

## Introduction and Background

*Identify and implement economic development & marketing strategies that will transform the Square into a destination place of which we may all be proud. Strategies will highlight the character of our community and attract businesses, neighbors, and visitors to an attractive and unique place to visit, shop, live and do business.*



## Independence Square Revitalization Plan



## 1.0 Introduction and Background

In the summer of 2000, the City of Independence adopted its first *Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*. This plan identified over 40 recommendations for utilizing the City's historic and cultural resources to expand economic and community development initiatives in Independence. The number one priority identified by community stakeholders was revitalization of the Independence Courthouse Square. Specifically, the Plan recommended that the Independence Square "should be the subject of an intense revitalization effort undertaken by a partnership comprised of the City, the private sector, and state and federal entities.

This recommendation supplemented the findings of the 1998 *Independence Tourism Strategy*, which identified the Square as one of the four "pillars" of Independence tourism-related economic development; and called for creating the Square as a focal point for tourism and retail activities. This strategy suggests that establishing the Square as a starting point, where visitors can be effectively linked to attractive retail establishments, amenities, and other pillars of tourism (including Truman history, Mormon history and Frontier Trail history related sites), is the key to generating an increase in the overall number of visitors to our community, and an increase in their length of stay and spending. This finding was founded on the results of the 1998 *Independence Historic Square Development Strategy* and the 1998 *Independence Lodging Market Analysis*, both of which were commissioned by the City of Independence as supplements to the 1998 *Independence Tourism Strategy*.

In March of 2001, in direct response to the recommendations outlined in the *Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* and the *Independence Tourism Strategy*, the City issued a call to community stakeholders to form a partnership to lead revitalization of the Independence Courthouse Square. A steering committee of 11 stakeholders was pooled from representatives of the Independence Square Association, the Square Tax Benefit

District and the Independence Square Redevelopment Corporation. Through months of intensive planning, this committee, and its partners in revitalization, has worked to put together the following comprehensive economic development strategy for promoting redevelopment, beautifying the streetscapes, strengthening existing businesses, attracting new businesses and residents, and unifying future efforts in preserving the Independence Square as the centerpiece of our community.



**Figure 1:  
Study Area**

# Independence Square Revitalization Plan



## 1.0 Introduction and Background

### The Planning Process

The Independence Square Steering Committee was guided in its planning process by the following mission statement:

*Identify and implement economic development and marketing strategies that will transform the Square into a destination place of which we may all be proud. Strategies will highlight the character of our community and attract businesses, neighbors, and visitors to an attractive and unique place to visit, shop, live and do business.*

This mission was further divided by the Committee into a list of broad goals to be addressed by the revitalization strategy:

- Beautify the Square
- Retain the uniqueness of the Square
- Make the Square a vibrant, active and bustling place
- Provide public amenities for a more enjoyable experience for shoppers and visitors so they will stay longer at the Square
- Improve the perception that residents, regional shoppers, and investors have of the Square
- Ensure that Square businesses and property owners are profitable
- Accomplish these goals in a unified approach, combining and coordinating the efforts of businesses, property owners, agencies, and government in one single partnership

Of particular value to the Steering Committee discussions and the development of its mission and this strategy were the findings of previous studies conducted by the City including:

- 1984 *Independence Square 353 Plan*
- 1998 *Independence Tourism Strategy*
- *Historic Independence Square Development Strategy* (1998)
- *Lodging Market Analysis* (1998)
- 2000 *Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*

These documents articulate the intended future development of the Square, each from its own unique perspective, and have formed the basis for various actions already undertaken in an effort to beautify and further revitalize the Square. An analysis of their separate goals and objectives provided a useful starting point for development of a comprehensive strategy.

Also useful in initiating this planning process were the results of an opinion survey conducted in April 2001 by the Steering Committee. The survey, which was sent to all Square business and property owners, identified those issues considered most pressing in terms of future success and improvement of the Square area.

With a mission in place and preliminary research gathered, the Steering Committee established four additional subcommittees comprised of Square business owners, property owners, and interested citizens to address specific needs of the Independence Square. Working hand-in-hand with City staff and a variety of stakeholders, these committees brainstormed requirements for Square revitalization in terms of Economic Restructuring, Traffic and Parking, Land Use and Design, Marketing and Promotions. Through months of planning these committees developed plan recommendations that were later presented to the Steering Committee for approval and incorporation into this document. The following provides a summary of work contributed by these committees:

### Economic Restructuring Committee

The Economic Restructuring Committee was instrumental in compiling a preliminary economic development incentive package to supplement the recommendations and implementation program of the Square revitalization Strategy. These proposed incentives and assistance programs were presented for discussion at a public forum in July 2001 entitled "The Buck Starts Here". Over 60 individual property



Members of the Steering Committee and City Staff review photos for the Visual Preference Study.

and business owners were in attendance at this forum and provided input regarding the usefulness of various economic development incentives.

### Traffic and Parking Committee

The purpose of the Traffic and Parking Committee was to address current problems related to customer and employee parking and traffic circulation within the Square study area. The committee developed specific recommendations for improving parking conditions which have been incorporated into the General Plan Provisions, Character District Development and Implementation Sections of this document. Committee recommendations include:

- Improve public parking lots through repair and enhancements, better signage, lighting and security
- Educate business owners on parking issues and available options
- Develop an incentive program to encourage Square employees to utilize existing public lots
- Develop a plan for location of common trash dumpster facilities
- Increase overall parking availability
- Investigate options for changing circulation patterns to encourage appropriate traffic around and through the Square study area



### Land Use and Design Committee

The Land Use and Design Committee was charged with evaluating current land use and design patterns against the objectives of Square revitalization. Committee efforts included development of a proposed use strategy to encourage pedestrian traffic through appropriate use of buildings in and around the Square's core retail area. This preliminary work formed the basis of the Square Land Use recommendations in the *General Recommendations* section of this document, and was instrumental in guiding development of an implementation strategy for recommendations pertaining to a Square Overlay Zone, Character District Development and Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority/Chapter 353 Tax Abatement.

The discussion and recommendations of this committee were also instrumental in the development of the Independence Square Design Guidelines which have been included as part of this document. These guidelines were the direct result of an initial visioning meeting conducted by the Design Subcommittee in May of 2001. Public input gathered from this meeting provided useful feedback regarding existing problems and future design recommendations related to Square architecture, signage, streetscapes, gateways, and parking.

### Public Review Process

The *Independence Square Revitalization Plan* was reviewed by the Heritage Commission on January 6, 2005. The Heritage Commission unanimously endorsed the plan.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on January 26, 2005. The Planning Commission recommended that the *Independence Square Revitalization Plan* be adopted as an amendment to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

On February 22, 2005, the City Council approved Resolution No. 5154 which amended the City's Comprehensive Plan to include the *Independence Square Revitalization Plan*.

### Planning for the Future

With this revitalization strategy in place, efforts will turn to developing an organization that has the leadership capacity to facilitate implementation of a long term revitalization approach for the Square. A city-wide campaign to gather membership and financial support for revitalization of the City's historic commercial core and tourism hub should be the focus for stakeholders and community leaders in the coming months. The success of this strategy ultimately depends on the establishment of a unified organization of leaders, volunteers, donors and members who are committed to achieving and maintaining the objectives of this plan and those of future planning efforts.

*Independence Square Revitalization Plan: A Comprehensive Revitalization and Development Strategy* is intended to serve as a stepping stone for this organization. While its recommendations are well researched and appropriate today, it will require continual review and update if it is expected to remain a useful tool for guiding Square revitalization efforts. Community stakeholders should not look at the Square Revitalization Strategy as a static plan to be administered verbatim, but instead as a framework for the process of developing the specific policies, programs and actions that have been prescribed. It is through this process that the governmental and private resources of the community will be brought together to address issues of economics, marketing, urban design and beautification, historic preservation, land use, traffic circulation and parking for the Independence Square area; and it is through the collaborative efforts of all organizations and agencies that revitalization of the historic Independence Courthouse Square will be achieved.