



Section 2a: Community Development

Introduction

From a planning standpoint, any community is in a constant state of change. At any given point in time, a town is either growing and developing new businesses and residents, or shrinking in size, population, and job opportunities. To be sure, a community is never static in terms of development. Due to a number of factors detailed in this chapter, Lathrop is fortunate to have been on the “growth” side of this equation for the past several years; and this trend is projected to continue at an exponentially greater rate in the future. As such, it is vital for the community to take proactive steps to manage future growth in a way that meets the development goals of the city, while providing the maximum benefits for current and future residents.

This section of the Lathrop Comprehensive Plan will examine the issues impacting the community development of Lathrop today, and offer a set of goals and objectives to achieve the community’s vision for Lathrop’s continued, managed growth.

Community Development in Lathrop Today

The development trends of Lathrop cannot be fully examined without first addressing population migration trends in the region, with particular regard to the changes in and around the Kansas City metropolitan area. Kansas City, like most major metropolitan areas in the country, has witnessed widespread population loss as the result of a trend known as suburbanization. Suburbanization, or the depopulation of a city’s urban core in favor of a less-densely populated hinterland, is generally characterized by the migration of urban dwellers away from the city along major transportation corridors. As more land is developed, the distance people settle from the urban core increases; hence the “suburbs” continue to radiate out in concentric rings around the city.

The issue of suburbanization of the Kansas City metropolitan area is of particular interest to the residents of Lathrop. The community is located approximately 32 miles northeast of downtown Kansas City, Missouri, and lies within its metropolitan statistical area (see Appendix B Map 2). More importantly, Lathrop is located along Interstate 35, a major north-south route servicing the entire midsection of the nation, and a primary transportation corridor in and out of Kansas City proper. Examining the development trends along I-35 reveals a clear picture of the impact of suburbanization from the Kansas City core. At approximately 15 miles from the downtown area, the community of Liberty was the first city along the Interstate to be significantly impacted by migrating populations. Between 1980 and 2004, Liberty’s population



New development in downtown Lathrop.

grew by 76%. Even more astounding, the community of Kearney, eight miles further north on I-35, witnessed a 384% increase for the same time period, effectively quadrupling the size of the city. Already, the small community of Holt, six miles past Kearney, has seen its population increase from 276 in 1980 to an estimated 434 in 2004 (57%), with several new housing developments planned.

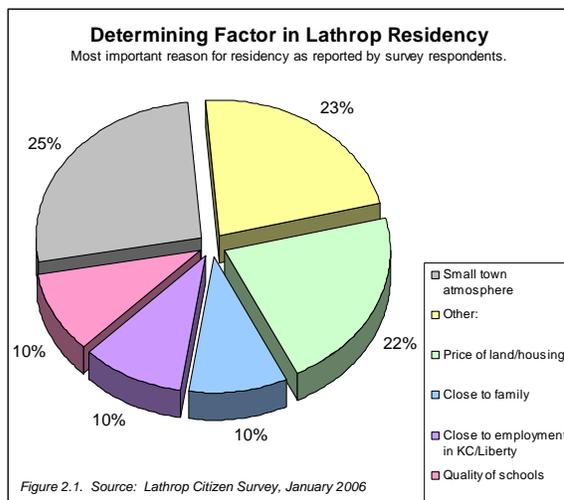
The next suburbanization ring can be logically placed at 35 miles out from downtown Kansas City, encompassing Lathrop. Not surprisingly, Lathrop has already begun to see the effects of suburbanization on its population, growing from 1,268 in 1980 to an estimated 2,302 in 2004, an 82% increase (see Section 6b: Demographics for more information). With population growth, of course, supporting businesses and services must follow. Without question, Lathrop is situated in a prime geographic location to potentially experience explosive growth and development in the next ten years.

Having established that, in all likelihood, Lathrop will grow substantially in the next decade, the first step in effectively planning for the future is an examination of current development trends and public perceptions regarding community development. Community development can be broken into two broad categories; **economic development**, which will be addressed first, corresponds to the availability and attraction of retail and industrial firms to provide goods, services, and jobs to residents, while **civic development** addresses housing stock, public services and geographic extent of the community.

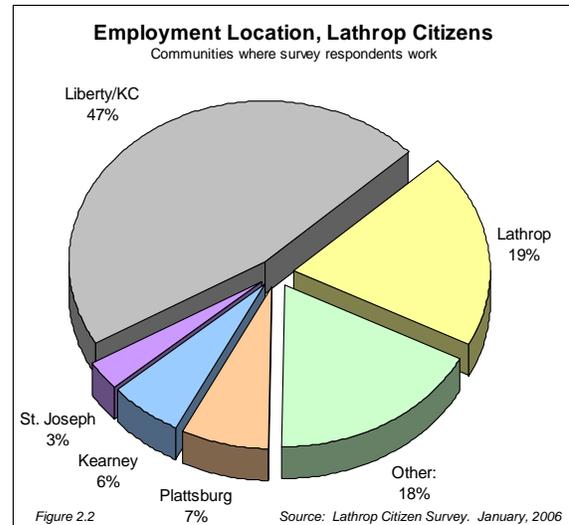
Economic Development

One of the predominant themes from the citizen survey was the desire to maintain Lathrop's "small town image". In fact, 25% of survey respondents reported that "small town atmosphere" was the single most important factor in locating in Lathrop (see Figure 2.1). Relatedly, when asked if they were willing to forgo Lathrop's small-town image to promote economic development, 51 respondents (44%) responded "no". While completely preserving the "small-town image" will likely not be possible in any development scenario, the community leaders of Lathrop should strive to maintain the characteristics that create a pleasant living and working environment within the city.

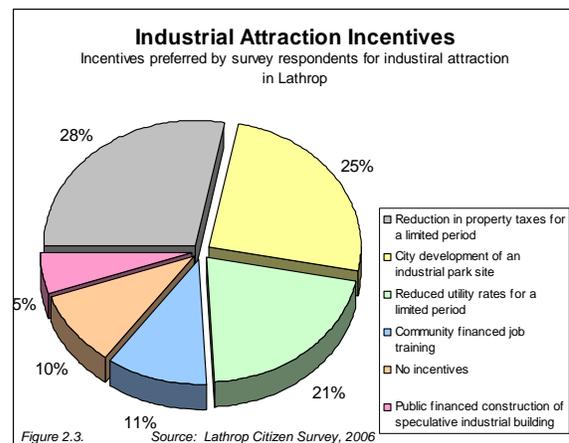
To effectively attract new residents to any city, regardless of size, employment opportunities must be available and desirable. The attraction of a major employer to a small community can have enormous positive benefits, and can spur the development of secondary and tertiary businesses, new residential housing, and an expanded tax base. Not surprisingly, the competition to attract new employers can be particularly fierce among small communities whose livelihoods depend on the presence of a viable, employed workforce. The challenge, then, is to create an atmosphere conducive to business attraction without overextending the goodwill of the community.



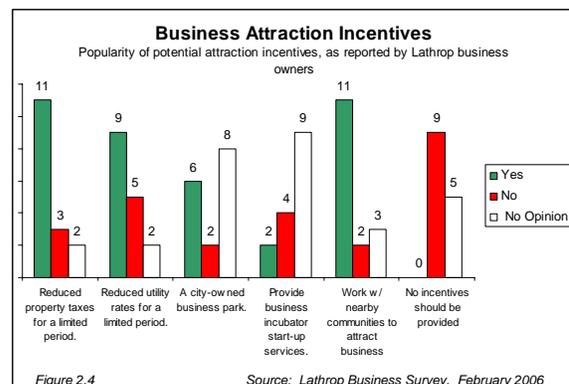
The desire for new employment opportunities in Lathrop is both real and measurable. In fact, 105 survey respondents (82%) indicated they would like to see new industry in Lathrop. This is likely correlated to the high percentage of Lathrop’s workforce that travel outside of Clinton County for employment, and would prefer to avoid a significant daily commute. Figure 2.2 shows that 47% of survey respondents work in either Kansas City or Liberty, with another 6% working in Kearney, 3% in St. Joseph, and 18% in some other location; only 19% of Lathrop’s workforce works within the City.

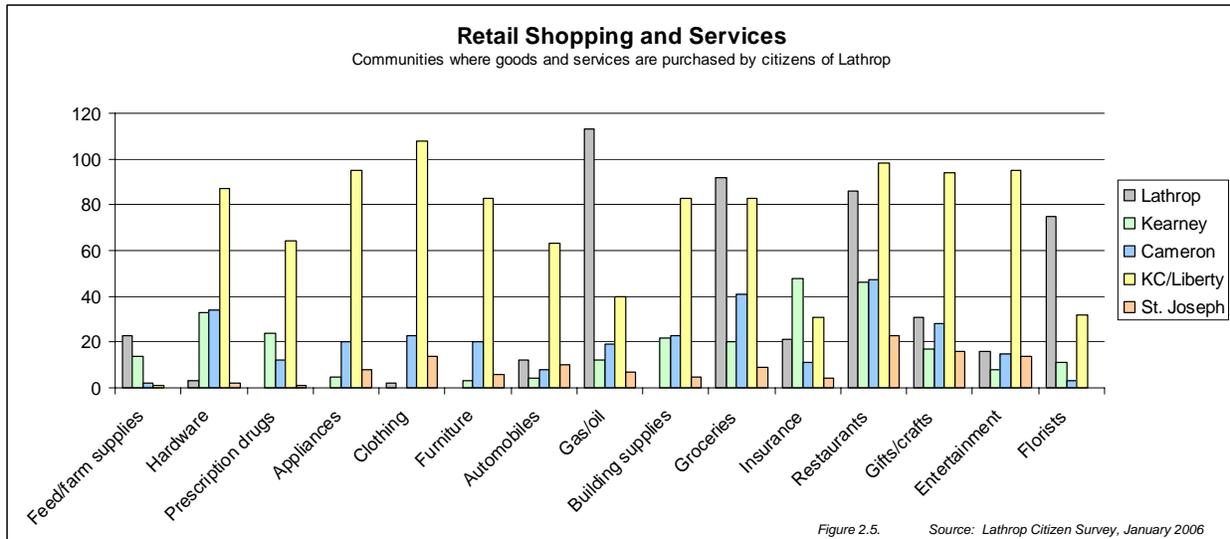


While most agree that new industry would be desirable in town (82% of survey respondents), the preferred method of attracting new employers is somewhat more varied. Figure 2.3 illustrates the mechanisms by which Lathrop citizens would like to attract new businesses. Three attraction strategies, reduction in property tax (28%), city development of an industrial park (25%) and reduced utility rates (21%), make up the bulk of the responses; however it is important to note that the city has limited control over property tax rates, and can only impact those utilities over which it has direct control. Unfortunately, a reality of today’s economic development climate is the omnipresence of incentives, and very little major economic expansion occurs without some degree of enticement from the potential host city. A majority of survey respondents (56%) were not in favor of increasing local taxes to facilitate industrial attraction.

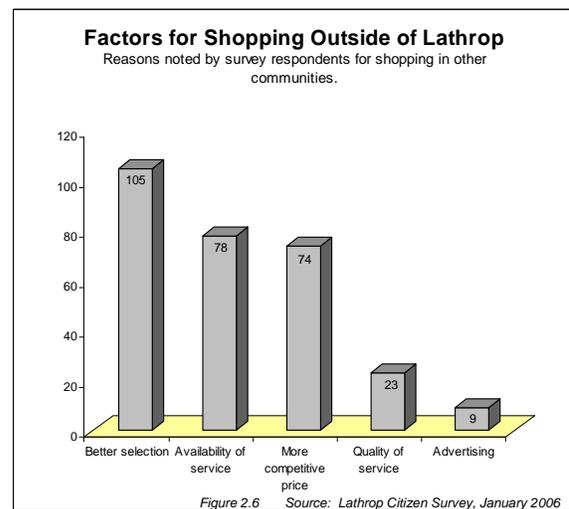


A survey of Lathrop business owners reveals similar opinions regarding industrial attraction. “Reduction of property taxes for a limited time” received the same number of positive responses as “work with nearby communities to attract businesses” (see Figure 2.4). This latter approach would not only benefit Lathrop, but would also promote development across the entire region, thereby pooling resources to address the common problem of low employment opportunities in the area.

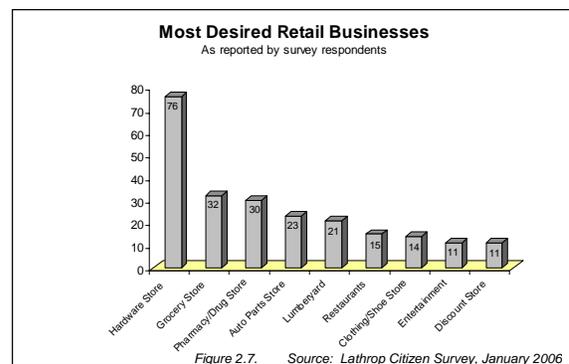




Employment opportunities are not the only reason Lathrop citizens routinely travel throughout the region, however. When asked where they purchase common goods and services, a very stark picture developed, as illustrated in Figure 2.5. Nearly every category of goods and services had more survey respondents answering that they shop in any community other than Lathrop. Only gas/oil, groceries, florists, and feed/farm supplies had Lathrop as the primary location for purchases. When asked what factor determined their shopping location, “better selection” was named most often, with “availability of service” and “more competitive price” second and third, respectively (see Figure 2.6).



Relatedly, a clear picture develops by examining the retail businesses most desired by survey respondents. Figure 2.7 shows that a number of basic commercial enterprises are either missing from the community or in need of improvement, with the top response, “hardware store”, receiving more than twice the number of responses as the next highest business (76 responses for hardware store versus 32 for grocery store). This is indicative of not only a strong community desire for basic material needs, but also illustrates an economic environment in Lathrop that is primed for the retail development necessary to support a growing population.

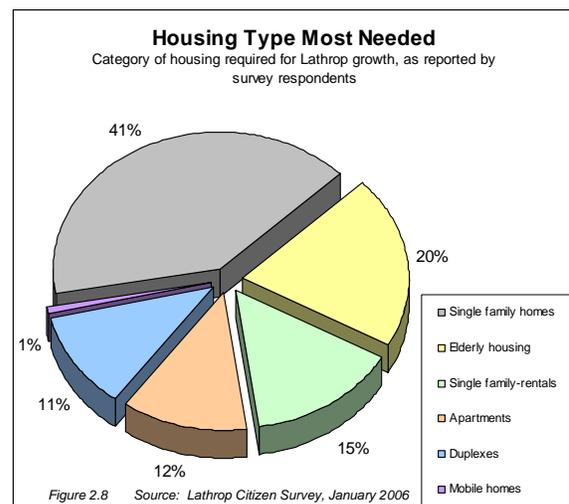


Civic Development

The attraction of industry and retail businesses is only one part of the larger community development puzzle. Without appropriately priced homes and available land to build on, a community simply can not grow, regardless of the availability of jobs. As such, it is equally important to examine the growth of these aspects of a community, known as civic development.

One of the most critical, and often overlooked, aspects of community development is the presence of an adequate housing stock. The decision to relocate to a community, particularly regarding employers with 20 or more employees, can hinge on the availability of affordable, desirable housing in a community. Many times, if a city does not have the type of homes desired by potential employers, those employers will choose a different location. Therein, however, is one of the more challenging aspects of community development; how can a community attract an employer without an adequate housing stock, and inversely, how can a community attract a housing developer without a population of potential buyers? This classic “chicken and the egg” paradox is present not only in Lathrop, but in nearly every community in rural Missouri.

Fortunately for Lathrop, the continuing upswing in population has recently brought housing developers to the community and, recognizing its growth potential, several new developers are interested in large tracts of land in or near the city. The type of housing constructed in a community is often viewed (correctly or not) as an indicator of the characteristics of the population. For example, rental units can indicate a temporary population, duplexes relate to young families or intermediary housing, and senior housing is evidence of a large elderly population. It is not surprising, then, that Lathrop citizens have a particular set of views regarding the type of housing needed in the community. Figure 2.8 illustrates 41% of survey respondents believe single-family homes to be the most needed in Lathrop, followed by elderly housing (20%) and single-family rentals (15%).



Another fundamental aspect of civic development is the availability of land within or adjacent to the corporate limits of a community. Specific facility requirements of many businesses prevent the redevelopment of existing retail or industrial space. As such, adequate land must be available for construction and accessible to municipal infrastructure to facilitate development. In addition, an increasing population will rapidly surpass the existing housing stock, creating a situation in which developers will look to open land to build new homes. Of course, if no land is available within the city, developers may choose to build on lots outside of the corporate limits, or build in a different community completely. Not only would this preclude the growth of the city proper, but it would also be a missed opportunity for the augmentation of the community's tax base.

The method of increasing a community's land area is annexation. Annexation, however, regardless of its form or intent, is almost always a controversial subject for a community. Landowners who choose to live in an unincorporated area often do so for a variety of reasons, such as not paying local taxes, avoiding municipal ordinances and building codes, or simply seclusion. Conversely, some land owners may desire to be annexed, such that they may access city services, such as sidewalks, police, or water and wastewater provision. Given these differences in opinions, it is not surprising that conflict can arise when a municipality proposes to annex land.

Annexation in Missouri falls into two primary categories, voluntary and involuntary (although many legal sub-variants exist to address specific circumstances). As its name suggests, voluntary annexation can occur when no land owner(s) within the proposed annexation area objects to the action. This is a relatively straightforward process involving a landowner's petition and public hearing. The involuntary annexation procedure must be followed if any landowner in the proposed annexation area objects to the action, and involves substantively more steps, including an election by the people. In the Lathrop Community Survey, 76 respondents (80%) were in favor of voluntary annexation, while the issue of involuntary annexation neatly split the respondents with 52 respondents (50%) in favor of involuntary annexation, and 51 respondents (50%) against. For more information on annexation in Lathrop, please see Section 4: Land Use.

Vision, Goals, and Action Plans

The vision and goals for community development were developed by a civic committee, comprised of Lathrop citizens with first-hand knowledge and interest in the development and growth of the city. Committee members were tasked with developing an overarching vision for the future of the development of the city, and devising a set of goals to support that vision.

VISION FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN LATHROP

To see Lathrop grow and prosper geographically, economically, and aesthetically, in an orderly way, which has a positive impact on the quality of life for its residents.

Goal 1: Ensure the future viability, growth and function of the City of Lathrop by developing and following a formalized, multi-phase annexation plan.

An annexation plan, drafted by the planning and zoning board and formally adopted by the Lathrop Board of Aldermen, will assist the city in planning for future development, while allowing nearby landowners ample notice of municipal intentions. The planning process will provide a forum for all development stakeholders to voice concerns, and ensure the best course of action is devised for the city. Potential conflicts with landowners will likely be minimized by adhering to a formal, long-term annexation plan.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) Create an annexation task force, made up of all interested stakeholders, including members of the planning and zoning board, board of aldermen, landowners, developers, and interested citizens. The task force should set out to define the needs and scope of any future annexation plans, and report directly to the planning and zoning board.
- 2) The annexation plan should address land needs for the growth of the city for the next 10 years, and should examine areas up to five miles away from the community, with particular emphasis east of Lathrop, towards Interstate 35. The plan should include considerations for servicing annexed areas with municipal infrastructure and services, including streets, water and sewer lines, sidewalks, and fire/police protection.
- 3) Coordinate with Clinton County to receive any changes in zoning or major developments in the annexation study area to the annexation task force.
- 4) Identify land parcels within the annexation study area for potential municipal use, such as future school locations, business/industrial parks, or recreation areas/parkland.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) Utilizing the formally adopted plan, annex land adjacent to Lathrop, as development warrants, or in anticipation of substantial new growth.
- 2) Extend and continually upgrade municipal infrastructure to service annexed areas, without compromising the function of city services to the city proper.
- 3) Continually inform the public of annexation needs and intentions, and conform to Missouri state statute with regards to voluntary/involuntary annexation.

Goal 2: Create an atmosphere conducive to retail and industrial growth.

The city can establish a number of meaningful policies and decisions to encourage the development and growth of the community, while maintaining the small-town image of Lathrop. Such actions will help to ensure Lathrop continues to develop into a full-service, multi-dimensional community capable of not only providing homes, but also functional retail shopping and opportunities for gainful employment.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) City should review and, as needed, revise municipal planning and zoning ordinances to ensure new development meets the economic development goals and standards of the community, including parking lot and sidewalk considerations, building appearance and aesthetic value, and environmental sensitivity. Any changes should strive to lessen negative impacts on current and potential businesses, while ensuring that public safety and community standards are upheld, including green spaces, walkways, tree development/retention, lot size, and development retreat areas.

- 2) Incorporate future business/housing growth into infrastructure and city services planning. Lathrop should take proactive, rather than reactive, steps in expanding and upgrading municipal infrastructure and public services to lower the barrier of entry for potential industries, retail businesses, and homeowners.
- 3) City should draft and/or actively expand its marketing efforts to draw potential business and home owners to the community.
- 4) City should forge beneficial relationships with nearby communities and Clinton County with regards to regional economic development and land use considerations.
- 5) City should support and encourage the Lathrop Chamber of Commerce to actively market the community of Lathrop.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) The City should hire a full time economic developer, potentially in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce, to market Lathrop and actively work towards the development of a fertile business climate within the community. This position, which should answer to the board of aldermen, will encourage the development of small businesses and explore new trends in rural economic development, such as the emergence of alternative fuels and hi-tech agribusiness.

Goal 3: Promote and support the construction of new housing and the refurbishment of the existing housing stock in Lathrop.

Economic and community development requires an adequate, affordable housing stock; quite simply, if a community lacks desirable housing, it will be unable to draw new industrial prospects, retail businesses or residents.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) The city should complete a housing study to determine what types and price ranges of houses are most needed in Lathrop today. The study should be updated at least biannually, or with the arrival or departure of a significant employer.
- 2) The city should explore state and federal funding programs designed to refurbish low-income homes within the city. In addition, public grant or loan funds should be pursued to demolish vacant, uninhabitable structures to promote infill development.



Home under construction in Lathrop.

- 3) Municipal leaders should work with potential housing developers to develop and enforce subdivision regulations to ensure new residential areas are compatible with existing city services and infrastructure.
- 4) To garner maximum utility from limited open spaces, Lathrop should consider limiting new residential development lot sizes with the city to two acres or less.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) City should proactively plan to expand city services and infrastructure to address future housing needs.
- 2) City should closely work with civic organizations, including police, fire, library, and school district, to ensure adequate service provision in relation to housing growth.