

## Analysis of Existing Fabric

*In order to effectively plan for the future we must gain an understanding of our history. We must analyze the complex underlying structure and fabric that makes up our City's historic commercial center.*





### 2.0 Existing Urban Fabric

The Independence Square has been the City's commercial center since the City was founded and the first Jackson County Courthouse was constructed ca. 1827. Today, the streets of the area continue to occupy the town's original grid system of rectangular blocks oriented on the cardinal directions and centered on a courthouse square. As illustrated by a comparison of *Existing Urban Fabric* and *Historic Fabric* (Figure 2 & Figure 3 respectively), a basic network of narrow streets, short blocks and alleyways has remained intact, as have most of the historic commercial buildings located around the Square proper. This quality and concentration of urban fabric is a characteristic feature found in most vibrant, walkable downtowns throughout America and will be an integral component of Square revitalization efforts.

The *Figure 2, Existing Urban Fabric*, demonstrates how past attempts at renewal have significantly altered both the historic and the distinctly urban fabric of the Square. Demolition and construction of new buildings, as well as alterations to infrastructure and the aggregation of lots have all contributed to the loss of character and identity on the Square during the late 20th century. Additionally, the gradual expansion of government and civic operations in the area immediately surrounding the Square has resulted in a new auto-oriented fabric of contemporary institutional buildings and their associated parking lots.

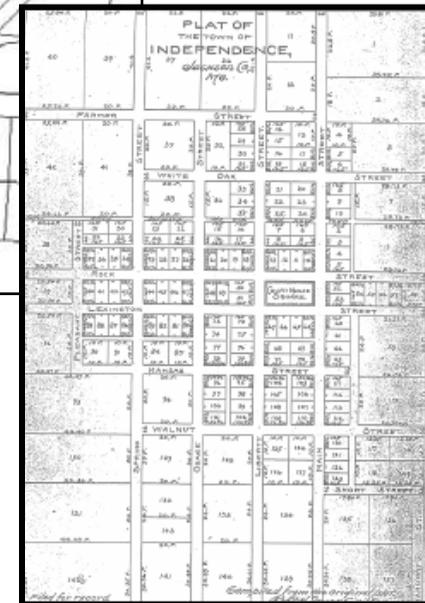
Analysis of the existing urban fabric drawing has provided valuable insight concerning the attributes of the Square that will contribute positively to revitalization efforts, and the obstacles that must be overcome in order for redevelopment to be successful. For example, the Square can find strength in its significant concentration of historic architecture and quality street frontage, especially in the area immediately surrounding the Courthouse and on adjoining blocks, as contiguous storefronts that are rich in character are vital to the creation of valuable pedestrian experiences.



**Figure 2  
Existing Urban  
Fabric**

On the other hand, at present the Square exists almost as an island of its own, surrounded by vacant lots and disconnected from its historic residential neighborhoods by a high-traffic business loop. The physical linkages of the Square to its surroundings have been broken, such that the Square is often perceived as isolated and unused.

**Figure 3  
Historic Fabric  
1827 Town Plat**



# Independence Square Revitalization Plan



## 2.1 Regional & Historic Context

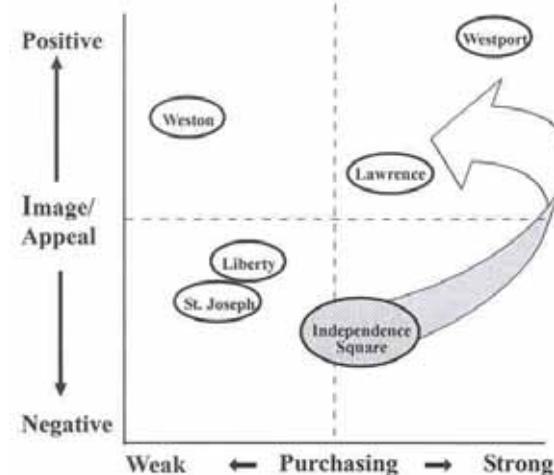
### 2.1 Regional & Historic Context

Located in an urban area that is rapidly growing with quality places to live, work, shop, dine, and explore culture, revitalization of the Independence Square is going to require establishing a niche for commercial, office and residential uses within an existing regional Main Street marketplace. The 1998 *Historic Independence Square Development Strategy* conducted an analysis of the Square's situation and potential as compared to five regional historic shopping district competitors located within 60-70 miles of the Square. These areas included Weston, St. Joseph, Liberty, Westport and Lawrence, Kansas.

As illustrated in Figure 4, at the time the analysis was conducted, the Independence Square was positioned in the lower ranges of the image/appeal scale based on its existing business mix and character. While the study also concluded that the Square shares a strong setting for potential purchasing power based on its large surrounding resident base and existing visitation levels, new regional competition emerging from nearby Lee's Summit, Parkville, Downtown Overland Park, and the River Market now threatens to compromise this power and further weaken the Square's position in the marketplace.

This 1998 analysis of regional and historic contexts for the Square confirms what has been widely accepted since the onset of this planning process; successful revitalization of the Independence Square will be founded in the promotion of the area's unique historic significance and character. While some Main Streets benefit from the appeal of a water front, chain retailers or upscale demographics, the unique appeal of the Independence Square is its rich and varied history. In addition to serving as the social, cultural, and economic center of the city from ca. 1827 through the 1950's, the Independence Square has played a significant role in three pivotal periods of American history--first serving as a trail head during the

**Figure 4**  
**1998 Historic Independence Square Development Strategy Analysis of Competitive Historic Districts Retail Perception**



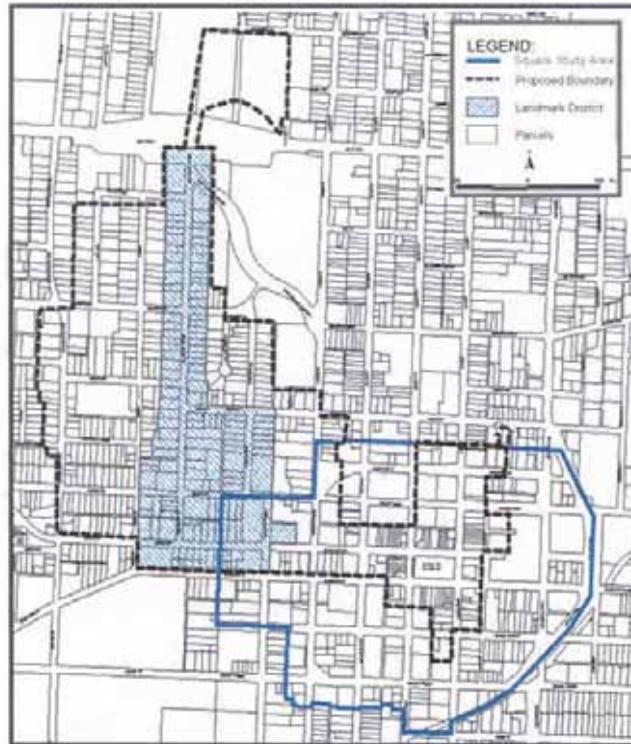
period of westward migration that united the country from east to west, then as a virtual battleground during the Civil War that divided our country from north to south, and finally as the hometown headquarters for Harry S Truman, the man from Independence who led our nation to become a world superpower during his service as President of the United States.

This rich and varied history, and the eclectic character of its 19th and early 20th century architecture, has earned the Square distinction as one of the four pillars of Independence's tourism industry. According to the 1998 *Independence Tourism Strategy* and the *Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*, promotion of Square history represents a valuable economic development opportunity that is unique to our community. Resulting plans for development of a

Visitors Orientation Center in the historic Jackson County Courthouse will be instrumental in making Independence's commercial core the hub of all tourism activity. Plan recommendations must be designed to further leverage Square assets and opportunities to generate the support of local residents. It should all begin at the Square, where visitors and residents alike can experience the City's heritage, quality amenities, specialty venues and meaningful links to the other pillars of our community.



**Figure 5**  
**Regional Main Street Competitors**



The National Park Service’s current effort to expand the Harry S Truman National Historic Landmark District to include the Square provides further reason to base revitalization on sound historic preservation practices. Figure 7 shows the proposed expansion of the District as it relates to the Square Study Area. Should the proposed expansion of the Landmark District be approved, all Contributing Buildings located within this boundary would automatically be eligible to earn Federal & State Historic Tax Credits for rehabilitation work that complies with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. Additionally, because National Historic Landmark designation is the highest distinction attainable by a historic resource, the Independence Square would be in a position to compete for other forms of funding and technical



assistance from state and national economic development and historic preservation organizations and agencies. National Historic Landmark District designation of the Square should be considered a pivotal component of revitalization efforts.

**Figure 7**  
**Independence Square**  
**Proposed NHL Expansion Area**



### 2.2 Character District Analysis

An analysis of Square Study Area resources resulted in the identification of eight *character districts*, or geographic areas defined as having a common or unifying characteristic or history of development. As a part of the whole, each individual district contributes both strengths and weaknesses to the character of the Square commercial core. By recognizing where the true and potential character of the Square lies and by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each distinct character district, this strategy can more accurately identify the most basic of design considerations needed to support Square revitalization, increase understanding and appreciation for area assets, set priorities for future redevelopment efforts, and encourage a unified vision for what the character of Independence Square can be.



#### Courthouse Square District

##### Character Definition

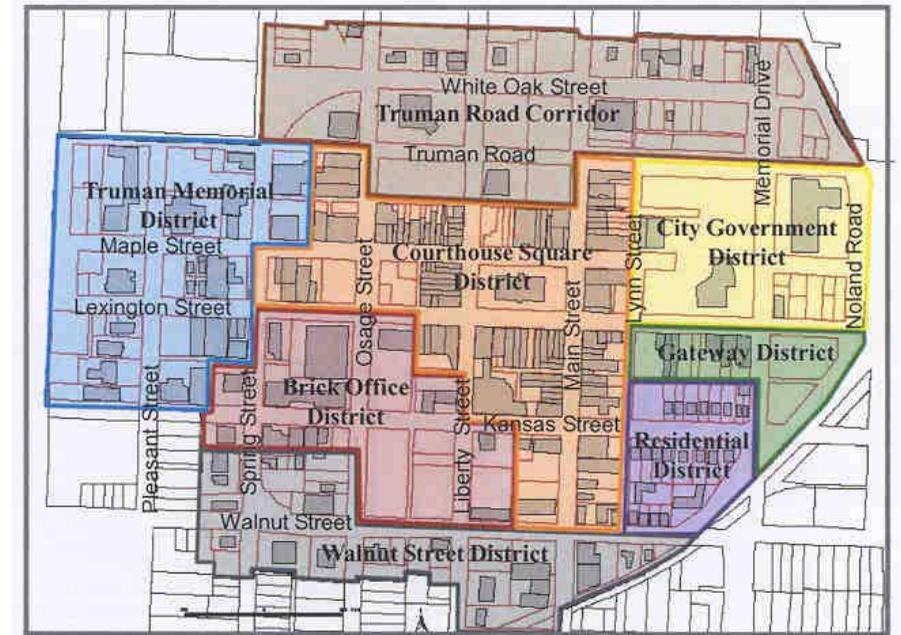
- Focal point of the Square study area
- Comprised of historic Jackson County Courthouse, the Courthouse Square proper, and adjacent historic commercial buildings that contribute to the Square's historic character and architectural history
- Encompasses existing retail frontage and mixed use redevelopment opportunities
- Maintains traditional patterns of building set back, height, material and alignment of streetscapes

##### Strengths

- Concentration and quality of significant 19th & 20th century architecture
- Abundant use of rich materials including brick, stone, terra cotta, cast iron, leaded and stained glass
- Opportunities for quality infill development
- Recent substantial rehabilitation of historic buildings for commercial and residential uses
- Opportunity for creating public/green space around Courthouse site
- Opportunity for creation of attractive public spaces using existing alleyways and secondary pathways
- Improved parking lots and reproduction street lighting
- Sidewalks

##### Weaknesses

- Existing vacant storefronts and boarded-up or vacant upper floor space
- Deferred maintenance and insensitive alterations to historic buildings



- Lack of public and green spaces and other amenities needed to support a pedestrian friendly environment such as seating, bicycle racks, and public restrooms
- Expanse of paved surfaces, combined with an absence of greenery, street trees and other types of pedestrian shelter
- Poor street signage and wayfinding; and poor regulation of business signage
- Lack of unifying design features that give the area continuity and a sense of place
- Poor screening of trash receptacles and utilities
- Insensitive treatment of rear building facades and secondary entrances





### Truman Road Corridor

#### Character Definition

- Northern boundary of Square study area
- Product of Urban Renewal and later suburban type developments
- Provides primary east-west traffic route, by-passing Square
- Provides link between Square commercial core and surrounding neighborhoods to the north
- Remaining architecture is predominantly modern in design and construction material

#### Strengths

- Available parking supply and potential for creation of on-street parking to meet demands of Square area
- Substantial opportunities for redevelopment of City-owned properties within this corridor
- Existing green space at east and west ends of district and opportunity for creation of new open space areas with infill development
- Existing destination points including the Walking Trail Pavilion and Civil War Battlefield marker at the northwest and southwest corners of Truman Road and Main Street



#### Weaknesses

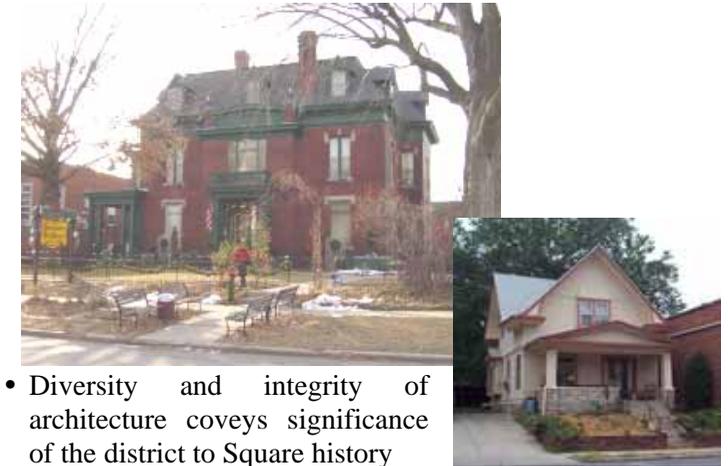
- Nontraditional building stock is not compatible with the historic character of the Square area
- Vast expanse of poorly maintained surface parking lots
- Streetscapes void of enhancements, adequate sidewalks and pedestrian friendly amenities discourage pedestrian activity within this district
- Poor signage, lighting, and lack of crosswalks discourages use of available public parking north of Truman Road.
- East-west automobile traffic on Truman Road discourages pedestrian activity to and from Courthouse Square District
- Existing vacant lots and buildings

### Truman Memorial District



#### Character Definition

- Encompasses all entryways to the Square from the west
- Maintains the historic relationship between the Square and its surrounding neighborhood to the west
- Existing resources demonstrate early evolution of area from a traditional 19th century suburban neighborhood to an urban environment of residences, churches, a public school, civic and commercial structures



- Diversity and integrity of architecture conveys significance of the district to Square history

#### Strengths

- Historic and architectural significance of District resources
- Traditional patterns of building set back, height, rich material and alignment of streetscapes have been preserved
- Connection to Truman Walking Trail sites
- Recent substantial rehabilitation of multiple district properties including the Truman Memorial Building, Palmer Junior High School, the Garvey Car Dealership (411 W. Maple), and the Serendipity Bed and Breakfast (116 S. Pleasant)
- Enhancement of street lighting along Maple Street
- Historic district signage for the Truman Landmark District

#### Weaknesses

- Lack of streetscape enhancements and pedestrian amenities needed to funnel retail and tourist traffic to and from the Square i.e. seating, areas of pedestrian shelter, enhanced crosswalks
- Poor signage and enhancements marking western entries into the Square commercial core
- Areas of poorly maintained sidewalks
- Lack of public/green spaces



### Gateway District

#### Character Definition

- District boundaries define eastern entry into the Square from Noland Road and Lexington Street
- Area character decided by past Urban Renewal efforts that included development of the City Government District and construction of the Square traffic loop
- Primarily comprised of Hiram Young Park (along Noland between Lexington and Walnut) and remaining commercial buildings that mark the eastern edge of the Square's historic commercial core
- Remaining buildings continue to maintain traditional patterns of building set back, height, design, and construction material consistent with Square history

#### Strengths

- Climbing topography of East Lexington Street combined with the green space of Hiram Young Park and visibility from Noland Road offers opportunity to create a significant gateway to the Square from the east
- Architecture within this district is consistent with the character of the historic Square
- Infill opportunities along the south side of east Lexington

- Opportunities to increase on-street parking capacity to support park use and Square area activities
- Proximity to City Government District on the north and the Residential District on the south, which provide potential customer base for Lexington Street and commercial property redevelopment

#### Weaknesses

- Lexington Street is not appropriately signed as a gateway to the Square
- Park signage and visibility of Hiram Young monument not adequate to generate patronage
- Lack of park amenities including water supply, seating, lighting, patron shelter, playground/recreation equipment, and screening from Noland Road traffic discourage use of park
- Lack of streetscape enhancements to encourage pedestrian traffic to and from the Square commercial core including seating, signage, areas of pedestrian shelter, pedestrian scale landscaping
- Deferred maintenance and improvement of existing properties
- Existing vacant lots where buildings were demolished
- Surface parking lot at Lynn and Lexington in need of maintenance

### City Government District

#### Character Definition

- Area comprised primarily of government facilities including City Hall, the Independence Police Department building, and surface parking to support municipal operations
- Modern, suburban type building and landscape design dominate the character of this district
- Remnant commercial buildings at Maple Street and Lynn Street, and a church building at Memorial Drive and

Lexington, allude to past character of this area that was altered by renewal efforts of the late 19th century

#### Strengths

- Abundance of parking resources to support Square activities on evenings and weekends
- Available land area to construct parking structure in the future should there be a demand for it
- Recent infrastructure improvements to enhance public parking and pedestrian experience with lighting, signage, and landscaping
- City maintenance standards insure upkeep of public property
- Link to Square commercial core through remnant structures at Maple Street and Lynn Street that maintain traditional design, setback and materials

#### Weaknesses

- Traffic circulation within this district is awkward and street grid is not in keeping with traditional pattern of the Square
- Area architecture design and placement is not consistent with historic character of the Square
- Vast expanses of paved surface area detract from Square character
- Historic commercial structures within area are underutilized and do not contribute to Square revitalization



## Independence Square Revitalization Plan



## 2.2 Character District Analysis

### Residential District

#### Character Definition

- Remnant of larger residential neighborhood that historically encompassed the southeast corner of the City's commercial center
- Neighborhood character altered by Urban Renewal and the construction of the Square traffic loop in the 1970's
- Elevated topography, traditional neighborhood character, and the diverse architectural style of its buildings make this district a prominent and character defining asset of the Square area as a whole
- Residential buildings date between ca. 1870-1930
- Rich landscape treatments including steep lots, private walks, stone retaining walls, mature trees and greenery
- Considered to be an eligible National Register Historic District



#### Strengths

- Visibility of district from the southern and eastern gateways to the Courthouse Square
- Concentration of quality historic residential architecture
- Proximity to Square commercial core and Hiram Young Park

- Mature landscape design
- Opportunity for infill housing development on existing vacant lots

#### Weaknesses

- Deferred maintenance of buildings and past conversion of single family homes to apartment buildings
- Limited parking resources
- Poor sidewalks and streetscape infrastructure (lighting, curbs, utilities)
- Impact of Urban Renewal infrastructure developments on south and east edges of Residential District and parking lot development at northeast corner of Kansas and Lynn Streets
- Proximity to streetscape blight along Lynn Street alleyway

### Brick Office District

#### Character Definition

- Characterized by the many modern brick professional office buildings developed here since mid 20th century
- Area buildings and large surface parking lots separate the Square commercial core from existing neighborhoods to the south and west
- Existing building stock houses primarily city, county and federal government offices

#### Strengths

- Abundance of parking resources to support evening and weekend activities on the Square
- Infill development opportunities on existing vacant lots
- Quality and permanence of building stock
- Building setback and brick construction are reasonably compatible with existing Square character
- Maintained sidewalks
- Opportunity for creation of effective public spaces



#### Weaknesses

- Vast expanses of paved, unscreened surface lots that have not been maintained
- Existing vacant buildings
- Lack of streetscape enhancements and pedestrian amenities to encourage foot traffic to and from the Square commercial core, through the Brick Office District
- Modern architecture does not blend with historic character of the Courthouse Square
- Area is basically void of green space and landscape treatments
- Existing Santa Fe Trail historic marker at Liberty and Kansas Streets needs enhancement





### Walnut Street District



#### Character Definition

- Forms southern boundary of Square Study Area and historic commercial core, and houses three primary gateways to the Square from Walnut at Spring, Noland and Main Streets
- Developed as a mix-use area of professional office and housing (west end) as a result of late 19th century Urban Renewal efforts
- Architecture is predominantly modern, suburban type development; however some remnant historic residential buildings have survived

#### Strengths

- Link and proximity to proposed National Frontier Trails Center redevelopment and other area historic sites to the south

- Proximity to residential customer base to the South and commercial core to the north gives area flexibility for redevelopment
- Opportunities for infill construction on existing vacant lots
- Opportunity to increase on-street parking resources along Walnut within this district
- Recent substantial investment in the rehabilitation of area properties including the Kritser House (115 W. Walnut) and the Operative Plasterers & Cement Masons Union Hall (301 S. Main)

#### Weaknesses

- Existing unmaintained vacant lots and buildings have created area blight
- Area architecture and suburban type development is not compatible with the character of the Square and lacks a consistent approach within the district
- Unimproved infrastructure and lack of streetscape improvements and pedestrian enhancements make this area formidable for foot traffic
- Current pattern of traffic along Walnut deters pedestrian traffic to the Square from the Walnut Street District and areas to the south





**2.3 SWOT Analysis**

SWOT is an acronym which stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. In planning for revitalization, SWOT analysis is an effective and objective way for a historic commercial center like the Independence Square to evaluate how well it has been dealing with its weaknesses, and capitalizing on its opportunities. Generally, a SWOT analysis is undertaken prior to the establishment of a business, or at any time when a major expenditure or investment may be required. In anticipation of future investment in the Independence Square as a result of this planning process, participants have compiled the following observations regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the Square and the threats and opportunities that it is currently facing.

**Figure 9**  
**SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Current revitalization of residential and historic buildings</li> <li>▪ Age and historic value of buildings</li> <li>▪ History of the area</li> <li>▪ Hiram Young Park areas and green spaces</li> <li>▪ Established festivals and events</li> <li>▪ Nearby Landmark District</li> <li>▪ Walking trails</li> <li>▪ Locally owned businesses</li> <li>▪ New Signage</li> <li>▪ New restaurants</li> <li>▪ Unique specialty businesses</li> <li>▪ Walkable environment</li> <li>▪ Free parking</li> <li>▪ 2,000 Square area employees</li> <li>▪ Farmers' market</li> <li>▪ Support from City, Tourism, Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>▪ Established Square associations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No Marketing Plan</li> <li>▪ A lot of plans</li> <li>▪ Size of budget</li> <li>▪ Perception of lack of parking</li> <li>▪ Signage and wayfinding weak</li> <li>▪ Many groups make attendance and participation difficult and divide efforts</li> <li>▪ High vacancy rate</li> <li>▪ Safety perception</li> <li>▪ Empty storefronts</li> <li>▪ Maintenance of buildings</li> <li>▪ Lack of ground floor retail space</li> <li>▪ Mix of building styles</li> <li>▪ Lots of asphalt</li> <li>▪ Lack of direct connection to freeways</li> <li>▪ Business selection and diversity</li> <li>▪ Vacant lots</li> <li>▪ Linkage to other parts of City</li> <li>▪ No design guidelines</li> <li>▪ Lack of entry way to Square</li> <li>▪ Demographics around the Square</li> <li>▪ Inconsistent business hours</li> <li>▪ Perception about events</li> <li>▪ Lack of vision for Square</li> <li>▪ Inappropriate use of retail buildings</li> <li>▪ Poor lighting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Number of Square area employees</li> <li>▪ Traffic from Truman and Noland Roads</li> <li>▪ Attraction of more residents</li> <li>▪ Marketing Plan for the Square</li> <li>▪ Business Directory</li> <li>▪ Visitors</li> <li>▪ Design Guidelines</li> <li>▪ Incentive Programs</li> <li>▪ Technical Assistance</li> <li>▪ Workshops</li> <li>▪ Establishment of Gateways</li> <li>▪ Maintenance &amp; clean-up efforts</li> <li>▪ Parking</li> <li>▪ Access of other organizations</li> <li>▪ Extended business hours</li> <li>▪ Improved safety perception</li> <li>▪ Links to other attractions and neighborhood</li> <li>▪ Committees and Work Plans</li> <li>▪ Communication</li> <li>▪ Infill and artisan live/works spaces</li> <li>▪ Use of website</li> <li>▪ Adopt Rehab Code</li> <li>▪ Visitor Orientation Center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cost to City of public improvements</li> <li>▪ Cost of remodels and renovation</li> <li>▪ Competition from big box development</li> <li>▪ Independence Center</li> <li>▪ Limited budget</li> <li>▪ Perception of the Square</li> <li>▪ Increasing regional competition</li> </ul>



**2.4 Land Ownership Analysis**

The success of a comprehensive economic development strategy for the Independence Square will depend on the availability of economic incentives that are capable of both leveraging substantial private investment, and of raising funds needed for public infrastructure improvements.

An analysis of the current pattern of land ownership of Square area properties reveals that tax-related economic development incentives may have a limited ability to encourage redevelopment; a conclusion drawn from the following observations:

- 1) Currently, more than 54.6% of the study area properties (by square footage) are owned by non-taxpaying entities.
- 2) The substantial amount of public and institutionally owned properties has resulted in both a limited tax base (sales and real estate), and limited opportunities for private investment. While the substantial amount of city, county, federal, civic and church owned property limits opportunities for increasing private investment and tax base, these types of uses supply a substantial customer base to the Square. In addition to the patrons visiting these facilities, it is estimated that they employ more than 2000 individuals who work within walking distance of Square commerce.
- 3) As indicated on the adjacent map, six privately held properties currently benefit from the 10 year 100% (plus an additional 15 years at 50%) property tax abatement offered by the 1984 Square 353 Redevelopment Plan.

The *Land Ownership Analysis* clearly demonstrates that one of the greatest opportunities for using tax-based economic incentives to drive downtown revitalization efforts may involve the leveraging of City-owned land for private investment.



**Figure 10**  
Independence Square Land Ownership Map  
c. 2001