

Chapter 3: Strategic Questions

The City of Independence has solicited extensive public participation through numerous public workshops with property owners, residents, and elected and appointed officials. These meetings produced a series of strategic questions that summarize major community concerns and interests about the Little Blue Valley. These questions and the following brief responses from the City and its consultants set the stage for development of alternative growth scenarios that can supersede the present Comprehensive Plan policies.

3.A Why does the City need to expand in this area?

3.A.1 Development Long Anticipated: The City of Independence has presumed eventual development of the Little Blue Valley since the area was annexed in 1963 and 1975.

3.A.2 More Efficient Use of Municipal Services: Following annexation, the Little Blue Valley Sewer District expanded its service capacity to much of the study area. Only the extreme northeastern part of the study area remains without sewer service. Development of those parts of the study area that already have municipal services is the most fiscally viable option.

3.A.3 Compete Better for Economic Development: The Little Blue Valley: The Little Blue Valley gives Independence an opportunity to diversify and increase its economic development opportunities. Specifically, the area's natural beauty and good regional access (with completion of the Little Blue Parkway) will enable the Little Blue Valley to compete better with other suburban communities for high-amenity business/industrial parks as well as higher-end residential development.

Asking serious questions related to the future of the Little Blue Valley and why it should or should not be developed is a key to development of a quality Plan. Throughout the Plan development process those involved continually referred to the answers of the Strategic Questions to direct the intent of the Plan.



The 40 Highway and Little Blue Parkway Intersection under construction; the Southern terminus of the Little Blue Parkway.

City Strategic Goal #2

To achieve continued growth in the local economy, especially in the area between 39th Street and 40 Highway, Lees Summit Road, and the new Selsa Road Interchange, and ensuring our future by planned development in the Little Blue Valley.



This wheat field contributes to the rural character in eastern Independence

3.A.4 Consistent with Strategic Goals: Expansion into the Little Blue Valley is consistent with the City's adopted Strategic Goals, specifically Goal #2 – "To achieve continued growth in the local economy, especially in the area between 39th Street and 40 Highway, Lees Summit Road, and the new Selsa Road Interchange, and ensuring our future by planned development in the Little Blue Valley."

3.A.5 Bring Revenues in Line with Expenses: Balanced growth and introduction of high-end development can improve the fiscal impacts of providing municipal services. Comparing the revenues generated to the costs of municipal services for existing development in the Little Blue Valley shows that expenditures now exceed revenues by more than 50 percent.

3.B How do you allow development and still keep rural character?

3.B.1 Substantial Area Already Protected: Much of the study area's rural character stems from the Little Blue Trace Park and other natural features within this stream valley environment. More than 1,500 acres of this resource are already in parks and public ownership.

3.B.2 Careful Planning Will Preserve Additional Areas: Careful planning and development of the study area can preserve additional open space and provide an overall framework for future development. Some eastern sections of the Little Blue Valley can remain rural for many decades, if not permanently.

3.B.3 Phase Development Logically and Incrementally: Largely because of market conditions, the area will develop gradually over the next 25 to 50 years. The City intends to ensure that development is concentrated and logically phased in an orderly transition from rural to more urban uses. This measured pace gives the community time to consider and implement a variety of planning tools for preserving rural open space and active agriculture.

3.B.4 *Employ Proven Site Planning Techniques:*

Within development areas, such proven planning techniques as environmental overlays, minimum open space requirements, development guidelines, and cluster development principles will help keep much of the original rural landscape character.

3.C *How do you balance the interests of the existing city with the Little Blue Valley?*

3.C.1 *Focus on Economic Development:* An essential goal of the Little Blue Valley Comprehensive Plan Amendment is economic development. By attracting high-quality, high-amenity development to the Valley, the City aims to compete successfully for high tax generating projects that will improve the overall fiscal health of the City. Such fiscal improvement will benefit all residents of Independence by enabling the City to provide improved levels of services throughout the community.

3.C.2 *Increase City Revenues:* The City's Strategic Goal #1 is "to revitalize and rebuild neighborhoods that contain deteriorated private property or infrastructure through a cooperative partnership with owners and tenants." This is presently occurring in some older City neighborhoods. The positive fiscal impact of development of the study area will further enable the City to rebuild and upgrade its existing neighborhoods and infrastructure.

3.C.3 *Maintain Strong Ties Between Old and New:* A primary theme common to the potential alternative futures included in this report is the establishment of strong links between the existing city and future development in the Little Blue Valley. Ways to do this include: upgrading key roadway corridors between the Little Blue Valley and existing City neighborhoods, developing alternative forms of transportation and pedestrian connections, and locating open space corridors to create strong physical and symbolic links.

City Strategic Goal #1

To revitalize and rebuild neighborhoods that contain deteriorated private property or infrastructure through a cooperative partnership with owners and tenants.

3.D How do we improve the image/ role of Independence within the region?

3.D.1 Use Little Blue Valley Development to Create More Positive Impression: The City believes strongly that the quality of new development in the Little Blue Valley will establish a more positive impression for the City of Independence as a whole. To achieve high quality development, the City will employ the latest and best planning and development techniques. Such policies will characterize Independence as an innovative community with a strong commitment to securing a better future.

The enhanced reputation of Independence will enable it to compete more effectively with other Kansas City suburbs for a better share of the region's future economic development.



Enhanced poured limestone facade given to the Little Blue Parkway Bridges over the Little Blue Trace and Interstate 70

3.D.2 Upgrade Public Environment: The City will use revenues from a recently approved sales tax to upgrade streets and parks and demonstrate its commitment to creating and maintaining a public environment that will complement and support private investment in good planning and design. Also, each of the three school districts passed capital financing bond issues in 1998 to upgrade and expand facilities in and near the Little Blue Valley.

3.E What is the timing, alignment, and design of the Little Blue Parkway (LBP)?

3.E.1 Alternative Land Use Possibilities Affect Proposed Parkway: A central starting point of all the alternative scenarios described in this report is a variation on the alignment and design of the proposed Little Blue Parkway. All alternative alignments work well as a regional transportation link. They differ greatly, however, in their local impacts within the Little Blue Valley.

The first crucial decision regarding the future road is resolving its relationship to the Little Blue River. Each choice has different environmental, open space and

landscape consequences and also affects profoundly the land use opportunities and design quality of future development.

3.E.2 Complete the Initial Segment (39th Street to R.D. Mize Road) within Five Years: The timing of completion depends on several factors, including overall market demand for development in the area, the availability of federal/state funding, and the availability of other local financial resources. The City is actively pursuing funding options with a goal of completing the initial segment of the new road within three to five years. It is likely that the southern segment of the parkway will be the first to open.



Future Path of the Little Blue Parkway south of R.D. Mize Road

3.E.3 New Road Will Improve Competitiveness: Design options include choices ranging from a typical regional parkway to a lower key, more naturalistic parkway. Under any choice, the City feels that the completion of the Little Blue Parkway will position the Little Blue Valley to be competitive for business and industrial development.

3.F What is the most cost-effective way to extend infrastructure?

3.F.1 Full Use of Existing System: Much of the basic infrastructure necessary to serve new development is already in place but is not fully used. The most cost-effective approach to infrastructure development, therefore, is to first make full use of the capacity of the existing system. This is one reason that the City is proceeding with planning for the study area.

3.F.2 Expand System Only as Needed: Once needed, further extensions will be carefully coordinated with actual development of the valley to insure new infrastructure is phased in compact, cost-effective increments.

3.F.3 Extend Existing Open Space Network as Development Progresses: Although parks and open space systems are not typically thought of as

infrastructure, the City feels that the public investment in the Little Blue River Open Space Corridor is important. This investment will protect its existing open, rural characteristics and preserve it as an amenity that will add to the overall high quality of future development. The City is, therefore, committed to expanding the existing open space system in conjunction with construction of the Little Blue Parkway and development of adjacent land.

3.F.4 Coordinated Systematic Expansions: Certain targeted system expansions can help to focus growth to areas closest to existing facilities. A program of systematic utility expansions along with an adequate public facilities ordinance will ensure all new development is supported by proper adequate infrastructure.

Simultaneous extension of water, sewer and street improvements to serve the new Blue Springs School District Elementary School on R.D. Mize Road serve the school and provide additional development opportunities to the north-east quadrant of the Interstate 70 and R.D. Mize Road/Woods Chapel Road Interchange.

