

The Vision



CHAPTER

1

Chapter 1: The Vision

I. Introduction



The following document examines the revitalization of the U.S. 24 Highway Corridor in Independence, Missouri, the gateway to the Truman Presidential Library. The document emphasizes the need for an all-embracing approach to social services, housing improvements and economic development. The document tackles the issues of changing population demographics, declining housing stock and economic development challenges. More importantly, the document emphasizes the need to build on the efforts of current programs and collaborative efforts. Existing efforts, in combination with the proposed

components, create a bright outlook for the Corridor. Within the key components such as Gateways, the Fairmount Business District and Mixed Use Areas, the plan outlines potential development scenarios that will help ensure community vitality. These potential development scenarios demonstrate how change could work for the Corridor and the community at-large. The report illustrates one of many potential paths to success and provides the community with the tools necessary to create their own.

II. Background

The vitality of the U.S. 24 Highway Corridor has always been tied to local historic events. Prosperous days associated with Fairmount Park and later key industries are gone. Found in its place is a retail-based economy commonly found along America's travel corridors. Recent interest and other events mark a new period for the Corridor and the future once again looks bright. New projects, including the redevelopment of industrial and residential areas and the potential for new transportation connections has set the stage for the future. The residents of this community are once again reclaiming the pride from years past. Key members of the community and City of Independence have long realized the importance of this area to the City of Independence, and now have seized this opportunity to implement changes.

As shown on Figure 1-1 on page 1-2, the study area runs the length of U.S. 24 Highway from the western Independence city limits to the Truman Library. It includes one-quarter mile on either side of the U.S. 24 Highway (Independence Avenue). A larger "Corridor Influence Area", consisting of one mile on either side of U.S. 24 Highway encompasses most of western Independence, the southern portion of Sugar Creek, the I-435 Interchange in Kansas City, and the intersection of U.S. 24 Highway and Noland Road. The Corridor Influence Area includes key land uses that directly influence the Corridor's future.

An overall vision has guided the plan since its inception.

"The U.S. 24 Highway Corridor will be an aesthetic and vibrant entryway into the City of Independence through complementary land uses, safe neighborhoods, renewed commercial centers, and a healthy economy. The Fairmount Business District, a symbol of regional pride, will be transformed into a model for other commercial centers in the Corridor."

The plan assists the community in achieving this vision for the corridor.

III. History

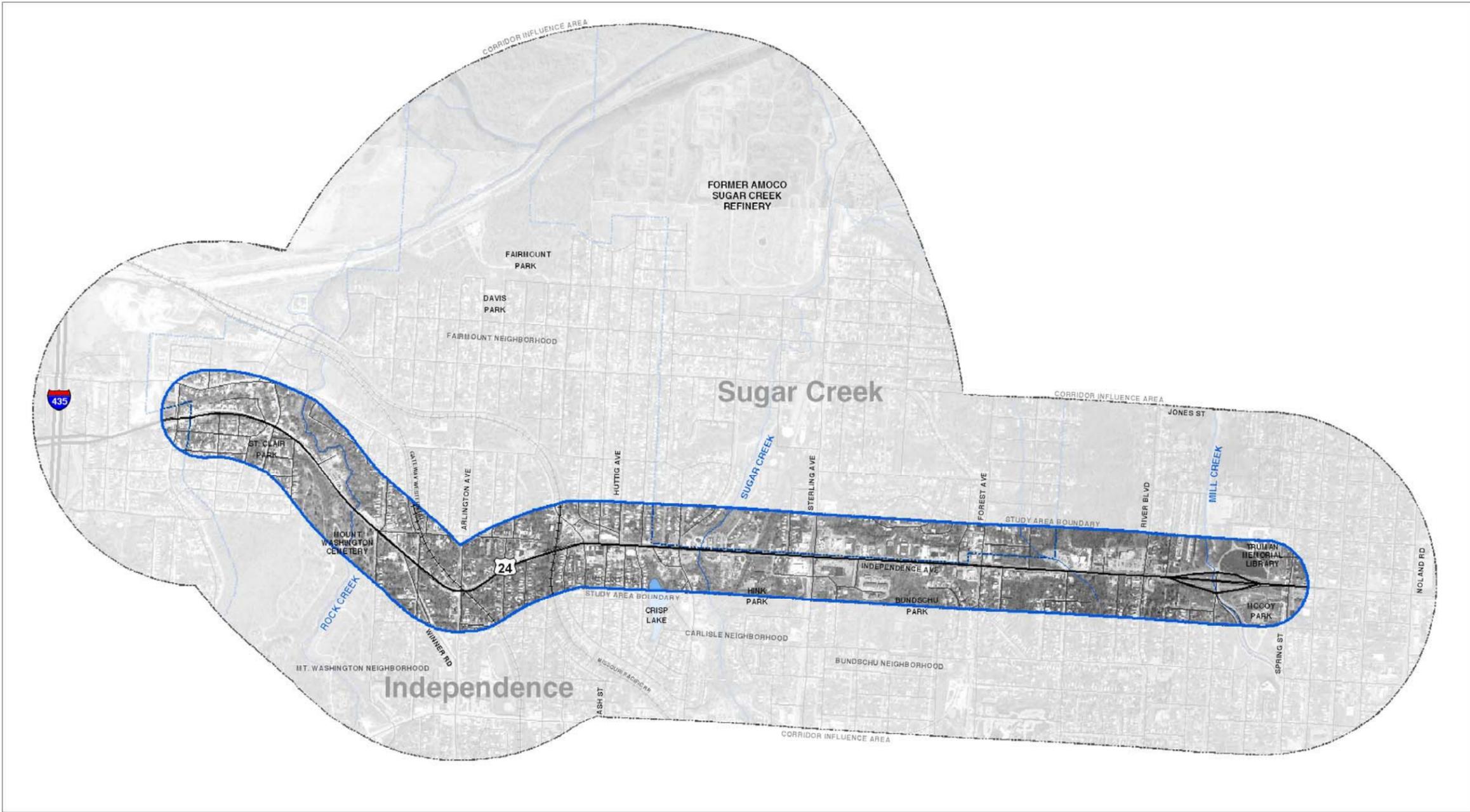
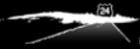
Cultural History

In order to understand the Corridor, one must understand its history. The Independence area was first inhabited by Native Americans (Osage and Kansa) and later by settlers due to the rolling hills and numerous springs. Later, proximity to the Missouri River and numerous trail heads made it a logical trading post and jumping off point for merchants beginning the long trek westward on the Santa Fe Trail. Trading was reinforced by Mexican merchants who came northeast on the Santa Fe Trail. In the 1840s, pioneers of the Oregon Trail stocked their wagons with final supplies before hitting the trail. This period also saw the arrival of missionaries sent by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to convert the Indians living in the area. (City of Independence, 2004).



Source: Special Collections
Kansas City Public Library

In the late 1800s the Corridor developed as a recreational area and suburb of Kansas City. In 1887 the Independence and Park Railway (now the existing Winner Road alignment) opened and development boomed along the Corridor. Areas such as the Fairmount Business District began to serve a growing population (JMA/Watson, 2000). This area was further established by investment and promotion by several prominent individuals, among them William E. Winner, Robert T. Van Horn, Arthur J. Stilwell and Colonel Van Horn. Colonel Van Horn constructed his home on the present site of the Van Horn High School. During this period, Willard E. Winner purchased 2,400 acres of land between Independence and Kansas City. He formed the Washington Park Land Company which ultimately developed an amusement park on the site currently occupied by the Mount Washington Cemetery. The park contained a lake, a boat that served as a stage for theatrical productions, a dance pavilion and an island containing a covered bandstand. The park acted as a draw to encourage riders to use the Metropolitan Railway Company's "Dummy" line. The Metropolitan Railway Company continued to lease the park until 1898, until Fairmount Park was established near the intersection of Northern Boulevard and U.S. 24 Highway.

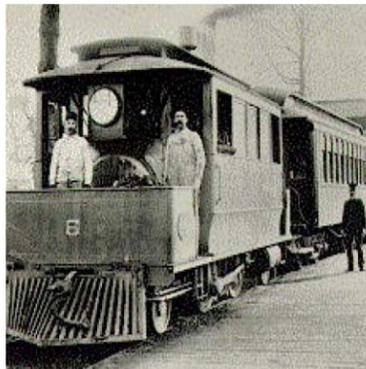


Legend
 - - - Independence City Limit

JUNE 2004 0 500 1,000 Feet

CITY OF INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI
 U.S. 24 HIGHWAY CORRIDOR STUDY
 CORRIDOR STUDY AREA BOUNDARIES
 F.D.A.W.

Figure 1-1



Source: Special Collections
Kansas City Public Library

The Fairmount Park first started in 1873 by Goetz Brewery Company as a beer garden. By 1895, the Fairmount Amusement Park was established. The trolley connection to Grand Central Station allowed the park to flourish for many years. Sugar Creek was dammed by the Kansas City Southern Railroad to create a 10-acre lake on the site. The Fairmount Park Horse Show was also located in the park, which was the predecessor to the American Royal Horse Show. By 1904, the new refinery operated by the Standard Oil Co. opened just north of Fairmount Park. Changes in the area resulted in the abandonment of Fairmount Park. The land was replaced with the new community of Riverview surrounding the Refinery. The community later became the City of Sugar Creek. (Stilwell, 1999)

Slowly, areas transitioned to working class neighborhoods. Workers commuted on streetcar lines connecting Independence Square, Englewood, Maywood, Fairmount and Kansas City. Over time, the demand for the streetcar system declined as more people drove automobiles (JMA/Watson, 2000). From 1948 through 1976, the City of Independence annexed key areas, including portions of the study area to prevent Kansas City from expanding eastward. During this period the development pattern of the area changed. The U.S. 24 Highway Corridor began to be dominated by strip commercial trends. Smaller commercial hubs such as Englewood and Fairmount began to struggle and the area saw very little large scale development except for the construction of the Truman Library at the eastern end of the study area. (City of Independence, 2004).

Though the area has a rich history, there are no properties within the study area listed on the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office National Register of Historic Places. However, areas like Fairmount Business District, Mount Washington Cemetery and the previous Fairmount Park site all have historical significance. According to the *Comprehensive Preservation Plan, 2000*, the Fairmount Business District has a high degree of historical integrity. The Fairmount Business District also includes several buildings that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.



Planning History

This is not the first plan to address the study area. This plan acknowledges that despite our community's best efforts, change has been slow and not all plans have been successful. Previous plans continue to live within this document. Lessons learned from their successes and failures form the foundation for this plan's recommendations. Plans for this area date back to the early 1970s, including a plan for the revitalization of the Fairmount Business District. Some of these key founding documents are listed below in chronological order.

Fairmount Business Area Plan

Completed in 1989, this plan builds off of planning efforts in the 1970s. The plan outlines strategies to rejuvenate the Fairmount Business District.

City of Independence Comprehensive Plan

Completed in 1993, this document provides general guidance for future development within the City of Independence and the study area.

Fairmount Neighborhood Strategic Plan

Completed in 1996, this plan provides a series of strategies and action steps to revitalize the Fairmount Neighborhood.

Weed and Seed Strategy

Completed in 1999, this document provides guidance for an existing program focused on law enforcement, community policing, prevention, intervention, and neighborhood restoration.

Historic Preservation Element of the City of Independence Comprehensive Plan

Completed in 2000, this element of the City's Comprehensive Plan outlines the historic importance of the Fairmount Business District and surrounding neighborhoods. The plan outlines potential preservation strategies.

Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan

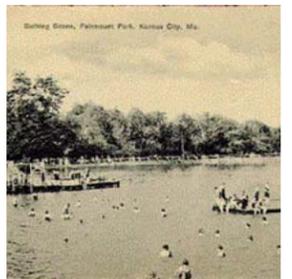
Completed in 2002, this plan provides a long range vision for parks, open space and trails. The plan includes recommendations for Rock Creek and a number of other parks and greenways located in the study area.

Northwest Independence Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy & Satellite Enterprise Zone Plan.

Completed in 2003, this plan outlines existing demographic and economic conditions along with strategies for the economic recovery of the study area.

Comprehensive Housing Survey

A number of housing surveys depicting age and housing condition have been conducted in the study area. These studies provide locations for new infill and revitalization projects. The most recent survey addressing the northern portions of the study area was completed in 2004.



Source: Special Collections
Kansas City Public Library

IV. Challenges

The Corridor contains a number of challenges. To understand these challenges, stakeholder interviews were conducted with elected officials, property owners, long-time residents and local business owners. The information gathered during these interviews was supplemented with information from four public workshops, the Steering Committee and the Technical Advisory Group. The primary challenges are described below:



Lack of Identity

As discussed in the Historic Preservation Plan, 2000, the Corridor suffers from a lack of identity. The historic roots of the area are difficult to identify due to the effects of modern development.

Declining Residential Areas

Recent demographics have resulted in deteriorating conditions and a decreasing demand for housing. Residents in most neighborhoods are aging, which correlates to a smaller family size and a loss in population in most areas. New families often find that suitable housing products are not available. Poorly maintained housing and vacant lots are present in the neighborhoods, which contributes to neighborhood degradation. A large portion of existing housing is renter-occupied. Renters tend to be less interested in making investments in the property.

Declining of Commercial Areas

Older historic business districts such as Fairmount have seen a steady decline as they compete with a growing number of commercial businesses located along the Corridor and in other parts of the region. New emerging corridors and commercial hubs, such as 39th Street, have hastened this decline. As business vacancies increase, the area is prone to vandalism and deteriorating building conditions.

Infrastructure Deficiencies

Previously unincorporated, the area suffers from lack of sidewalks, curbs, gutters, adequate drainage, and sewer systems. This is complicated by the presence of three jurisdictions providing services.

Access and Transportation Issues

As a primary travel corridor, the area accommodates a large number of vehicles. Access control, intersection design, speed of movement, and lack of pedestrian accommodations have resulted in a number of safety issues.

Effectiveness of Existing Programs and Incentives

A number of programs and special districts are in place to revitalize the Corridor. These programs have not resulted in significant redevelopment.

Composition of Existing Businesses

The area suffers from a lack of a diversified business mix. The area is dominated by locally owned, small businesses and there are few commercial anchor businesses.

Local and City Involvement

Many feel the area has not received equal planning attention, political representation, and capital investment as compared to other areas of the City.

Declining Visual Character

Lack of investment in image-building characteristics, such as street trees, wayfinding systems, and older commercial building stock, combined with an overabundance of commercial signage and billboards have affected the visual character of the area.

Quality of Education

The quality of education was identified as a concern. Many stakeholders perceive the presence of the Kansas City School District as having a negative impact on neighborhoods within the western half of the U.S. 24 Highway Corridor. Stakeholders felt that this perception discourages home acquisition, investment and appreciation. Concerns also center on the quality of individual schools and diminishing education quality from the elementary level through junior and high school levels.

V. Planning Objectives

A number of planning objectives will be used to guide implementation of the plan and are described below.

Economy

1. Revitalize the Fairmount Business District by improving aesthetics, expanding the district, providing new housing and attracting new businesses.
2. Retain existing businesses and attract key developers and businesses to assist in redevelopment and initiate new developments.
3. Provide attractive site locations and an improved economic climate to the business community.
4. Develop new mixed-use activity centers that focus on development and discourage commercial strip development.
5. Increase availability and accessibility to meaningful employment for area residents.
6. Increase tourism activity along the U.S. 24 Highway Corridor.
7. Work cooperatively with adjacent communities such as Sugar Creek to promote the economic development of the region.

Neighborhoods, Housing, and Community

1. Revitalize and rebuild neighborhoods that contain deteriorated property or infrastructure through a cooperative partnership with owners, tenants, and the City.
2. Improve the cleanliness, attractiveness, security, and marketability of the adjacent neighborhoods.
3. Enhance neighborhoods and housing areas for all income levels.
4. Reduce the current number of non-maintained properties with the areas to the average City level, eliminate or rehabilitate uninhabitable housing units, and decrease the rate of deterioration.
5. Reverse the trend towards rental occupancy and create opportunities for home ownership within the neighborhood.
6. Increase neighborhood services to the area, especially senior and health services.
7. Improve the social health of the community by supporting drug prevention and school programs.

8. Strengthen the leadership capacity of neighborhoods to implement Action Plan elements.
9. Work to reduce the negative perception of local schools by improving neighborhood access to high quality education opportunities.

Infrastructure and Transportation

1. Upgrade the general appearance of U.S. 24 Highway and other collectors within and leading into the community.
2. Create a series of gateways into the community including new signage and landscape elements.
3. Slow down the flow of traffic through Fairmount, and control the flow of traffic for access and safety through the remaining corridor.
4. Improve infrastructure including sidewalks, water, and sewer services.
5. Improve the pedestrian environment by creating walkable environments accessible to all.
6. Make infrastructure improvements that are necessary to protect property values and eliminate public safety hazards such as blind street corners and intersections, dead end streets without barricades, and areas of stormwater runoff accumulations and erosion.

Natural Resources

1. Protect and restore natural resources, parks, and greenways.
2. Utilize a natural greenway system to provide a break from the intensity of the Corridor, separate commercial uses, and form the basis for a local trail system linking parks, neighborhoods and activity centers.

Implementation

1. Develop a vision for the Corridor that is internalized and implemented by the community.
2. Develop a clear, phased and attainable action plan.
3. Develop a process to monitor the success and progress of the plan.
4. Create a plan that markets the area and its future.

VI. Content of Plan

In addition to **Chapter 1 – The Vision**, the remaining chapters outline the general planning process and the building blocks of the Corridor Plan:

Chapter 2 – The People and the Economy describes the study area’s existing and future demographic makeup and the resulting economic implications.

Chapter 3 – The Foundation describes the existing physical conditions within the study area.

Chapter 4 – The Building Blocks describes the study area’s opportunities and possible development scenarios.

Chapter 5 – The Framework Plan provides principles and policies for development and redevelopment within the Corridor, residential neighborhoods, the Fairmount Business District, mixed-use centers, commercial areas, gateways and the transportation system. Four potential redevelopment scenarios are provided to illustrate the implementation of the principles and policies.

Chapter 6 – The Implementation describes the tools and actions necessary to implement the plan.

VII. Process

The City of Independence, the City of Sugar Creek, a Technical Advisory Group, consulting firms and a Steering Committee / Citizens Advisory Group worked for 12 months to develop a framework for change for the Corridor. The Steering Committee, representative of the community, consisted of residents, local businesses, community groups, adjacent municipalities, the Truman Library and BP. The broader community participated in the process through four public workshops/open houses, stakeholder interviews and an interactive website. The result is the *U.S. 24 Highway Corridor Study*. The process consisted of three phases each including a series of Technical Advisory Group and Steering Committee meetings.

<p style="text-align: center;">Phase I: Inventory + Analysis</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Vision and Goals Development Identification of Existing Conditions and Issues Opportunities and Constraints Analysis Identification of Redevelopment Areas *Stakeholder Interviews</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase II: Alternative Framework Plans</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*Technical Advisory Group, Steering Committee and Public Workshops Alternative Framework Plan Development Alternative Concepts for Redevelopment Areas</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Phase III: Implementation Strategy</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Preferred Plan Refinement Development of Implementation Tools Development of Action Plan *Public Open House and Workshops *Planning and Zoning Board Hearing *City Council Hearing</p>
