Maryland Heights – 10/17/2023

Future Business Preferences

A substantial portion of the office spaces, particularly those in the Riverport Business Park, were built in the 70s and 80s. These buildings, often characterized by cubicles and a rigid layout, reflect the architectural and design principles of their time but are now misaligned with the expectations and requirements of modern businesses. Today's technologically driven; culture-centric companies prioritize modern office environments.

Today, businesses are seeking environments that foster creativity, flexibility, and a blend of work-life balance. This shift is leading to a re-evaluation of office space design and functionality. The trend is moving towards more versatile, technologically integrated, and human-centered spaces, which can adapt to various business needs and employee well-being.

In industries at the forefront of technology and creativity, the cubicle has become an artifact. Addressing high employee turnover, especially among Gen Y, is crucial. Landlords who create environments that appeal to this demographic will thrive. Major tech companies like Google, Facebook, and Twitter have sought locations that resonate with the vibrant, collaborative ethos of young professionals. Open areas where free communication is encouraged lead to more productive, energetic, and enjoyable work experiences. Gen Y thrives in collaborative settings, which are indispensable in a globally connected economy. The office environments that succeed in the coming years will be those that can ignite the creativity of this generation. [11]

There is a clear preference emerging for living in areas with access to shopping districts and mass transit, enhancing the appeal of walkable communities. Businesses located in isolated office parks or peripheral districts are finding it increasingly difficult to attract high-quality workers. Consequently, there is a noticeable shift towards central locations where the synergy of proximity to urban amenities and accessibility can be leveraged for business success.

Amenities as a Draw for Talent and Businesses

An innovative approach to real estate development is especially relevant in Maryland Heights, where the reimagining of isolated, single-purpose office parks could transform them into vibrant retail and commercial corridors. These redeveloped spaces could offer a blend of retail, dining, and commercial services, creating a synergy that benefits both local office workers and the community. By infusing these areas with retail outlets and eateries, the daily influx of workers becomes an immediate customer base, fostering a dynamic economic environment.

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[11] https://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/WhatsNext1.pdf

Additionally, in the contemporary job market, the quality of the workplace environment is a significant factor for prospective employees. Amenities such as fitness centers, childcare facilities, green spaces, and convenient retail options can make isolated office parks much more attractive to a diverse workforce. Outdoor spaces for relaxation or informal meetings, walking trails, and spaces for social interaction can contribute to a more engaging and productive work environment. These aspects are particularly appealing to businesses seeking to foster a collaborative and innovative culture.

For businesses, the advantages of being located in a mixed-use area are multifaceted. Not only do these areas attract and retain talent, but they also provide the businesses with visibility and accessibility to clients and partners. The presence of retail and services creates a vibrancy that can elevate a company's brand and presence in the community.

Revitalizing Suburban Spaces

The shift towards mixed-use developments is also part of a broader trend in urban planning that seeks to revitalize suburban spaces. By reducing the need for commuting and bringing amenities closer to the workplace, these areas can reduce traffic congestion and contribute to environmental sustainability. Moreover, they can help to reinvigorate local economies by attracting investment and increasing property values.

The conversion of isolated office parks into retail and commercial corridors with rich amenities would be a forward-thinking approach to real estate development. It aligns with the changing preferences of workers and businesses, and it holds the promise of stimulating economic growth and community development in areas like Maryland Heights.

Strategies

There is compelling public interest in the City's office space being redeveloped into contemporary, mixed-use product that will be relevant in the market to ensure that the sector doesn't further decline and enter the death spiral of disinvestment, high vacancy and declining valuation. Because the business parks are privately owned and substantially built out, the role of the Economic Development Department is to:

- Create the vision for redevelopment

- Communicate the benefits of redevelopment to the property owners / developers

- Create incentives and provide support to facilitate the redevelopment

The specific steps are:

Office Space Summit

Organize an 'Office Space Summit' to initiate discussions about the future of commercial office spaces.

- Bring key stakeholders together, including City officials, business leaders, property owners, developers, and community representatives to the summit. Create a collaborative environment to share insights, concerns, and visions regarding the future use of commercial office spaces.

- Facilitate, through discussions, the identification of potential opportunities for repurposing office spaces as well as the challenges that may need to be addressed. This understanding is crucial for developing practical and innovative solutions.

Riverport Business Park Transformation

Encourage, facilitate, and incentivize redevelopment of the Riverport Business Park into a mixed-use development that will serve as a commercial hub for both workers and residents. Help to catalyze a range of dining, entertainment, and recreational amenities within the business park and implement strategic initiatives to reduce vacancy rates.

- Facilitate dialogues on the potential transformation of Riverport Business Park.

  - Understand the needs and visions of property owners - whose cooperation and investment are required for any redevelopment project.

  - Plan workshops, encouraging collaboration among business park owners. These sessions can help them to identify mutual benefits and shared objectives, fostering a sense of

community and joint purpose in the redevelopment process.

○ Reactivate the Riverport Business Park property owners' group.

  ▪ Assist in the creation of a master plan, ensuring that the redevelopment is strategically thought out and comprehensive. This plan would guide the transformation, considering factors like land use, architectural design, and community impact.

  ▪ Connect property owners with experts in urban planning and architecture to reveal creative and practical solutions that align with the vision for the business park.

○ Create and implement incentive programs to encourage and facilitate investment by property owners in renovating and upgrading buildings and in redeveloping the business park.

○ Recommend zoning adjustments, to facilitate the transformation into a vibrant, mixed-use area as current zoning might restrict the types of businesses that can operate in the business park.

"Large-scale employment centers and a mix of single/multiple tenant office buildings; may include some institutional and public/quasi-public uses such as hospital/medical or government offices; personal service and accessory uses including restaurants, local retail, hotel/motel; multi-story buildings; integrated site design to encourage walkability, connections to parks and trails system and including public open spaces."

City of Maryland Heights Comprehensive Plan

Key Metrics

1. Forum and engagement:	Successfully host the Office Space Summit.
2. Long-term goals:	Monitor the progress towards achieving a higher occupancy rate in the commercial corridor over a 5-year period.

3. Retail/Restaurant Businesses Ecosystem

The retail and dining sectors play an important role in Maryland Heights' economy, significantly contributing to the City's revenues through sales taxes. The introduction of town centers in the City would strengthen these sectors. By establishing central areas of commerce and social interaction, these redevelopment nodes can attract more visitors and foster a sense of community involvement. Additionally, these central areas simplify the process of locating retail and restaurant spaces within the City. With focused planning and development, the Department has the opportunity to harness the potential of these sectors, driving economic progress and improving the City's financial future. This approach aligns perfectly with the City's goal of achieving financial stability and cultivating a thriving community for its residents.

Outcome Objectives

- Create a more vibrant retail / restaurant environment to facilitate recruitment of new or improved establishments

- Increase the variety and quality of retail options, especially in the dining and grocery segments.

- Design and adopt a redevelopment template that can be applied to future town center projects.

Key Findings and Analysis

Current Revenue Stream and Forecasting

Because sales and gaming taxes are forecasted to provide 51% of its budget in 2023, the status of the retail sector is of critical importance to the City. Following is an analysis of the sources of revenue over the last 8 years and future projections.

Figure 4: Maryland Heights Revenue Stream and Forecast

Summary & Prediction							Estimated	Budget/ Estimated	Forecast
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2030
Gaming Tax (,000)	10,413	10,388	10,010	9,983	5,704	8,067	8,634	8,980	7,156
Sales Tax (,000)	8,410	9,272	11,074	11,245	9,699	10,110	12,685	12,035	13,089
Sales & Gaming Tax	18,823	19,660	21,084	21,228	15,403	18,177	21,318	21,316	20,245
Utility Tax (,000)	5,849	6,116	6,098	5,504	5,001	5,286	5,060	5,445	5,059
Other Revenues (,000)	16,927	18,380	17,881	15,829	13,080	10,043	14,979	15,435	14,892
Total Recurring Revenues (,000)	41,599	44,156	45,063	42,562	33,501	33,506	41,357	42,196	38,544
Population	27,110	26,979	26,992	26,956	27,021	28,024	27,269	27,490	28,139
Housing Units	12,319	12,206	12,306	12,452	12,412	13,112	13,210	13,340	14,448
Total Recurring Revenue per capita	1.53	1.64	1.67	1.58	1.19	1.20	1.52	1.53	1.39
Total Recurring Revenue per housing units	3.37	3.62	3.66	3.42	2.70	2.56	3.13	3.16	2.84

Source: Maryland Heights Finance Reports, U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

The City's gaming tax revenue increased by 2% from 2015 to 2017 but declined by 4% over the following two years. Unsurprisingly, revenues plummeted by nearly half during the pandemic. By 2022, while national commercial gaming revenues had already surpassed pre-pandemic levels in 2021 and 2022,[12] gaming tax collections in Maryland Heights in 2022 remained 10% lower than in 2019. This trend suggests that the City's gaming revenues are undergoing a systemic decline, influenced by local factors rather than broader, national trends.

Sales taxes have increased by an average of 5% per year, but this growth has been insufficient to offset the downturn in gaming tax revenue. Because the City's population and housing units are increasing, the amount of taxes collected per capita and per housing unit are in decline. Despite a 30% increase in sales tax collection from 2016 to 2022, revenue per capita has declined by 8.5% and revenue per housing unit by 14%. With costs of providing services rising rapidly, the decline in revenues coupled with increasing service requirements due to population growth are not sustainable.

Considering these realities, the strategic enhancement of retail opportunities and the expansion of the sales tax base present are critical to the financial health of the City. Developing the retail sector would grow sales tax revenues, compensating for the decline in gaming revenue.


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[12] https://www.americangaming.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CGRT_CY_2022_Report.pdf

Grocery and Retail

Attracting more retail and restaurant businesses is the most realistic pathway to increasing sales tax revenues. There appears to be a significant opportunity in this sector.

A preliminary retail leakage analysis indicates that 24% of spending by Maryland Heights residents in the grocery store sector flows out of the local economy. In the above graph, 'X' represents the State's average sales per capita, and the colored bars illustrate the taxable sales per capita specific to Maryland Heights. Currently, the City hosts only one grocery store, and although Aldi is expected to open soon, its location will be near the existing store. Additional grocery stores located in diverse locations throughout the City would reduce the amount of spending leaving the City while also enhancing the quality of life for residents. Focus group participants highlighted the importance of having a diverse range of grocery stores to accommodate daily needs and preferences.

Figure 5: Maryland Heights Retail Industry Leakage Study
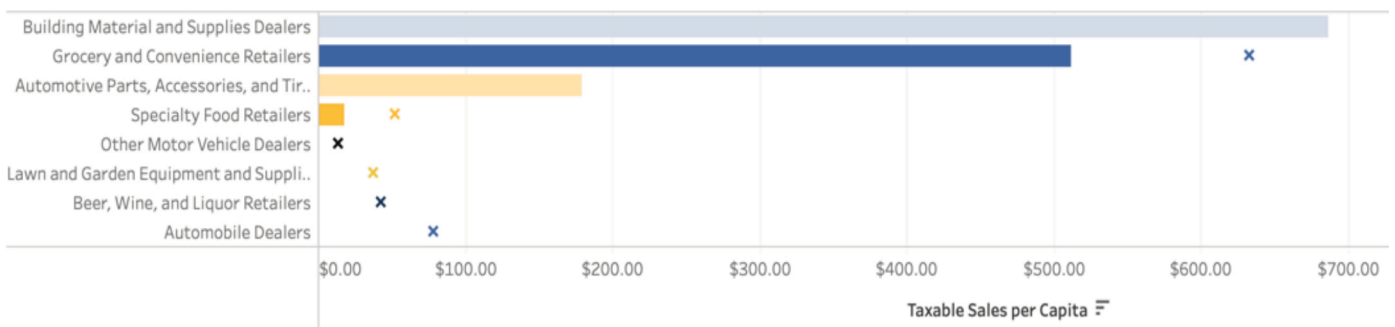
Source: Missouri Tax Reports

Restaurants

Another consistent request from focus groups was for more high-quality restaurants and a broader a variety of dining options that reflect the community's diversity.

The leakage report indicates that local restaurants are capturing less than half of resident's spending. There is significant unmet demand for more restaurants within the City.

Town Centers

In the focus groups, many residents expressed a desire to see upgraded retail offering in the City. In the best retail environments, it is very difficult to recruit high quality retailers. Maryland Heights' retail landscape predominantly comprises strip malls with older form factors and which have not been updated in years. This landscape will make it very challenging to attract the kinds of retailers that would be considered an upgrade over those currently in the City.

The location of a retail store directly influences its access to customers its store's visibility – factors which drive its affecting foot traffic and sales potential. A strategic location ensures the store is easily

accessible to its target demographic, optimally positioned against competitors, and conducive to efficient logistics and supply chain operations. Having Town Centers within the City would present an appealing target destination for retailers.

A town center is a designated area within a community that serves as a focal point for commercial, social, and often cultural activities. It typically features a mix of retail shops, restaurants, offices, entertainment venues, and sometimes residential units, designed to promote walkability and community interaction. Town centers are designed to provide a centralized space where people can shop, work, dine, and engage in leisure activities, often reflecting the character and values of the community. These areas are often designed to be pedestrian-friendly and feature a diverse mix of amenities, including:

	Retail Stores and Restaurants	These establishments provide essential goods and services to both residents and visitors and drive foot traffic.
	Civic Buildings	Key structures such as town halls, libraries, and courthouses are often situated here, serving as landmarks and functional spaces for public use.
	Public Spaces	Parks, plazas, or squares, offer communal areas for gatherings, events, and social interaction.
	Residential Areas	Integrating living spaces within town centers creates a more dynamic environment by enhancing the area's liveliness throughout the day and night.

The trend toward mixed-use developments in town centers is on the rise. Because these developments combine residential, commercial, and recreational spaces residents can live, work, and play in close proximity and reduce the need for daily travel.

Contemporary town centers increasingly focus on celebrating and incorporating local identity and history. This approach includes supporting local artisans, hosting farmers' markets, and providing venues for local music and arts, which offer unique experiences that stand out from standardized commercial designs. The integration of these elements not only enriches the cultural fabric of the area but also attracts visitors seeking authentic local experiences.

In Maryland Heights, the concept of town centers could play a transformative role in enhancing the City's economic and social dynamics. Given the City's unique and rich mix of ethnicities and its growing population, Town Centers could serve as a catalyst for economic development and community engagement by offering unique and culturally diverse products and services.

Strategies

With the Westport Project, the EDD has demonstrated the skills and ability to facilitate and drive catalytic redevelopment projects. Many other retail nodes in the City have aged to the point where they will require significant upgrades to remain relevant and to be able to attract the kinds of retail and restaurants the community desires. The EDD will play a central role in creating the vision for these retail nodes to transform into Town Centers.

Retail Revitalization Plan

Create and execute a 5–10-year strategic plan for retail area development. Ensure that changes are sustainable and aligned with broader economic goals.

- Use economic data and community feedback to identify priority areas. Redevelopment should address the most pressing community needs and opportunities.

- Collaborate with local retailers, shopping center owners, and developers to align the refreshment plan with their interests and capabilities.

- Establish benchmarks for the Town Center plan and monitor progress against these milestones.

Retail Leakage Study

Commission a retail leakage study or utilize the Department's new Placer.ai subscription to evaluate retail leakage. Identify retail sectors where local business revenue per capita is less than the state average spending– indicating categories where Maryland Heights residents are likely spending money outside of the City. Knowing the sectors where there are opportunities to recapture spending helps commercial real estate brokers, developers, and the City know where to focus retail recruitment efforts.

- Identify areas where local consumer demand is not being met by existing retail offerings.

- Inform developers and commercial real estate brokers of the study results. They can use this data in attracting businesses that fill the identified gaps - ensuring that new businesses meet actual market demand and increasing their likelihood of success.

- Collaborate with commercial realtors and retail consultants in their efforts to identify and attract desired retail businesses and restaurants.

Town Center Template

Develop a template that provides guidance on redeveloping retail areas into Town Centers. Guidance, while not being overly prescriptive or restrictive, addresses quality, design, zoning, density, and promote specific uses.

○ Research successful town center models to provide insights into what works. This can include elements like public spaces, a mix of residential and commercial uses, accessibility, and community-focused amenities.

○ Adapt learned best practices to the specific socio-economic and cultural context of the City, ensuring that the town centers reflect the local community's character and needs.

○ Provide the template to developers and commercial property owners and encourage its utilization in future projects within the City.

Collaborate with the Community Development Department to ensure that the template aligns with the City's broader planning goals.

○ Adjust zoning and land use policies as necessary to facilitate the conversion of traditional retail spaces into mixed-use town centers. These adjustments might include allowing for higher density, mixed residential and commercial use, and pedestrian-friendly designs.

▪ Consider incorporating innovative zoning ideas like 'form-based codes', which prioritize the physical form of buildings and spaces over the separation of uses and create aesthetic consistency.

Pilot Project

Work with a target developer or property owner to implement a pilot Town Center project to demonstrate the concept's practical potential, serving as a model for scalability and replication across the City.

○ Utilize incentives as necessary to catalyze the initial project.

○ Use the pilot project as an opportunity to refine the template with real-world experience. Feedback from this project can be used to make adjustments and improvements before

> "**PURPOSE**: To provide for a dense, compatible mix of retail, residential, commercial business and hospitality land uses.
>
> **CHARACTERISTICS**: Broad mix of uses with compatibility ensured through site design; integrated pedestrian circulation throughout site and to surrounding uses; building size and use intensity can vary across development; can be tourist and/or recreation oriented; general and specialty retail; mix of multifamily housing types; open spaces and public spaces; seen as a catalyst for high quality development; useful in creating compact development nodes centered on plaza's and other public spaces."
>
> – City of Maryland Heights Comprehensive Plan

broader application.

○ Consider incorporating unique features like smart city technology, green spaces, or community art installations to enhance attractiveness and functionality.
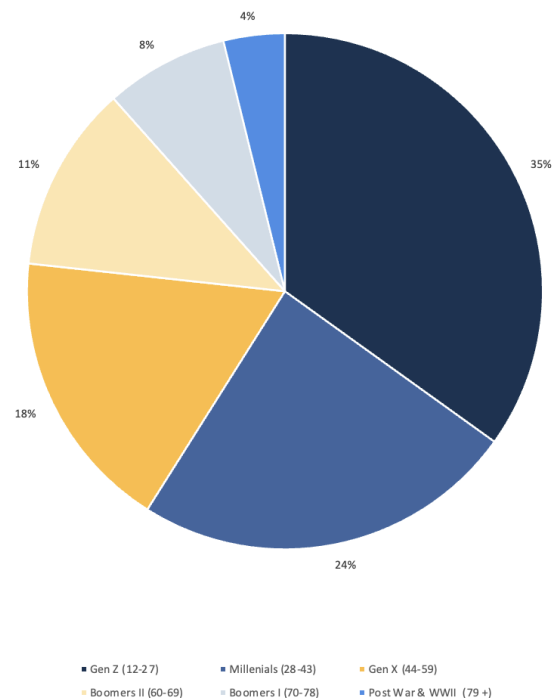
Key Metrics

1. Upscale dining and grocery businesses:	Attract at least 3 new dining establishments and 1 grocery store by 2027.
2. Retail revitalization plan:	30,000 sf of updated / redeveloped commercial / restaurant space by 2026.
3. Retail leakage study:	Conduct study / analysis by end of 2024; begin addressing leakage opportunities in 2025.
4. Town center redevelopment template:	Create template in 2024; apply to at least one project by 2025.

4. Housing & Neighborhood Redevelopment

The generational cohort distribution of Maryland Heights leans significantly towards the younger generations. Generation Z comprises the largest segment at 35%, followed by Millennials at 24%. Generation Z's prevalence exceeds the national rate by 10 percentage points. Maryland Heights is a hub for the younger generations, whose needs and preferences diverge from those of older cohorts.

Because younger generations represent the future of the City, developmental strategies should reflect their preferences. The younger population tends to favor living spaces that resonate with modern lifestyles and values, prioritizing aspects such as walkability. The housing preferences lean towards accessible, pedestrian-friendly communities. To remain resilient to demographic changes and retain the younger generations within its bounds, Maryland Heights must align its urban development plans with the contemporary demands of its youthful residents.

Figure 6: Maryland Heights Generational Cohort Distribution

Legend:
- Gen Z (12-27)
- Millenials (28-43)
- Gen X (44-59)
- Boomers II (60-69)
- Boomers I (70-78)
- Post War & WWII (79 +)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Outcome Objectives

- ○ Identify housing options that are attractive to younger demographics, with amenities suited to their lifestyles.

- ○ Facilitate the transformation of older neighborhoods into vibrant, modern communities.

Key Findings and Analysis

The current era is characterized by swift technological change and evolving cultural norms - factors that significantly influence today's housing market. Millennials and Generation Z, who now comprise the largest segments of the workforce, are at the forefront of this transformation. They are not only revolutionizing workplace dynamics and communication methods but are also shaping housing market trends. Their preferences are steering the development of new living spaces that align with contemporary lifestyles and values.

Generational Differences and Housing Preferences

A Pew Research survey revealed that while a slight majority (57%) of Americans favor larger houses with more space between neighbors, a substantial minority (42%) prefer smaller houses close to walkable schools, stores, and restaurants.[13] These findings initially suggest a preference for communities where houses are spaced further apart. Yet, a deeper understanding emerges when examining these preferences through the prism of generational differences.

Millennials, currently aged 28 to 42, along with Generation Z, aged 13 to 27, are inclined towards smaller, more affordable homes. These homes are characterized by low-maintenance outdoor spaces or shared communal spaces in engaging neighborhoods. [14] Preferences evolve alongside life stages; younger Millennials are drawn to affordable, compact living spaces, whereas older Millennials are more likely to seek starter homes or spaces conducive to family life. They eschew the large, dated homes of their parents' generation in favor of modern, energy-efficient alternatives. [15] Currently, only 50% of Millennials are homeowners, a figure anticipated to increase. Despite valuing stability and viewing homeownership as a long-term investment, hurdles such as student debt and economic uncertainty hinder many Millennials from buying homes.

Conversely, Generation Z prioritizes flexible, multi-use spaces, influenced perhaps by tighter budgets and a lesser focus on material possessions. They are drawn to open floor plans, communal areas, and rooms that can be easily adapted for different uses.[16] This generation is spearheading an increase in renter households, a notable trend despite their slightly smaller numbers compared to Millennials. Interestingly, the current size of Generation Z surpasses that of Millennials at comparable ages 15 years prior, potentially indicating sustained demand in the rental market going forward. [17] This trend's continuity hinges on factors like immigration levels and the dynamics of household formation and homeownership rates within this demographic.

Generation Z also exhibits a pronounced entrepreneurial streak and a sophisticated approach to technology, which may influence their housing choices. They prioritize flexibility and the ability to

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[13] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/08/02/majority-of-americans-prefer-a-community-with-big-houses-even-if-local-amenities-are-farther-away/

[14] https://www.rockethomes.com/blog/home-selling/what-do-millennials-want-in-a-home

[15] https://www.whirlpoolpro.com/millennial-story-4-sustainability/

[16] https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/03/28/how-gen-z-is-shaping-future-apartment-living/

[17] https://www.nationalmortgagenews.com/list/housing-trends-by-generation-gen-z-millennials-boomers

manage their work life independent of physical locations. This generation is perceived as less individualistic than their predecessors, favoring networking and a communal approach to addressing challenges.

Walkability and Amenity Preferences

The housing preferences across generations distinctly lean towards walkability, a trend that is particularly strong among younger demographics. The National Association of Realtors (NAR) reports that over 30% of Gen Z and Millennials are willing to invest more for the benefit of living in communities with walkable neighborhoods that offer easy access to schools, stores, and restaurants[18].

The same report suggests that the appeal of walkability extends beyond the younger generations. Approximately half of suburban dwellers consider sidewalks to be of utmost importance, and a similar proportion is open to paying a premium for homes in walkable areas. The preference for pedestrian-friendly environments is widespread, cutting across age demographics, with Gen Z and Millennials particularly inclined to invest more in these amenities.

In housing type preferences, however, there is a generational divide. Gen Z and Millennials are more drawn to apartments or townhouses that promise walkability and shorter commutes, contrasting with Gen Xers and Baby Boomers who tend to prefer detached single-family homes, despite potentially longer commutes and a reliance on driving to access amenities.

These trends have significant implications for urban planning and real estate development. As preferences evolve there will need to be a continued focus on developing mixed-use projects that integrate residential, commercial, and recreational facilities within pedestrian-friendly designs.

Common preferences:

	Sustainability	Millennials and Generation Z are environmentally conscious, seeking energy-efficient homes with sustainable features.
	Technology	Smart home tech, connectivity, and home automation are important across generations.
	Community	Both value connection and belonging, preferring neighborhoods with shared spaces, community events, or proximity to social hubs.

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[18] https://www.nar.realtor/reports/nar-community-and-transportation-preferences-surveys

Polycentric Urban Planning

The emerging concept of Polycentric urban planning represents a strategic opportunity for Maryland Heights. It provides a forward-thinking approach to address the evolving preferences and needs of residents, particularly Millennials and Generation Z. This model is characterized by the development of multiple smaller town centers within a city rather than one large urban core. Having multiple town centers created many spaces that provide sustainability, walkability, and efficient use of living spaces.[19] By decentralizing urban functions and distributing them across various hubs, Maryland Heights can foster a more accessible, vibrant, and sustainable urban environment that resonates with the lifestyle aspirations of its younger populace.

This planning strategy not only caters to the desire for walkable communities, with essential services and amenities within easy reach, but also addresses the pressing need for sustainable living practices.[20] The polycentric model inherently promotes reduced vehicular dependency, encouraging the use of public transit, cycling, and walking, thereby contributing to a reduction in carbon emissions and enhancing the overall urban livability.

Furthermore, the diverse housing options that this model supports—ranging from smaller homes to mixed-use developments—reflect the housing preferences of Millennials and Gen Z, who often seek affordable, minimalist living arrangements. Such diversity in housing also helps in tackling the challenge of housing affordability by creating density, making Maryland Heights a more inclusive community.
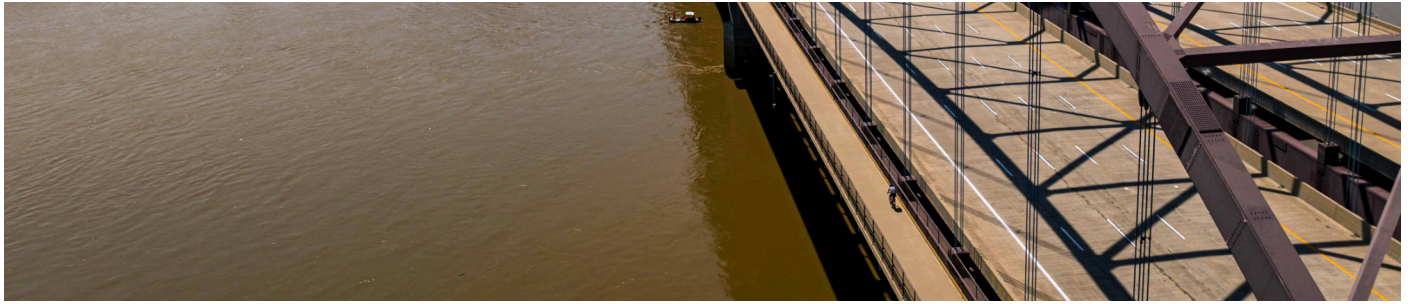
Economically, the polycentric model offers a robust framework for fostering diverse and resilient economic centers. By attracting a wide array of businesses, Maryland Heights can create numerous employment opportunities, stimulate local economies, and reduce the need for residents to commute long distances for work. This economic dynamism, coupled with the creation of social and cultural hubs, enriches the community fabric, making the City a more attractive place for young professionals, entrepreneurs, and families alike.

The polycentric urban planning model creates a strategic opportunity for Maryland Heights to not only meet the current demands of its residents but to also anticipate and adapt to future urban living trends. It is a pathway towards creating a more connected, sustainable, and vibrant City that prioritizes the well-being and preferences of its community, ensuring Maryland Heights continues to thrive as a desirable place to live, work, and play for generations to come.

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[19] https://www.gensler.com/blog/polycentric-cities-new-normal-manila-finance-centre
[20] https://d16zhuza4xzjgx.cloudfront.net/files/resear-6-walkable-cities-report-digital-1-667394a6.pdf

Economic Development Strategic Plan

Strategies

Generations Y (Millennials) and Z have shown preferences that differ significantly from previous generations, including a greater emphasis on sustainability, technology integration, and community spaces. Understanding these preferences is key to developing housing that meets their needs and expectations.

Housing Preference

Conduct surveys and market research to gather direct insights into the specific housing features desired by younger generations, such as smart home technologies, green spaces, and proximity to amenities. This data-driven strategy ensures that development planning is aligned with actual demand.

Redevelopment Vision

Support the redevelopment of legacy neighborhoods that do not provide contemporary living standards and accommodations, particularly concerning energy efficiency, space utilization, and community amenities. Redeveloping these areas can improve the quality of life for residents and attract new demographics.

- Collaborate with the Community Development Department to create standardized redevelopment templates to ensure that neighborhood upgrades are consistent, sustainable, and aligned with broader urban planning goals.

  - These templates can outline key features, design standards, and community amenities that should be included in redevelopment projects.

- Offer incentives to developers who incorporate desired features into new housing projects encourages the private sector to invest in redevelopment efforts.

  - These incentives can take various forms, including tax breaks, expedited permitting processes, or tax increment financing.

Incentive programs might include:

- Density bonuses: Allow developers to build additional units beyond base zoning requirements if they incorporate features like open space, affordable housing, or mixed-use elements.

- Fee waivers or reductions: Reduce or eliminate building permit fees, impact fees, or other development fees associated with redevelopment projects.

- Streamlined permitting processes: Implement expedited permitting procedures to reduce administrative burdens and delays for redevelopment projects.

- Land banks: Acquire blighted or vacant properties at a discount and sell them to developers at below-market rates for redevelopment.

- Public-private partnerships: Partner with private developers to share risks and rewards associated with redevelopment projects.

Redevelopment Zoning

Explore rezoning options with CDD because mixed-use, polycentric projects are not part of the City's current development landscape and changes to zoning and permitting may be required to facilitate these new development types.

- Analyze current zoning to ensure that 'town centers' developments that combine residential, commercial, and recreational spaces are allowed.

  - Work with CDD to consider reducing parking requirements, moving towards form-based code, and encouraging pedestrian-friendly designs.

- Determine which areas should be designated as Town Centers and change zoning accordingly.

Key Metrics

1. Market research completion and insights report:	Conduct research by Q3 2024; publish findings by Q4 2024.
2. Rezoning proposals drafted and approved for creating walkable communities:	Present initial rezoning proposals by Q4 2024; secure approval by Q2 2025.

5. Local Business Network

A robust local business network, alongside proactive business retention and expansion (BRE) programs, are fundamental to economic development as they cultivate a supportive ecosystem for growth, encourage reinvestment, and foster local job creation. Strong networks enable businesses to collaborate, innovate, and leverage local resources, which bolsters economic resilience. BRE programs ensure existing businesses receive the support needed to thrive, which is crucial since they are often the primary source of investment and employment in the community.

Outcome Objectives

- Create a robust network of local businesses supporting each other's growth.
- Develop business support strategies based on local business conditions.

Key Findings and Analysis

Importance of Business Network

Local business networks are instrumental in promoting economic development and fostering community resilience. These networks provide a robust platform for the exchange of information, resources, and services among businesses, which is crucial for the collective prosperity of local economies.

One of the primary benefits of local business networks is their ability to drive economic growth and innovation. As highlighted in a 2015 report by the World Economic Forum, business networks contribute significantly to increased sales and market share for their members.[21] They are platforms for collaboration and innovation, where entrepreneurs can exchange ideas and create new business models that respond to market demands. The collective strength of a network can also lead to improved operational efficiency, as businesses learn best practices from one another, reducing costs and increasing productivity.

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[21] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/09/what-are-the-benefits-of-business-networks/

Figure 7: Maryland Heights Business Owners
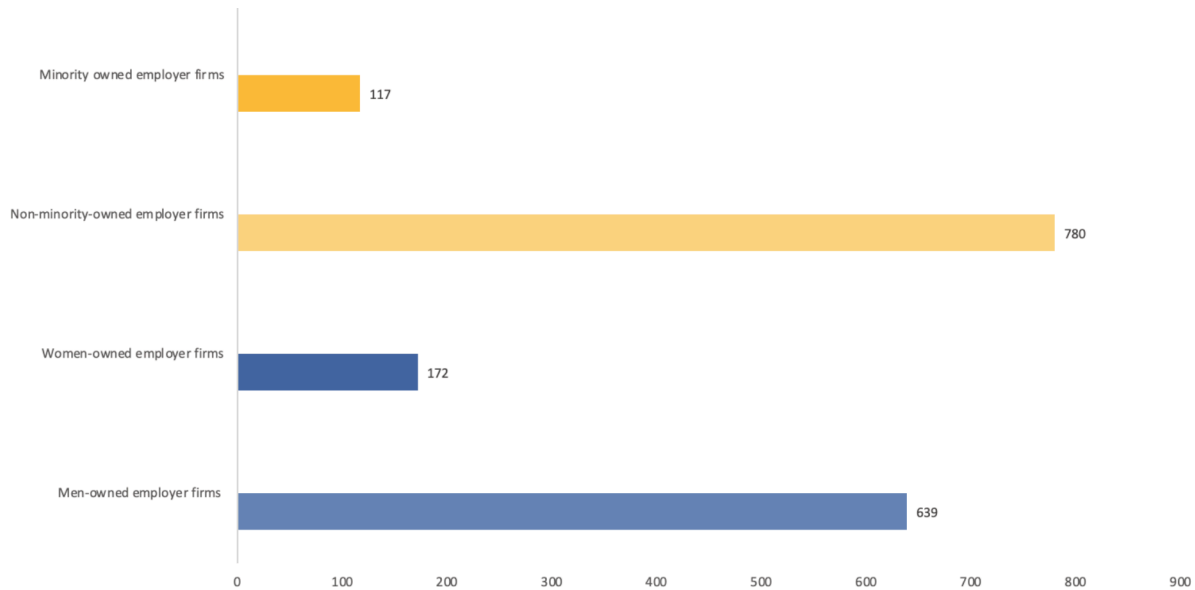
Source: Missouri Tax Reports

The composition of business ownership in Maryland Heights in 2017 demonstrates the potential of a local business network. It shows how a network that connects business owners of different backgrounds, including women and minorities groups, could facilitate an exchange of knowledge and open doors to new collaborative ventures. Such networks are also influential in shaping policies that foster business expansion and sustainability.

The 2015 ILO report also underscores the significance of business networks in creating good work opportunities, particularly for the youth. [22] These networks are vital in providing young entrepreneurs with essential resources, mentorship, and job opportunities. They offer a foundation for young business leaders to acquire practical insights and skills necessary for successful entrepreneurship. Established companies within these networks can extend internships and employment offers, playing a key role in reducing youth unemployment rates.

Role of BRE Programs

Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) programs focus on cultivating an ecosystem that supports ongoing business sustainability and encourages growth, innovation, and active community participation.

Job Creation and Preservation

The emphasis on nurturing existing local businesses as a cornerstone for job creation and preservation has gained significant momentum. This approach, rooted in the principle that existing businesses within a community are more likely to generate new employment opportunities, is

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[22] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_413826.pdf

supported by a number of studies. [23] The research consistently demonstrates that between 50% and 70% of job creation stems from the expansion of local businesses rather than the introduction of new entities from outside the community. [24]

Consequently, strategies focused on internal growth—whether through the expansion of current businesses or the encouragement of new startups—are increasingly recognized for their effectiveness.

Economic Gardening: A Focused Strategy for Growth

A prime example of such a strategy is Economic Gardening. This approach is designed to spur job creation by assisting existing businesses in gaining market share and expanding into new markets. Economic Gardening primarily targets "second stage" businesses—those entities that have successfully navigated the initial startup phase, and have an established business model. [25] These businesses are seen as ripe for development, having established a foundation from which they can expand further with the appropriate support.

Cost-effectiveness

Compared to the costs associated with attracting new businesses from outside the community, BRE programs offer a more efficient use of resources to achieve job creation and economic growth. [26] This efficiency stems from several key aspects:

- *Lower Investment for Greater Returns:* BRE programs often require less financial investment than efforts aimed at attracting new businesses. This is because BRE focuses on leveraging existing assets within the community—its established businesses. These businesses already contribute to the local economy, have an understanding of the local market, and have established relationships with local suppliers and customers.

- *Reduced Risk:* Investing in existing businesses carries a lower risk than attempting to attract new companies. Existing businesses have a track record that can be analyzed, making it easier to assess their potential for growth and the likelihood of their long-term success. This reduces the risk associated with economic development investments, as the community is not banking on the uncertain potential of a new entrant to the local economy. Existing businesses are significantly less likely to leave the community after their incentives expire.

- *Quick Impact:* BRE programs can have a more immediate impact on the local economy. Since these programs support businesses that are already operational, the effects of such support—be it through job creation, expansion of facilities, or increased sales—can materialize more quickly than the lengthy process of attracting, settling, and operationalizing a new business in

[23] https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/articles/business-retention-expansion/
[24] https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FE651
[25] https://communitybuilders.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PlaceValue_11lowresa.pdf
[26] https://www.bre.guru/WhyBRE

the area.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems are a powerful tool designed to optimize interactions and relationships with businesses and stakeholders within the community. These platforms serve as a central hub for managing data, communications, and processes related to business retention and expansion (BRE) initiatives. A CRM platform could provide the following functions:

- Centralize local business information, including contacts, business profiles, history of interactions, needs assessments, and support provided. This helps the Department staff access up-to-date information, enhancing their ability to provide timely and relevant support to local businesses.

- Facilitate systematic and personalized communication with businesses and stakeholders. The Department can use the platform to send targeted updates, opportunities, and invitations, ensuring that businesses are aware of the resources and support available to them. This not only helps in retaining businesses but also encourages their expansion by making sure they are engaged and informed.

- Enables the Department to monitor the effectiveness of its BRE programs by tracking engagement levels, program participation rates, and the impact of specific initiatives on job creation and economic growth. These insights allow for data-driven decision-making and strategy adjustments to enhance program outcomes

- Streamline the DED workflow by automating and organizing tasks such as project and incentives tracking. This efficiency reduces administrative overhead and allows staff to focus on strategic activities that directly support economic growth.

Strategies

Local Business Network

Facilitate the form of local business networks. A network of mutually supportive businesses can diversify economic risks. When businesses in different sectors support each other, the economy is less vulnerable to sector-specific downturns, contributing to overall stability. Also, businesses in a network often share resources, information, and best practices. This collaboration can help individual businesses to be more resilient in the face of challenges, as they can draw on collective wisdom and support.

- Add resources to the Economic Development Department, including hiring one additional staff member to focus on the critical strategy of business support.

- Create a structured Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Program to systematically support the growth and sustainability of local businesses. By identifying the needs, challenges, and opportunities faced by these businesses, the program can offer targeted assistance, resources, and advice.

  - Focus on retaining existing businesses and aiding their expansion within the community, which is often more cost-effective than attracting new businesses from outside.

- Utilize a CRM platform specifically designed for business retention and expansion efforts, like CivicServe to allow for efficient management and tracking of interactions with local businesses.

- Plan and execute events like mixers and roundtable discussions to foster a sense of community among local businesses. They provide valuable networking opportunities, allowing businesses to connect, share experiences, and explore potential collaborations.

  - These events can also serve as platforms for knowledge sharing, where businesses can learn from each other's successes and challenges. Roundtable discussions, in particular, can facilitate collective problem-solving and innovation, addressing common issues faced by the local business community.

Localized Business Support

Develop business support strategies. Local business conditions vary widely based on factors like economic climate, industry presence, workforce availability, and cultural context. By understanding the specific needs of local businesses, support programs can be designed to offer targeted assistance, whether financial, educational, or advisory. This ensures that resources are allocated where they are most needed, enhancing the effectiveness of support initiatives.

- Implement an annual survey to capture the needs, challenges, and satisfaction levels of the local business community. This helps in tailoring support services and policies to address these needs effectively.

- Engage a professional company to ensure the survey is conducted impartially and professionally, enhancing the credibility of the findings. A reputable firm can also employ methodologies that ensure high response rates and accurate representation of the business community.

- Share the survey results with the business community not only to foster transparency but also to help businesses understand broader community trends. This can encourage collaboration and peer support among businesses facing similar challenges.

- Perform regular business visitation interviews to keep the lines of communication open between the Department and the businesses. This ongoing engagement demonstrates the City's commitment to supporting local businesses and can build trust.

  - Through direct conversations with business owners and managers, uncover in-depth insights into the local business climate, opportunities for growth, and specific challenges that might not be captured through surveys alone.

- Synthesize findings from surveys and interviews and distribute them to stakeholders, including city officials, to make informed decisions regarding economic development policies, business support programs, and community development initiatives. [27]

  - Provide comprehensive feedback to decision-makers to ensure that the strategies and policies implemented are responsive to the current needs of the local business community.

- Regularly update the business community through adding a section dedicated to insights and events helps in building an informed and engaged business network in the newsletter. It encourages a culture of knowledge sharing and collective problem-solving.

  - This communication channel can also serve to promote upcoming events, workshops, and opportunities that are relevant to the local businesses, ensuring wide participation and engagement.

Key Metrics

1. Number of events held and attendance figures:	Organize at least 4 events per year with a 10% increase in attendance annually.
2. Participation rate and key findings of the annual business survey:	Achieve a participation rate of at least 30% of local businesses in the annual survey.
3. Number of business visitation interviews conducted:	Conduct interviews with at least 100 local businesses each year.
4. Engagement levels and feedback from information dissemination efforts:	Distribute findings to all local businesses and the City Council within one month of report finalization.

[27] Here is an example for a BRE report: https://www.omahachamber.org/economic-development/bre-report/

6. Branding & Positioning

Branding and positioning create the City's unique identity and distinguish it in a competitive market to attract businesses and investors. A well-articulated brand underscores Maryland Heights' unique strengths and investment potential, fostering a reputation that is conducive to growth. This strategic identity not only aids in attracting and retaining a skilled workforce by promoting a vibrant community and quality of life but also ensures alignment of development initiatives with the City's vision. A robust brand and clear positioning for the City can catalyze community engagement, enhance public-private partnerships, and drive the City's economic objectives forward.

Outcome Objectives

- Create a cohesive and consistent brand identity.
- Position the City as a desirable place to live and work.

Key Findings and Analysis

Investing in branding and positioning helps municipalities aiming to stimulate economic development. A well-defined and managed brand can attract residents, businesses, and investments, promoting sustainable growth. However, this requires a holistic approach that goes beyond logos and taglines, encompassing community engagement, strategic positioning, and the operationalization of brand promises through concrete actions and policies. In the context of economic development, the City's brand is not just a marketing tool but a strategic asset that shapes its future.

Impact of Branding and Positioning on Economic Development

Branding as a Catalyst for Economic Development

Attracting Investment	Strategic branding and positioning amplify Maryland Heights' prowess in securing both domestic and international investment. A meticulously crafted narrative that highlights the City's unique offerings, lucrative incentives, and an overarching business-conducive atmosphere is critical. Clear communication of these facets can pique the interest of investors who are on the lookout for markets with untapped potential and reliable growth prospects.
Enhancing Civic Engagement	A well-defined brand does more than lure external parties; it also plays a vital role in enhancing civic engagement. The City's brand that embodies its core experiences, values, and promises not only fosters local pride but also stimulates community participation. Such a brand acts as a centerpiece for residents to rally around, thereby boosting local initiatives and contributing to the socio-economic fabric of the City.
Differentiating the City	In the competitive arena of city marketing, a potent and cohesive brand is indispensable for Maryland Heights. The City can harness branding to carve out a niche identity, distinguishing it from its peers. By effectively communicating what makes Maryland Heights a unique and attractive location, the City can stand out, drawing residents, businesses, and investors to its promising environment.

Coherent Marketing Strategies	A coherent marketing strategy underpinned by strong branding enables Maryland Heights to broadcast its value proposition with clarity and impact. The brand's alignment with marketing strategies ensures that all communication is consistent, be it via digital media, print, or direct engagement. This coherence amplifies the City's narrative, reinforcing its image as a location primed for business, which is crucial for attracting a wider audience and securing a place in the global economic landscape.
Targeting Growth Sectors	By leveraging its brand, the Department can effectively target and attract growth sectors that align with the City's strategic vision and infrastructural strengths. Strategic branding allows the Department to highlight sector-specific assets, such as technology, healthcare, or education, to businesses seeking a supportive ecosystem for growth. This targeted approach helps in cultivating specialized clusters that can thrive on the City's resources and, in turn, bolster its economic profile.
Attracting and Retaining Talent	An engaging city brand plays a pivotal role in attracting a diverse and skilled workforce. Maryland Heights can use its brand to showcase the City's vibrant culture, educational opportunities, and quality of life. These brand elements are crucial in not only drawing talent but also in retaining it, as they address the aspirations and needs of young professionals and families, ensuring a dynamic and sustainable talent pool.
Local Business Empowerment	The branding of Maryland Heights can serve as a platform for empowering local businesses. Through campaigns and initiatives that underscore the 'shop local' ethos, the brand can stimulate community support for local enterprises, fostering an environment where home-grown businesses can flourish. This empowerment contributes to a robust local economy, with businesses thriving on the support of residents who take pride in their City's offerings.

Principles of Branding and Positioning

In the ever-evolving landscape of economic development marketing, the 2023 edition of Development Counsellors International's (DCI) Winning Strategies in Economic Development Marketing [28] underscores the importance of the internet and websites as the premier channels for engaging location advisors and corporate executives involved in site selection. 73% of key decision-makers are likely to visit an economic development organization's (EDO) website during their site-location searches so having a well-designed online presence can be very important.

This insight not only highlights the shifting paradigms in how economic development marketing is conducted but also sets the stage for a deeper exploration into the strategic elements essential for creating an impactful online presence.

Audience Identification and Targeting

The foundation of a successful economic development strategy starts with a clear understanding of the target audience. This involves a detailed analysis to identify primary stakeholders such as site selectors and C-suite executives, along with secondary audiences like local businesses seeking growth and retention opportunities. Content can then be tailored to meet the specific needs and interests of these groups. For example, manufacturers may prioritize information on available land, while tech companies might focus on the local talent pool. Content should also address the needs of existing businesses by highlighting support for expansion and retention.

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[28] https://aboutdci.com/insights/news-research/

Content Accessibility and Site Structure

In today's digital age, where the internet caters to rapidly dwindling attention spans—often as short as 8 seconds— websites need to capture and maintain the interest of corporate executives and location advisors from the moment they land on the page. This underscores the necessity of presenting a compelling and positive image of your location immediately, using sections like "Why Us" or "Our Advantages." [29] The initial engagement on the website is not just about showcasing data or benefits; it's about sparking curiosity and encouraging the visitor to explore further.

An elevator pitch / mission statement that is the first element encountered on the economic development website quickly establishes the EDD's priorities. The mission statement should not be confined to the digital realm alone but should also be leveraged across other marketing materials, both digital and print, to build awareness about the community and reinforce a consistent narrative about the City's strengths. This strategy can help promote the City also create leads for job-generating deals.

Direct Contact Opportunities

Site visitors, especially those making significant business decisions, prefer immediate access to knowledgeable individuals who can provide specific insights and assistance. Ensuring that contact details for relevant staff are easily found enhances the user experience and fosters a sense of accessibility and responsiveness.

According to the Winning Strategies in Economic Development Marketing report, location advisors, who utilize proprietary databases for standardized assessments, highly value customized information on an economic development organization's website, with staff contact information (81%) ranked as the most useful feature. [30]

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[29] https://www.frontiermktg.com/blog/why-the-about-us-page-one-of-most-important-on-your-website/
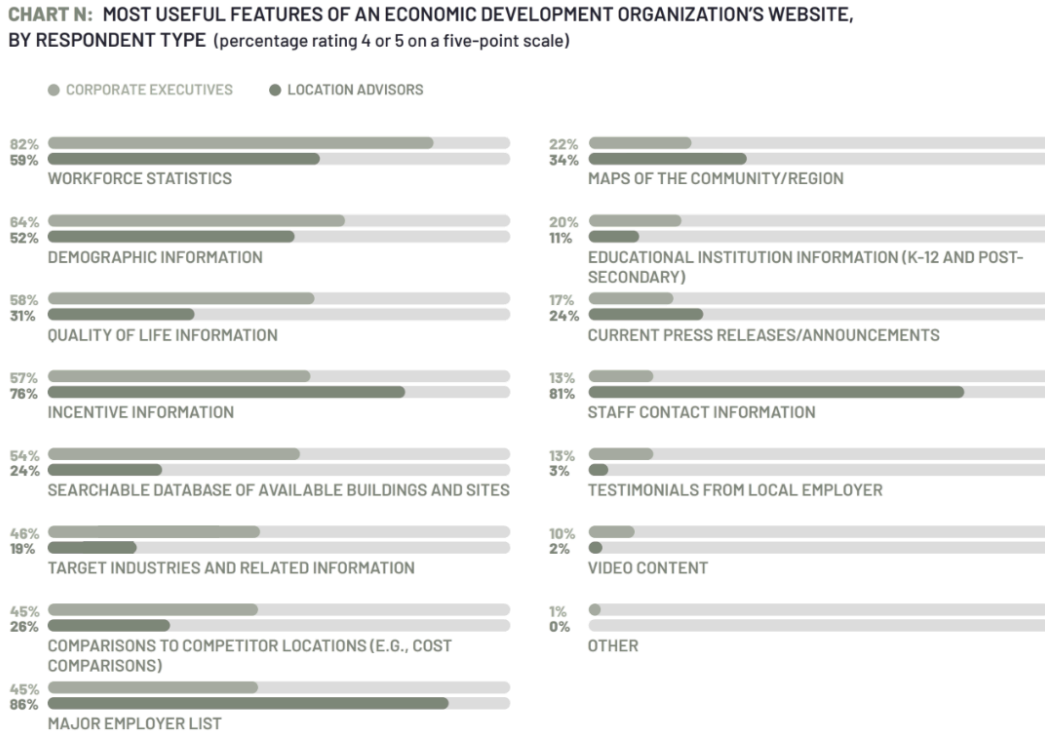[30] https://aboutdci.com/insights/news-research/

Data Visualization

Recognizing that website visitors are more likely to skim than read in detail, the presentation of data through visual means becomes crucial. Charts, infographics, and other visual aids can dramatically improve the comprehension and retention of information, making complex data more accessible and engaging for the audience.

Figure 8: Most Useful Features of an Economic Development Organization's Website, by Respondent Type

CHART N: MOST USEFUL FEATURES OF AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION'S WEBSITE, BY RESPONDENT TYPE (percentage rating 4 or 5 on a five-point scale)

● CORPORATE EXECUTIVES   ● LOCATION ADVISORS

Feature	Corporate Executives	Location Advisors
WORKFORCE STATISTICS	82%	59%
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	64%	52%
QUALITY OF LIFE INFORMATION	58%	31%
INCENTIVE INFORMATION	57%	76%
SEARCHABLE DATABASE OF AVAILABLE BUILDINGS AND SITES	54%	24%
TARGET INDUSTRIES AND RELATED INFORMATION	46%	19%
COMPARISONS TO COMPETITOR LOCATIONS (E.G., COST COMPARISONS)	45%	26%
MAJOR EMPLOYER LIST	45%	86%
MAPS OF THE COMMUNITY/REGION	22%	34%
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION INFORMATION (K-12 AND POST-SECONDARY)	20%	11%
CURRENT PRESS RELEASES/ANNOUNCEMENTS	17%	24%
STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION	13%	81%
TESTIMONIALS FROM LOCAL EMPLOYER	13%	3%
VIDEO CONTENT	10%	2%
OTHER	1%	0%

Source: DCI 2023 Winning Strategies

Additionally, the survey results from DCI indicate that corporate executives and location advisors value workforce statistics, demographic information, quality of life insights, and incentive details on economic development websites.

Unique Regional Differentiation

Finally, the essence of effective branding and positioning lies in the ability to differentiate the City from its competitors. This requires a clear articulation of what makes the City special, going beyond generic attributes to highlight unique qualities and advantages. The content should be distinctive, ensuring that the City's value proposition is both compelling and unique and sets it apart in the competitive landscape of economic development.

Strategies

City's Website

Update the City's website. In the digital age, the first interaction most people have with a city is through its website.

- Enhance the visibility of the economic development event calendar through ads and announcements to ensure that residents and businesses are informed of upcoming events, workshops, and meetings. This can increase participation and engagement with the City's economic development initiatives.

- Integrate mapping tools to visually communicate the City's growth, development projects, and strategic direction. This helps stakeholders understand the City's economic landscape and investment opportunities.

- Develop and provide easy access to data dashboards with key economic indicators, such as demographics, employment statistics, and development projects, empowers businesses and investors to make informed decisions.

Compelling Narrative and Communication

Craft and disseminate a compelling narrative that highlights the City's unique characteristics, culture, and vision can differentiate it from other cities. This storytelling approach for the Economic Development Department helps to build an emotional connection with the audience, making the City more attractive to potential residents, investors, and businesses.

- Create a consistent narrative across all platforms (website, social media, print materials) to reinforce the City's brand and message. Consistency aids in building recognition and trust with the audience.

- Collaborate with marketing professionals to create a strategic communication plan for the City.

- Inform community of important information, achievements, and developments through regular news update.

Social Media Presence

Expand and enhance the City's social media presence. Social media can reach and engage broad audiences. By expanding its presence on platforms that are popular among its target demographics, the City can increase its visibility and attract a diverse audience.

- Post a variety of content, including City news, upcoming events, amenities highlights, and success stories, to engage different segments of the audience. This varied content strategy can help to showcase the City's vibrancy, opportunities, and community spirit.

Key Metrics

1. City's Website and utilization of data:	Complete the website update by the end of Q4 2024. Increase key website metrics including total website visits, average time spent on the site, bounce rate and page views.
2. City and the Department's story:	Initiate engagement with marketing professionals by Q4 2024 to create comprehensive marketing strategy for the City. Show improvement in brand recognition and perception as measured by surveys before and after the marketing and messaging upgrade.
3. Social media presence:	Finalize decisions on social media platforms to be used by the end of Q3 2024. Optimize content (news, events, highlights) for the best results. Consistently improve analytics in reach and engagement.

7. Economic Development Commission & City Communication

A dynamic and effective Economic Development Commission that is inclusive, informed, and proactive can become a valuable asset to the EDD.

The Economic Development Commission serves as a bridge between the City's Economic Development Department, its diverse community stakeholders, and the City Council. By facilitating open lines of communication with local businesses, residents, and investors, the commission can ensure that the City's economic development strategies are both inclusive and responsive to the community's needs. Through regular meetings, the commission can actively engage with the Department to gather insights, feedback, and recommendations. This collaborative approach not only enhances the effectiveness of the City's economic development efforts but also reinforces a sense of shared purpose and commitment to the community's prosperity and well-being.

Outcome Objectives

- Increase participation by members of the Economic Development Commission and leverage their experience and knowledge.

- Ensure the Commission reflects the diverse demographics of Maryland Heights.

- Foster new ideas and perspectives through implementation of non-renewable 5-year term limits.

- Engage younger generations by creating dedicated youth positions on the Commission.

- Enhance effective communication of the Department goals and achievements to City leadership.

Key Findings and Analysis

Economic Development Advisory Commissions (EDACs) often play a vital role in advising local government entities on economic development issues, leveraging local business and community leader expertise, and providing a bridge between public sector initiatives and private sector expectations.

Key Functions of EDACs

	Advisory Role	Provide expert advice to local governments on economic development strategies, policies, and projects.
	Stakeholder Engagement	Facilitate broader engagement with stakeholders in the community, including businesses, educational institutions, and non-profits, to ensure diverse input into economic development planning.
	Policy Development Support	Assist in the development and refinement of economic policies and strategies that align with local needs and priorities.
	Project Evaluation	Offer insights and recommendations on specific economic development projects or initiatives, including feasibility studies, impact analyses, and implementation plans.
	Advocacy and Promotion	Act as advocates for the economic interests of the community, promoting the area as a desirable place to do business, invest, and live.

Effectiveness of EDACs

The effectiveness of EDACs can vary widely depending on factors such as their composition, mandate, resources, and the political and economic context in which they operate. However, research and case studies highlight several key factors contributing to their success:

Clear Objectives

EDACs with well-defined roles, objectives, and performance metrics tend to be more effective. Clear guidelines help ensure that the commission's work is aligned with broader economic development goals.

When cities establish EDACs, they face a range of organizational options. These can vary from independent, nonprofit organizations with autonomous boards to internal departments directly overseen by city managers and elected officials. Between these extremes, numerous hybrid structures exist, combining city oversight with shared responsibilities and accountability for economic development efforts. The chosen structure significantly influences the EDAC's authority, responsibilities, and policy-making capabilities.

It's crucial for the founding objectives of EDACs to be mutually defined by both the local government and key stakeholders. Conflicts often emerge when the city unilaterally decides the EDAC's focus without consulting stakeholders about their vision and goals. For example, a local government might prioritize job recovery in a specific sector, while EDAC members see greater value in pursuing diverse, alternative strategies. Without establishing shared objectives from the start, disagreements and challenges can disrupt the EDAC's effectiveness and progress. [31]

Ensuring that new members grasp the commission's objectives and duties gives them with an orientation to the advisory commission. The aim is to promptly acquaint members appointed throughout the year with their roles and responsibilities. [32]

Diverse Membership

Commissions that include members from a variety of sectors, with a range of expertise and perspectives, are better equipped to address complex economic issues and propose innovative solutions.

A notable challenge facing local governments is the recruitment of individuals to serve on local advisory commissions. Individuals with an interest in economic development are more likely to actively contribute to the advisory commission's efforts compared to those whose interests lie elsewhere. As elected officials and managers who recruit Commission members can communicate a clear and consistent message about the commission's purpose and its critical role it will help attract good candidates for membership positions.

Diversity within these commissions extends beyond numerical representation to including a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints. This includes not only gender, race, sexual orientation, and ethnicity but also age, and a broad professional spectrum covering education, industry sectors, and technical expertise. True diversity means integrating multiple dimensions of difference, recognizing that a

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[31] https://ced.sog.unc.edu/2012/01/seven-strategies-for-creating-successful-economic-development-advisory-boards/

[32] Here is an example for an Orientation Manual: https://co.marion.or.us/hr/vol/Documents/Adv_board%20handbook.pdf

genuinely inclusive commission requires more than a single type of diversity. By embracing such comprehensive diversity, advisory commissions are better positioned to reflect the community they serve and bring forth solutions that are both innovative and inclusive.

Effective Communication Channels

Establishing effective communication channels between EDACs, local government officials, and the broader community is key to ensuring that the commission's work informs decision-making and garners broad support.

When the objectives, activities, and achievements of EDACs are transparently shared with the community, it fosters a sense of inclusion and partnership. For instance, if the EDAC is instrumental in attracting a new business to the area, sharing this success story through local media and community meetings can enhance public support for future initiatives.

Publishing an annual report detailing the EDAC's and the Department's activities, impacts, and future plans will provide a comprehensive overview of its contributions to local economic development. This report, distributed to community members, businesses, and government officials, can highlight the collaborative efforts and successes achieved over the year.

Strategies

Economic Development Commission

Conduct three economic development board meetings annually with a standing agenda for proactive idea sharing and feedback.

- Regular meetings with a focus on proactive idea sharing encourage collaboration among commission members and foster an environment of innovation.

Implement training sessions on emerging economic trends to equip commission members with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions that reflect current economic realities and future opportunities.

- Continuous learning about new trends helps the commission adapt strategies to changing economic conditions, ensuring the City's economic development efforts remain relevant and effective.

Involve youth in the commission, focusing on high school students, to introduce fresh perspectives and to build a bridge to younger generations. This engagement can lead to innovative ideas and approaches to economic development.

- Provide mentorship and engagement opportunities for youth in governance and community issues to help in nurturing leadership skills among young people, ensuring a pipeline of informed and capable future leaders.

- Offer summer internships.

Publicly advertise commission positions to encourage a diverse pool of applicants with a wide range of perspectives and expertise.

Implement term limits for commission members to ensure regular infusion of new ideas and to prevent stagnation, encouraging broader participation from the community over time.

Provide an orientation manual to new commission members, furnishing them with essential background information and an understanding of current projects, which will enable them to contribute effectively from the outset.

- A standardized orientation ensures that all commission members have consistent information and understanding of their roles and responsibilities, contributing to the continuity of board activities and initiatives.

Annual Strategy and State of the City's Economic Development Reports

Prepare an annual strategy document for the setting of future targets, and the identification of specific strategies to achieve these goals.

- Outline priorities for the coming year to offer a clear roadmap for the City's economic development efforts. This forward-looking component ensures that the city remains focused on strategic objectives, adapting to challenges and seizing opportunities in the economic landscape.

Present an annual report covering the previous year's accomplishments, enabling the City to showcase its achievements and progress in economic development to stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and potential investors.

- Include a Prosperity Index or similar economic development metrics to provide a quantifiable evaluation of the City's economic health and development progress. These metrics help in assessing the effectiveness of past initiatives and in making data-driven decisions.

Key Metrics

1. Diversity of leadership:	Achieve a leadership composition that reflects the demographic diversity of Maryland Heights by 2030.
2. Implementation of term limits:	Initiate term limits starting from the next election cycle, ensuring new leadership representation each term.
3. Youth representation:	Create all youth-designated positions by Q4 2024 and receive feedback from youth participants.
4. Commission member orientation:	Ensure all new Board members receive orientation within three months of their appointment.

VI APPENDIX A

Strengths	Opportunities
Maryland Heights offers its citizens a high quality of life. The City serves as a haven within St. Louis County; its crime rate is almost half the national average, and 97% of citizens state that they feel safe walking alone at night. High-quality parks and recreational facilities are hallmarks of Maryland Heights, providing ample recreation opportunities. The public school system reflects a strong, diverse population, with Pattonville Senior High School ranked in the top 7% of Missouri schools. Parkway School District also ranks amongst the top in St. Louis County. Additionally, a range of charter schools and specialty programs are available in the area.	Riverport Business Park presents a unique opportunity for the redevelopment of unused office space. There are two strategies: upgrade and modernize the office space to become more marketable, and redevelop the area to include retail and restaurants.
Community members are engaged and have high aspirations for the community. In the 2023 survey, most community members expressed their belief that the City would improve within the next five years. Additionally, community events and engagements are well-attended, with citizens actively voicing their opinions, wants, and needs.Various council members have noted the high levels of correspondence and input they receive from their constituents.	Business and commercial property owners exhibit collaboration and willingness to engage with each other.
Maryland Heights is located just 5.4 miles from St. Louis Airport and features multiple access points to Interstates 70 and 270. These access points facilitate easy entry for businesses, tourists, and employees visiting the City.	City leadership has a long history of encouraging community input and fostering participation in commissions and boards. The ongoing shift in the City's racial and ethnic makeup provides the opportunity to add diverse opinions and perspectives to city leadership and decisions.

Maryland Heights boasts multiple sports complex facilities that operate during various sporting seasons. The Lou Fusz Complex houses multiple soccer fields, attracting soccer tournaments from across the state. Creve Coeur Soccer Park similarly draws large-scale soccer tournaments and ensures a steady flow of tourists. The Sport Port International complex rents fields for a variety of sports (soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, football, cross country, ultimate frisbee, rugby, league play, tournaments, shows, and practices) at all age levels, bringing in roughly half a million visitors a year. The Centene Community Ice Center provides a venue during the winter season for various sports and recreational visitors from across the state. These complexes not only sustain consistent tourist flows to Maryland Heights but also contribute to the occupancy of local hotel rooms.

Residents are searching for new places to spend time and money. The City has recently secured an Aldi, and many residents and interviewees have noted the development. Throughout interviews, people have mentioned the limited retail and restaurant options. This gap provides an opportunity for the City to identify and attract new retail and restaurant businesses that meet the needs of residents.

Current business attraction strategies have brought new developments to the Westport Plaza area and on Dorsett Road. Specifically, the Economic Development Department has successfully attracted Rawlings Sporting Goods Company, Inc., to relocate its headquarters to Maryland Heights. Furthermore, on Dorsett Road, an Aldi is set to open on February 28, 2024, offering new retail options to residents.

Residents have noted a need and desire for reliable public sidewalks. In the 2023 citizen survey, sidewalks were among the most important topics cited for improvement. The City's recent initiative to repair sidewalks and streets showcases a commitment to this need. Further, the growing number of younger people within Maryland Heights suggests a future preference for vibrant, amenity concentrated spaces. The City has an opportunity to anticipate the growing need for 'Town Center' spaces among their newest demographics.

Being a part of the St. Louis Metropolitan area gives Maryland Heights a unique narrative within the region. The City stands out among other cities for its parks and recreation, safety, and school districts. Moreover, the area provides a suburban contrast to city life, offering a tight-knit community for city commuters and others moving away from the metropolitan region.

In recent years, the City witnessed a variety of demographic changes. As it stands today, the age composition contains a concentration of Millennial and Gen Z generational cohorts. The growth of these groups highlights the further potential for the city to attract and retain young professionals. Attracting and retaining this new demographic will allow the city to grow sustainably.

Over the years, citizens report high satisfaction with the City. Not only as a place to live, but citizens are highly satisfied with how the city operates and its ability to get tasks done. Additionally, the consistent members of office provide familiar faces and stable actors within the community to allow for connection and familiarity amongst residents. Generally, residents feel that they can, if needed, contact and go to the city for help.

The City currently attracting a large number of visitors for sporting and recreational events. Stronger branding, and placemaking would allow the city to highlight the unique characteristics of the area: its proximity to St. Louis metropolitan area, recreational events for families, and the array of public amenities for residents.

Social Media Analysis

Below is a brief social media analysis for Maryland Heights covering followers/likes, posting frequency, content highlights, and engagements across various platforms, delving into key metrics to provide insights into the community's online presence and engagement.

Platform	Followers/Likes	Posting Frequency	Content Highlights	Engagement
Facebook (City Govt.)	3.5K Followers	5 posts/week	City events, reposts from Parks & Rec, safety/weather alerts	Avg. 13 likes/post
Facebook (Parks & Rec)	5.7K Likes, 6.4K Followers	4 posts/week	Community events, updates on community center/pool	Avg. 10 likes/post, 70 reviews (4.7 stars)
Facebook (Chamber of Commerce)	1.1K Likes, 1.2K Followers	1-2 posts/month	Networking events, reposts from local businesses	Avg. 13 reviews (5 stars)
LinkedIn	519 Followers	(1 post/2 months)	Government/administrative news, job openings	-
Twitter	1,476 Followers	2-3 posts/month	Community events, city alerts	-
YouTube	104 Subscribers	Not specified	Community event recaps	10-30 views/video
Instagram	952 Followers	4-5 posts/week	Community events, city news, occasional branded content	-
Website	-	-	Well -organized, accessible resources	-

Maryland Heights Citizen's Satisfaction Surveys

Abstract and Overview of Surveys

Keywords: Parks and Recreation, Policing Services, Safety, Communications, Accessibility

Between 2019 and 2023, Maryland Heights gave its residents the opportunity to express their satisfaction with the City through a citizen satisfaction survey. Both instances achieved a target response rate of 400 households, receiving 411 and 413 responses in 2019 and 2023, respectively. Despite varying demographics among respondents, both surveys revealed similar perceptions of Maryland Heights. The City enjoys a high level of satisfaction among its residents, who generally view it as a good place to live, raise a family, and maintain a high quality of life. Notably, many community members have resided there for over 10 years and exhibit continued optimism about the community's longevity. The surveys found that residents were satisfied with the parks, recreation facilities, and programs, as well as the policing services. However, there has been growing discontent regarding the enforcement of property management and appearance codes, along with roads and traffic management. The 2023 survey also identified an emerging concern over safety, specifically related to roads and street lighting, not highlighted in the 2019 survey.

Initial Discussions:

- The 2019 and 2023 surveys reported a similar number of respondents (411 to 413) with consistent demographic makeups, though the latter saw fewer Asian or Asian Indian participants. Similar levels of African American, Hispanic/Spanish/Latino, and a new category for Eastern Indian or Pakistani respondents were noted.

- There was a noticeable shift towards higher annual incomes, with more respondents reporting salaries above $99,000. The presence of younger families was more pronounced, indicating a demographic shift.

- Satisfaction slightly declined in almost all evaluated categories, including quality of services, overall quality of life, recreational opportunities, city image, safety feelings, city appearance, commercial development, and the quality of new residential developments. Parks, recreation facilities, and police services maintained high ratings.

- The least satisfaction was noted in the enforcement of city codes and ordinances.

2023 Survey Overview

- Respondents are primarily concerned with the overall maintenance of city streets, traffic and congestion management, and the enforcement of city codes and ordinances.

  - Specifically, respondents were dissatisfied with the maintenance of streets, the tree trimming/

replacement program, and the condition of city sidewalks.

- ○ Most respondents would like to see an emphasis on maintaining street lighting as well as residential lighting. Additionally, respondents want an emphasis on the condition of city sidewalks.

- ○ Enforcement of Codes:

  - ▪ Respondents continue to be slightly dissatisfied with the enforcement of codes related to protecting public safety and maintaining business property.

  - ▪ Respondents are more highly dissatisfied with the enforcement of codes that mandate the cleanup of litter and debris from private property, the mowing and trimming of lawns, and the general maintenance of residential property.

- Respondents continue to be highly satisfied with the Maryland Heights Police Department.

  - ○ However, there is a lower satisfaction rating with the enforcement of local traffic laws and violations.

2019 Survey Overview

- The race/ethnicity of respondents was skewed towards the dominant population, with 68% identifying as White or Caucasian. Fewer than 20% of respondents identified as African American or Hispanic/Latino/Spanish.

- High-Priority Items for MH Survey Respondents:

  - ○ Overall enforcement of city codes and ordinances.

  - ○ Maintenance of city streets.

- Participants in the survey were optimistic about the future of Maryland Heights, with many anticipating that the City would grow or become 'better off' in the next five years.

  - ○ Overall, 96% of those who responded indicated satisfaction with the City and believed it is a good place to raise a family, have a quality life, and grow a business.

- Respondents indicated they were highly satisfied with the City services in Maryland Heights. Specifically, the quality of the parks and recreation programs and facilities was rated highly satisfactory.

  - ○ The most frequented parks and recreation facilities included:

    - ▪ Maryland Heights Community Center (65%)

    - ▪ Vago Park (39%)

    - ▪ Aquaport (34%)