



CHAPTER

8

CHARACTER OF THE COMMUNITY

Excelsior Springs' natural and constructed environments give the city a distinctive physical character. As the city moves into the future, it should strengthen its visual appearance, recognizing that maintaining community quality is an important priority in competitive environments.



COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Community character addresses the overall appearance of a community – the relationships of different parts of its built environment and the interaction between the urban and natural settings. Chapter Three, DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES, considered large-scale elements of urban design, such as the patterns of development and the forces that help form the city. This chapter will consider the design of specific elements of Excelsior Springs’ urban environment, including landscaping of the public environment and of major private development projects, streetscape, signage, downtown appearance, residential neighborhoods, and major transportation corridors.

People sometimes consider good community design a luxury, unnecessary to the process of business and economic growth. Yet, enhancing the quality of a community is a strategic economic decision, adding value to the community, increasing property values and producing a city that its residents find rewarding. Good urban design promotes community growth and establishes an environment for healthy neighborhoods. Just as the land use, transportation, parks, and community services elements of this plan define aspects of its development vision, the community character plan also helps to describe a long-term vision for the city.

People choose to live in places that are attractive and have a high quality of life. The design of Excelsior Springs will continue to be important to the city as it competes on a regional and national basis for investment and residents.

GOALS

In developing its community character program, Excelsior Springs should:

» **ASSURE THAT COMMUNITY ENTRANCES AND MAJOR TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS CONVEY A STRONG STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY QUALITY AND ACCOMMODATE A VARIETY OF USERS.**

Excelsior Springs’ gateways are a visitor’s first interaction with the community, and convey a powerful first impression to visitors. The city’s front doors should welcome and invite visitors, making a dramatic statement about the quality and character of the community. But entrances and corridors are also important to residents who use the city every day. Attractive residential streets also add value to their surroundings and provide avenues on which people travel at slower speeds. Many communities such as Excelsior Springs find that the aesthetic upgrading of key community corridors creates significant economic benefits by encouraging better development standards.

» **PROVIDE CONSISTENT STANDARDS FOR THE DESIGN OF PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.**

Excelsior Springs’ terrain has caused the city to spread with auto-oriented development around Highway 69 and the access to the Kansas City area. This area’s “big boxes,” strip centers, and free-standing buildings surrounded by parking lots, contrasts with the more compact and smaller scale of the city’s traditional downtown. However, development patterns have left these two areas feeling like separate communities. Enhancement and improvement of private design standards will provide continuity throughout the city and contribute to the quality of the city.

» **MAINTAIN THE HIGH QUALITY AND HISTORIC CHARACTER OF THE DOWNTOWN.**

Excelsior Springs' historic downtown is a signature district and is an intimately-scaled and interesting historic commercial district. Continued investment in the district can help it grow as both an attraction to visitors and a retail and civic neighborhood. The continued conservation and enhancement of this unique district's quality should remain a fundamental part of city policy.

» **CAPITALIZE ON EXCELSIOR SPRINGS' NATURAL SETTING BY CONSERVING DISTINCTIVE OPEN SPACES AND INCREASING RECREATIONAL USE AND ACCESS TO FORESTED AREAS AND DRAINAGEWAYS.**

Excelsior Springs' natural setting creates major open spaces in the city landscape. This setting has helped to reinforce Excelsior Springs' unique development pattern of partially self-contained residential areas separated by major landscape and topographic features. A plan true to the character of Excelsior Springs must make good use of these natural resources by increasing recreational use and access and preserving distinctive landscapes.

» **ENHANCE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVE THE APPEARANCE OF THE CITY'S STREETS AND NEIGHBORHOODS.**

Enhancing community character means strengthening the quality, intimacy, and identification of the city's neighborhoods. However, small neighborhoods that are separated from one another also can produce a disjointed city. Therefore, the community character plan should propose policies that weave these neighborhoods together into a continuous civic web.

THE COMPONENTS OF COMMUNITY CHARACTER

The Excelsior Springs Community Character Plan includes four major components, each addressing parts of the urban environment that make Excelsior Springs distinctive. These components include:

GREEN CHARACTER, addressing the city's natural and open space environment, and the connections between city and nature.

TRANSPORTATION CHARACTER, addressing the city's above ground framework, its transportation system, and including the city's major corridors and gateways.

CIVIC CHARACTER, addressing the nature of important places in Excelsior Springs' private and public environment, and including the principles that should guide development.

PLACE CHARACTER, addressing the nature of important places in Excelsior Springs' private and public environment, and including the principles that should guide development.





GREEN CHARACTER

The founders of Excelsior Springs were drawn to the area for its healing mineral waters. The original city developed in the Fishing River Valley and the steep hills surrounding the valley. With growth Excelsior Springs' urban development moved up the hills and into the rolling hills of the surrounding area. The city's connection to nature and healthy living is permeated by the undeveloped steep slopes that are often covered by native tree canopies and a variety of wildlife. The Fishing River valley and surrounding slopes have established much of the overall character of the city. This plan considers goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures to help the city conserve natural landforms and expand the use of these features.

Goal 1: Greenway Corridors as the Spine of the City's Open Space System

Excelsior Springs' forested slopes are a significant part of the city landscape and limit development and connections between neighborhoods. These features form a major community asset that can define the city's future open space network. The policies of the plan propose using these areas and the drainage corridors that cut through the hills as the core of the city's future open space system, connecting developed areas of the city.

Objectives

1. Existing trails within undeveloped areas should be incorporated into the city's trail system and become a formalized part of the city's transportation system.
2. Waterways in their natural condition should be enhanced as part of Excelsior Springs' trail and greenway system in developing areas.
3. Waterways and bodies of water should increase the value of adjacent development. Consequently, this development should relate to this asset and should maintain public access to it.
4. Development should not increase the size of Excelsior Springs' existing 100-year floodplain.

Policies

1. Greenway and trail development should be focused within the city's existing greenways and along major waterways. These include the large parcels of undeveloped and forested areas that cover the hills surrounding the city and the drainage corridors of western Excelsior Springs. Development here should include trail construction; trail support facilities and infrastructure such as signage, benches and other site furnishings; and trailheads. In those areas where paths have already been cut through, routes should be formalized with signage and maintenance. Other routes should remain more natural for hikers and bikers looking for a more unique experience. The city may also consider neighborhood park features such as playground equipment and shelters in greenways that are adjacent to residential areas and serve neighborhood park functions.
2. Easements for trail corridors should be acquired for the forested areas. Land in the floodplain adjacent to the creek corridors should be acquired through purchase and easement. Both types of corridors should be maintained as public open spaces.
3. Development adjacent to water resources should maintain public access and should be connected to the trail and greenway system. Development should not increase the extent of the 100-year floodplain or cause damage to or erosion of improvements along the system.

Goal 2: A Complete Trail and Pathway System

Earlier sections of this document address the pathway and trail system. This network is important on a number of levels: it connects the city's neighborhoods and activity centers, provides an important recreation resource and community amenity, and supplements the street system. It should also build on the city's reputation as a health destination. Excelsior Springs has a relatively extensive pathway system, but many residents do not realize that these routes exist within the forested areas around the city. The city has fewer formalized trails and no connection between the eastern and western trails. The pathway system should be a major community resource that can be enhanced by the development of additional multi-use, off-road, or separated roadside trails.



Objectives

1. Excelsior Springs should develop a complete trail network that increases the number of multi-use trails. Excelsior Springs' forested areas and waterways will provide the routes for many of the off-road trail connections.
2. Excelsior Springs should develop a program of multi-modal roadways along routes that provide the easiest grades, including new street connections.
3. A sidewalk improvement program should be established that identifies sidewalk routes within neighborhoods. The width and grade of some streets limit sidewalk construction but at a minimum a sidewalk system should be established along those streets with the easiest grades and adjacent to neighborhood parks.
4. The existing pathway and trail system should be in a state of good repair, and the un-official trails should be upgraded.
5. The pathway system should be connected to pedestrian circulation in neighborhoods, commercial and mixed use areas, and should provide access to most of the city's major recreational, civic, cultural, and commercial facilities, especially the new community center.
6. New parks should also be connected to the pathway system.

Policies

1. The city should complete the Excelsior Springs' Greenway, a system around the city that connects many of Excelsior Springs' major open spaces and community features. The major component of this system uses undeveloped spaces within the city. Pathways have already been cut through these areas. Easements for these routes will need to be purchased along with signage and maintenance. The former inter-urban line should also be utilized to connect the southern portions of the city.
2. The city should establish standards for roadside pathway construction, and assure that pathways continue to be incorporated into major street projects. Major priorities for pathway extension or improvement should be the Kearney Road link between the downtown and the Jessie James Road area.
3. The city should provide landscaping improvements and trail amenities at strategic points along pathways and proposed multi-use trails.
4. Major private and public developments should be served by the pathway system. An example is connection of the new community center to a pathway system.

Goal 3: Conservation of Steep Slopes

Excelsior Springs' hillsides and views define the physical character of the city and provide a beautiful backdrop to a historic community. Only the steepest slopes surround the Fishing River Valley were left undeveloped while other areas were more



sparingly developed with minimal access. Redevelopment of these areas should protect the integrity of the hills, native tree canopies, and the unique neighborhood character.

Objectives:

1. Redevelopment of Excelsior Springs' hillsides should limit the amount of impact on the natural environment, including storm water run-off. View should be preserved and appropriate access provided.
2. The city's growth has inevitably taken urbanization into the surrounding hills. Development should maintain the character of the landscape by minimizing serious land disturbances.

Policies:

1. Excelsior Springs should encourage the use of conservation design techniques, such as lot clustering and common open space, in redeveloping the hills north of downtown.
2. The city should limit development in the forested hills surrounding the city with slopes that have a grade of 15% or greater remaining undisturbed.

Goal 4: Green Streets

Streets cover more than 20% of Excelsior Springs developed area and make up the city's largest public space, using more land than parks and civic spaces put together. Their appearance has a major impact on the visual quality of the city. Elements that contribute to the successful functioning of major streets as public spaces include:

- › Linear greenways on both sides of the street with sidewalks and/or pathways on both sides of the street. Sidewalks and pathways should be set back far enough from the street to provide separation from vehicular traffic and provide adequate space for street landscaping and snow storage.
- › Attractive landscaping that provides shade and helps define the pedestrian and motorized domains of the street.
- › Public art installations can become thematic elements that provide definition for the street and can help streets act as virtual outdoor galleries. Some communities install public art on a consignment basis, providing outdoor display space for artists and assuring a changing and dynamic streetscape.
- › Ornamental or colored paving surfaces, defining sidewalk edges, raised medians, bike lanes, or other areas of special focus.

While major streets are very important and experienced by most people, most of Excelsior Springs' streets serve residential areas and have a major impact on neighborhood environments. Streets of appropriate width, combined with sidewalk setbacks and street landscaping can provide both more attractive residential settings and prevent traffic from moving through neighborhoods at excessive speeds.

Objectives

1. Excelsior Springs' major streets should include landscaped environments that include trees, landscaped areas, and special features such as public art. Landscaping should be incorporated into all new major street construction projects.
2. Excelsior Springs' local streets should be appropriately landscaped to reinforce the residential character and reinforce the quality of Excelsior Springs' residential

areas.

Policies

Excelsior Springs should define Urban Design Corridors, the major street corridors to which Green Street standards should be developed and applied. These standards, including sidewalk and pathway setbacks, street section, and street landscaping should be incorporated into the design of each new major street construction project. In addition, the city should program retrofits for some corridors. Urban Design Corridors should include:

- › Kearney Road
- › Jessie James Road
- › St. Louis Avenue
- › Isley Boulevard
- › Kansas City Avenue
- › Marietta Street
- › Wornall Road
- › McCleary Road
- › Tracy Ave
- › Highway 92

Of these corridors, Isley Boulevard is especially important as a major entrance to the city and a concern of many residents. As a gateway corridor into the downtown area, it is especially important that this corridor function well while, at the same time, present an image consistent with Excelsior Springs' concern for quality landscape.

On local streets in new neighborhoods, apply guidelines or complete small projects that improve the green quality of the streets. Alternatives include medians or roundabouts at intersections that add landscaping and calm traffic; incentives for planting street trees; and encouraging sidewalk setbacks of at least 8 feet on local streets.

The city should implement a neighborhood street greening program, providing assistance to neighborhoods seeking to implement upgraded public landscaping on both community streets and local neighborhood streets. Subdivision regulations should also be revised to require tree planting and landscaped traffic calming techniques such as intersection medians and roundabouts where appropriate in new residential neighborhoods.

Goal 5: Good Landscaping on Public and Private Property

Greening of the public environment is very important and can help enhance Excelsior Springs' already attractive cityscape. However, reasonable landscaping of private development projects, focused along major civic corridors, is also very important. The city's development regulations should be upgraded to require focused landscaping of such projects. Landscaping should occur where it makes the most difference – at the public/private interface and between land uses with potential conflicts. In addition, landscaped areas can help to manage stormwater by increasing permeable surfaces and reducing the quantity and speed of urban runoff into drainage ways.

However, new development requirements do not typically apply to previously developed property. To address this, Excelsior Springs may consider a pilot landscape incentive program, providing financial incentives on a competitive basis to encourage existing projects to provide landscaping. Recognizing that most existing develop-





ments usually cannot fully comply with new standards, the incentive program should establish priorities, beginning with landscaping adjacent to public right-of-ways.

Objectives

1. All new public and private development should be attractively landscaped to improve the visual quality of the city, manage stormwater, provide shade in the summer, help define access and circulation ways through large projects, and increase the economic value of properties in the city.
2. Large expanses of paving should be broken with landscaping to reduce the effects of summertime heat.

Policies

1. The City should review its land development regulations, upgrading its landscaping requirements. Key focuses for reasonable landscape requirements include:
 - a. Perimeter landscape borders adjacent to public right-of-way for multi-family residential and non-residential projects. Industrial projects should provide perimeter landscaping along Urban Design Corridors.
 - b. Landscaped bufferyards at the boundaries of uses in potential conflict, such as commercial projects developed adjacent to single-family residential development.
 - c. Internal parking lot landscaping.
 - d. Facilities and structures required for stormwater management.
2. The City of Excelsior Springs should review its own properties for compliance with future ordinance requirements for specific sites.
3. The City should encourage landscape upgrades of existing properties by instituting a pilot landscape incentive program.
4. The City should encourage the use of innovative landscape materials and techniques that reduce maintenance costs and water consumption while maintaining a quality visual landscape. Areas for potential new or improved standards include parking lot landscaping and stormwater management, efficient irrigation techniques, and innovative landscape design.

TRANSPORTATION CHARACTER

From their earliest history, cities have been places of settlement where people gathered to conduct business. In America, though, mobility dominates much of how people think about cities and towns. Outside of home and workplaces, much of city life is spent moving from one place to another, and the street has become the public space that citizens experience most. Automobiles, the most common method of travel along these streets, are far more important to most people than a utilitarian conveyance. In our cities, we have become creatures of movement.

Transportation facilities, including streets and railroad corridors, make up nearly one-quarter of Excelsior Springs' developed area. The dominance of streets in the cityscape makes their design and scale especially important. For example, a standard arterial channel width of 60 feet (two moving lanes in either direction and a center left turn lane), accounts for much of a motorist's cone of vision at 35 miles per hour. The average pedestrian moving at 4 feet per second requires about 15 seconds to cross the street; a senior citizen will take about 20 seconds to make the same crossing. These different perceptions affect the nature of the experience and the visibility

of signs and buildings along the street.

Transportation arteries, including both the railroad and major roads, are also the corridors of commerce in Excelsior Springs and nearly every other community. They provide the access and visibility that retailers, service providers, and industries need to thrive. Therefore, urban corridors are closely tied to economic development, and improvements can also “fertilize” the business environment that they offer.

Goal 1. Functional and Attractive City Corridors

Transportation facilities are first and foremost conduits for movement. Street design usually stops here, and roads are often engineered like sewers – sized to accommodate a projected flow, but with relatively little regard for the surrounding context. Yet, streets are also public spaces and economic development tools, and should be considered part of the cityscape.

Excelsior Springs’ major streets include both open and urbanized contexts. For the most part, the Green Street principles identified above should guide development of these emerging corridors. Urbanized contexts have well-established land use patterns, sites that can be developed more effectively or intensively, and have, in many cases, contextual constraints such as limited right-of-way, steep slopes, adjacent buildings and parking lots, railroads, and other limitations. They require a far more specific design strategy that combines functional, aesthetic, and economic development objectives.

Objectives:

1. Excelsior Springs’ major corridors must meet their required transportation functions safely and efficiently, and will clearly and safely navigate people to their destinations.
2. These corridors should provide an attractive travel experience to their users, and will present a positive community image to both residents and visitors.
3. These corridors will provide high quality locations for future business and economic development projects, and will create conditions that encourage additional investment and property improvement.

Policies:

1. Isley Boulevard/St. Louis Avenue

Isley Boulevard and St. Louis Avenue are the gateways into the downtown. Isley from the city’s western edge should be improved to include new sidewalks and gutters, street lighting, and landscaping. The intersection of Isley Boulevard and Saratoga should also be improved to increase the visibility of the downtown entrance and improve safety. Redevelopment along this corridor should remove dilapidated properties and create high quality mixed use environment.

The intersection of St. Louis Avenue and Elms Boulevard is the main entrance to downtown but leaves visitors confused as to how to access downtown. The line of site for pedestrians trying to cross the intersection often leaves them feeling unsure and unsafe. Improvements to this intersection and the Isley Boulevard and Saratoga intersection are described more fully in Chapter 7: Downtown Excelsior Springs.





2. Emerging Corridors

Wornall and McCleary roads will increase in importance and traffic levels with development on Excelsior Springs' west side. These sections require detailed review as development occurs. Proper street sections along with green street amenities and access for pedestrians and bicycles should all be components of these streets.

Goal 2: Streetscape Elements

Streetscape elements include street graphics, lights, wayfinding and traffic information, landscape, street furniture, and sidewalk materials. These features can define the image of the street and, by extension, the city. Often, though, sign elements, lighting, and other parts of the streetscape are not designed, but are placed according to individual, unrelated decisions, and produce a kind of visual chaos. In some cases, institutional standards, including the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), makes the installation of well-thought out, coherent but non-standard systems very difficult as well. People traveling through may ignore the ensuing chaos, but at best the environment that they experience is neutral, and does not effectively communicate the quality of the city. Instead, Excelsior Springs' transportation environment should project the city's image, and should include high quality, uniform streetscape components.

Objectives:

1. All streetscape elements on major transportation corridors should have a consistent design vocabulary and be maintained in a way that is consistent with the original design and installation.
2. Excelsior Springs' key corridors should effectively direct visitors to important community destinations.

Policies:

1. Excelsior Springs should design and gradually install a community wayfinding system along its corridors that direct visitors to destinations in a clear and attractive way. The city should work with the Missouri Department of Transportation to explore flexibility in its interpretation of the MUTCD and to develop a wayfinding system along Highway 163 that is acceptable to DOT and attractive, economical, and clear to users.
2. Excelsior Springs should establish design and material standards for street lights, signage, street furniture, and other features along major transportation corridors.
3. Commercial corridors and districts should develop graphic themes, individual but with a unified family resemblance, and, in cooperation with the City Engineering Department, install these graphics according to accepted uniform standards.

Goal 3: Gateways

Like buildings, communities have entrances – points of transition between the “outside” and the “inside.” At these gateways, the traveler passes into the urban sphere of influence, and the city has its first opportunity to communicate its quality and sense of place. Excelsior Springs' gateway corridors are: Highway 69, Highway 92 and Isley Boulevard.

Objectives:

1. Excelsior Springs should develop a community gateway enhancement program that will effectively communicate the quality of the community.
2. The Isley Boulevard gateway requires special attention as the oldest corridor and the most concerning to residents. Improvements to this corridor should include a mixture of public and private realm projects. Public realm improvements should include improved sidewalks and curbs, new pedestrian lighting, and street trees. Private realm improvements should address dilapidated and vacant structures along the corridor.



Policies:

1. Similar entrance features to Kearney Road should be done at the appropriate scale along Isley Boulevard, Highway 92, and the northern extent of Highway 69.
2. The city should place the improvements to the Isley Boulevard corridor within their one to five year capital improvement program.

Goal 4: Building Design and Scale along Corridors

Many of Excelsior Springs' major urbanized transportation corridors are largely commercial in character, although they also include other land uses. These buildings often do not relate well to the street. They are often set back far from the property line, with parking lots usually separating the building from the street. Wide streets are attractive if they are defined by a building edge; however, deep setbacks and adjacent parking lots make signs a more evident part of the streetscape than buildings. In addition, front doors also are not connected to sidewalks and pathways; and the building's major façade is usually oriented to the parking lot, with little attention paid to other building elevations. Clearly, the appearance and function of transportation corridors depends on the type of edge condition established by adjacent private development.

Objectives:

1. Buildings and adjacent private development on major corridors should contribute to the quality of the street environment and should enhance the experience of the motorized or non-motorized traveler along the corridor. A strongly defined building edge is especially important along wider streets.
2. A clear connection should be provided between public sidewalks and pathways and the entrances of buildings and adjacent major development.
3. Buildings should be at least as apparent as signs and parking lots to travelers along major corridors.
4. The visual impact of parking lots directly visible and adjacent to the street should be reduced although the route from the street to parking areas should be extremely clear.

Policies

1. Excelsior Springs should encourage site designs that place commercial buildings closer to the street and locate parking lots to the side or rear of principal buildings. However, building setbacks should comfortably accommodate future widening when street expansion is reasonably expected. The city should include standards for site design that emphasizes buildings over parking, and locates parking behind or to the side of buildings along major corridors.
2. Excelsior Springs should require as part of site plan review a direct, safe route from



- public sidewalks or pathways to the main entrances of commercial buildings.
3. Developments should manage the number of curb cuts along major corridors by providing common access points, circulator roads, interconnected parking lots, and rearage roads to the greatest degree possible. This access management will require coordination among several properties in a business area.

PLACE CHARACTER

All parts of a city are important and contribute to the character of the community. But some places are especially important because of their historic or symbolic role in the growth of the city, their visibility, their role in the everyday life of citizens, or special physical and even spiritual qualities. People think of special places on many levels, beginning with their home, church, or other places of special individual importance. When we think about special places in a city, we address areas of civic importance that are typically the territory of all members of the community. Sometimes, these areas are referred to as “image centers” – the places that define the visual and even economic quality and health of the overall city.

Often, these places of civic importance focus around historic parts of the city, such as downtowns. Downtown Excelsior Springs’ scale and architecture history reflect the city’s history as a major destination for its healing waters. However, places of civic importance are not limited to downtown districts. Major commercial corridors and adjacent shopping and activity centers also have great community importance. Thus, Jessie James Road, Kearney Road, and Isley Boulevard are major civic resources. The character of these corridors can be improved by applying some of the time-honored principles and patterns that we observe in older, more established parts of the city.

This section presents goals, objectives, and policies that apply to areas of civic importance, both old and new. It is designed to identify and apply civic design elements to these important areas, improving the image of the city and the quality of residents’ engagement in the places that they experience most often.

Goal 1: Define Areas of Civic Importance

In most cities, the traditional city center and adjacent neighborhoods are seen as having the most community importance. The seats of government, finance, and business are often clustered in these areas. For example, downtown Excelsior Springs includes the historic Hall of Waters, the center of city government. For Excelsior Springs many of the city’s other major civic destinations have moved out to the Jessie James Road and Highway 69 corridors, including the Library, banking institutions, and churches. These newer areas have developed with little continuity to each other or other destinations in the city.

These areas of civic importance are related to the Urban Design Corridors discussed above. However, the concept of areas of civic importance addresses adjacent development along these major corridors.

Objectives:

1. Excelsior Springs should define the downtown, the Wornall Road corridor between Jessie James and McCleary roads, and Jesse James south of Wornall as areas of civic importance that receive special design review and attention as they grow and change.

- Streets and public spaces within areas of civic importance should receive special design attention. In many cases, the major streets in these areas are identified as Urban Design Corridors, making them subject to specific streetscape and landscaping standards discussed in the TRANSPORTATION CHARACTER section of this chapter. Private development in these areas should respond to their importance as image centers for the community, and should be designed or retrofitted to improve their visual quality and the experience offered to users.

Policies:

- Excelsior Springs should establish specific design objectives for the private and public built environment within these defined Areas of Civic Importance.
- Private development in each area should be consistent with its respective design vision. For the downtown this should be based on historic design standards.
- Sign regulations should accommodate the need for businesses to identify premises and to advertise goods and services. However, design guidelines for signage should generally favor smaller, lower-scale signs and include incentives for excellent design of street graphics.
- In most cases, development should provide for good access for both motorized and non-motorized methods of transportation. Projects within these areas should be related and connected to each other, with these areas emerging as more unified districts.
- The city should have mechanisms within its development regulations to review the nature of development within these areas for their consistency with the design objectives for the area.

Goal 2: A Distinctive Heart of the City

Downtown Excelsior Springs is a compact and yet diverse district, rich in historic and cultural importance, and alive with reinvestment. After years of struggle following the hospital closures the district is finding a new niche and a new vitality. Downtown Excelsior Springs is becoming a more active mixed use center, with an attractive, pedestrian scaled street scene and an interesting mix of businesses along its corridors. The downtown is marked by historic and modern high rises along with iconic Hall of Waters and Elms Resort. The district is a vital image feature and, as such, adds considerable economic value to all property. Continuing efforts to strengthen downtown should be viewed as investments that ultimately enhance the economic value of land and homes throughout Excelsior Springs. *Chapter 7: Downtown Excelsior Springs* provides a detailed vision for the district.

Objectives

- Downtown Excelsior Springs will maintain its quality as the city’s image center, a visually attractive place filled with activity, a place that people find delightful to experience.
- Downtown will grow stronger by taking advantage of development opportunities on underused sites both within and outside of the central commercial core.
- Downtown should provide an environment that supports the growth and prosperity of local small business, services, restaurants and entertainment, and specialty retailing.

Policies

- Downtown Excelsior Springs should expand the street improvement work that has been done along Thompson and Broadway to other streets in the district.





2. The downtown entrance from Isley should be more visible as described in Chapter 7.
3. Signage should direct visitors from the Highway 69 corridor into downtown. Currently the twisting roads and changes in street names often make it challenging for visitors to find the district.
4. The district should complete development of historic design standards and utilize them with both rehabilitation and infill projects.

Goal 3: Public Art

Public art can become an important part of Excelsior Springs' cityscape. In many cities, highly successful programs have displayed sculpture on a loaned basis, and have brought delight to both residents and visitors. Neighborhood groups and students may also make their mark with art in the public environment. These projects add personality and distinctiveness to the city.

Objectives:

1. Public and environmental art should be a part of the cityscape.
2. Excelsior Springs should identify locations as focuses for public art. These areas may include Urban Design Corridors, places of civic importance, public facilities, parks, and special districts.

Policies:

1. The City should incorporate public art in major public projects, including large transportation projects.
2. Public art should include work by significant local and regional artists, but also should incorporate the work of others, such as students, in appropriate places in enhancement projects.
3. Public art should include both permanent installations and works on exhibit temporarily on either a loan or consignment basis.
4. Excelsior Springs should utilize a Public Art Commission to help organize and manage the public art program. The Commission may spin off a 501(c) 3 support organization that can accept tax deductible contributions.

Goal 4: Historic Preservation and Conservation

Excelsior Springs has a rich history that stretches over 130 years. This history is particularly reflected in the city's architecture in downtown and in surrounding neighborhoods. Excelsior Springs has done a superb job of conserving the Hall of Waters and Elms Resort, historic icons in the city. At the same time notable structures like the Royal Hotel have falling into disrepair and single-family homes have been divided into multi-family homes around the downtown.

Objectives:

1. Excelsior Springs should institute activities and programs that recognize, protect and, where necessary and possible, increase the economic life of historic buildings, sites, and districts.
2. The City should initiate policies that make it easier to reuse historic buildings.
3. In general, the city should protect and conserve its existing housing and building stock.

Policies:

1. Excelsior Springs should consider instituting and enforcing a Property Maintenance Code, and work with private sector on programs that finance improvements necessary to fund the rehabilitation of worthy structures.
2. Excelsior Springs should complete development of the Historic Design Guidelines and use them in conjunction with a conservation and preservation ordinance that discourages the demolition of historically or architecturally important buildings, provides guidelines for the modifications of these buildings, and provides flexibility to encourage the rehabilitation and reuse of these structures.



IMPLEMENTING CHARACTER

An Organizational Framework

The Community Character Plan proposes a variety of policies that use the inherent character of Excelsior Springs to create an even better and more attractive community. These recommendations fall in four implementation categories:

Guidelines and Review, involving changes to the city's Land Development Ordinances to guide the nature and quality of new private development.

Modifications of Normal Practice, involving changes in the way that major public projects are completed. Examples include integrating visual design improvements and enhancements into arterial street or highway projects.

Retrofit or Revisions of Existing Development, involving improvements that enhance the function and appearance of existing private developments.

New Capital Projects, including improvements that will be included in the city's capital or operating budget.

While each of these categories requires different implementation and priority setting processes, a common, citizen-based constituency should unify them and help form partnerships between the public and private sectors. This organization may be referred to as the Excelsior Springs Character Committee. The scope of a Community Character Committee extends beyond that of a city government-based regulatory and advisory committee. It should ultimately review project priorities and build partnerships that improve the city's design quality. The new committee should include a variety of interests, including city agencies and staff, the development and business communities, design professionals, economic development professionals, neighborhood associations, and other interests.

Care must be taken in defining the oversight role and composition of the Character Committee to insure that this review body complements, rather than duplicates, the roles of existing appointed bodies. For example, the design review function is established in the Community Development Committee and the City would not want to burden developers with another review body and function. The key is to carefully assign components of Community Character to a body that can then "own" these community enhancement issues and provide a review and recommendation function for the City Council when opportunities to implement Community Character components arise.

Assuming the creation of a Character Committee, the plan recommends the following implementation steps.

Guidelines and Review. Excelsior Springs should undertake a review and revision of its development ordinances, including its zoning and subdivision ordinances. However, full implementation of the Community Character element requires new guidelines that will affect the design of residential and commercial development. These features will not necessarily add cost to development. They will direct the design of projects to promote greater connectedness and continuity with the character of the city. The Character Committee is one of the stakeholder groups that should be involved in a participatory process to complete ordinance modifications.

Expansion of Normal Practice. This simply includes expansion of efforts by public works to include design enhancements in public projects. An existing example of this is the design of the Public Works offices. Expansion of this type of design aesthetic is most applicable to street and transportation improvements, but also affects other public works projects. It is particularly important that this element of the comprehensive plan should be prepared under the aegis of the Engineering and Parks Departments.

Retrofits. These are in some ways particular challenges, because they involve the redesign of private properties. The Excelsior Springs Character Committee, representing both the private and public sector, can be an extremely useful catalyst in helping to improve the functional and aesthetic design of these projects. The city should also be prepared to offer assistance in these projects, sometimes creating capital requirements.

Capital Projects. The Community Character element recommends a series of capital projects that are both large and small. Some require city funding, some public/private partnerships, and others can use external sources such as Transportation Enhancement funds. Setting priorities should be a community-based process; as a result, this plan does not recommend a top ten projects list. Instead, the Character Committee, representing a variety of public and private interests, should review this element in detail and develop a system for assessing priorities. This should produce an Excelsior Springs Character Capital Plan that considers a variety of funding sources, and becomes part of the city's Capital Improvement Program.