



Section 2b: Physical Appearance & Aesthetic Value

Introduction

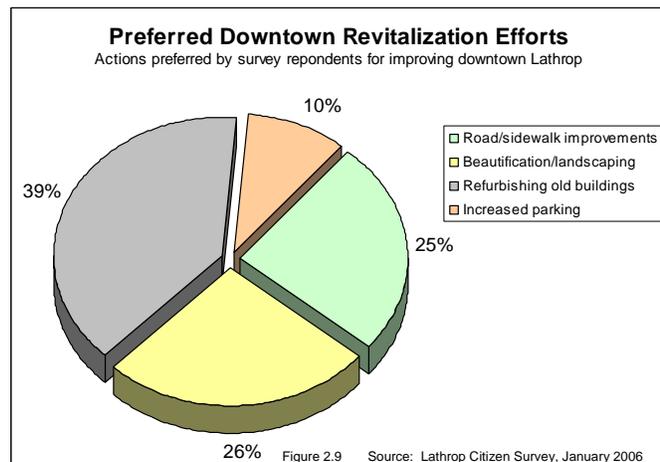
The physical appearance of a community is the first opportunity to make a positive impression on potential homeowners and entrepreneurs. Well kept streets and lawns, flowers and benches in the downtown district, community signage, and enforced building codes all promote a vision of community health, pride and vitality. Further, a clean and aesthetically pleasing city increases property values, reduces crime, and minimizes threats to public health. As a community on the cusp of a significant population increase, it is especially important for Lathrop to formalize future beautification goals and set and enforce municipal policies for aesthetic development.

This section of the Lathrop Comprehensive Plan will look at the issues impacting the physical appearance and aesthetic value of Lathrop today, and offer a set of goals and objectives to achieve the community's vision for Lathrop's beautification.

Physical Appearance and Aesthetic Value in Lathrop Today

Like most small communities in rural Missouri, Lathrop struggles to strike a financial balance between municipal priorities; a nearly infinite list of city projects must be matched with a very finite amount of fiscal resources. Not surprisingly, beautification projects, by necessity, are often not part of the municipal lexicon, ranking low on a list of priorities such as law enforcement, street maintenance, and water/sewer provision. Oftentimes, where municipal budgets do not allow for such projects, the local chamber of commerce can provide fundraising efforts towards city beautification. However, this is not to say that the Lathrop has neglected the aesthetic aspects of the community. The city utilizes a number of ordinances that establishes appearance guidelines, particularly with regards to private residences. In addition, adopted building codes help to maintain the appearance and safety of structures in town.

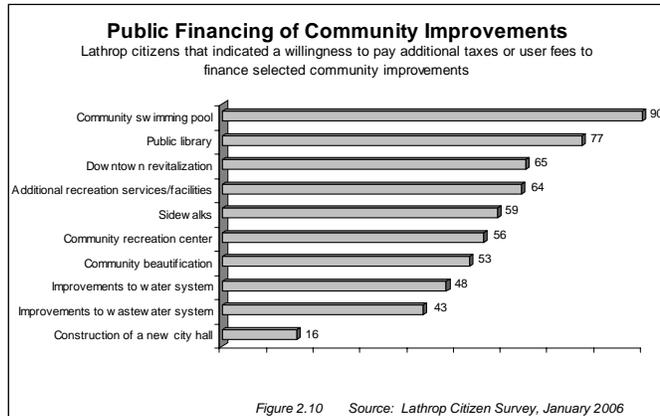
A windshield survey of Lathrop reveals a typical small Midwest community. Neighborhoods are generally not segregated by class in town, with a good overall diversity of housing types and conditions in residential areas. While there is no one residential area that could be characterized as depressed or unkempt, there are a few scattered homes



around town that appear to violate municipal ordinances in terms of safety and public health. As with most communities, the primary nuisances include inoperable automobiles and other clutter in private

yards, excessive overgrowth of vegetation, loose animals, and dilapidated structures. Regarding public areas, the City works diligently to ensure all parks and public structures are maintained, well-lit, and generally attractive.

In general, the downtown district and commercial areas along Highways 33 and 116 are neat in appearance and clear of litter, overgrown vegetation, and dilapidated structures. Overall, business owners in the community keep their storefronts attractive and in good structural condition. When asked in a citizen survey completed during January 2006, 39% of respondents said they would like to see the historic buildings in the downtown area refurbished, while an additional 26% noted a desire for beautification and landscaping in the same area (see Figure 2.9). Also of note, 53 respondents indicated they would be willing to pay additional taxes or user fees to pay for community beautification (see Figure 2.10)



Vision, Goals, and Action Plans

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

VISION FOR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND AESTHETIC VALUE IN LATHROP
To be a community embracing and reflecting a strong aesthetic value,
which will draw people to our city.

Goal 1: Create a signature downtown district by enhancing its beauty and functionality.

An attractive and accessible downtown area can make great strides in improving the overall status of a community in the minds of regional visitors and potential homeowners. Further, a comfortable gathering place located in the center of the community will help to foster community events and conceptualize an “identity” for the town.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) The city should form a downtown redevelopment district, governed by a board of local leaders and downtown merchants, to facilitate improvements made to the downtown area.

Such an organization would not only help to organize any redevelopment efforts, but also strengthen applications for beautification funding programs.

- 2) Update or install benches, waste receptacles, and street lights in the downtown area. These features should all have the same design and conform with the overall character of Lathrop.
- 3) Sidewalks in the downtown area should be repaired and upgraded to conform with the requirements set forth by the 1990 *Americans with Disabilities Act* for sidewalk width, height from ground, and curb cuts.
- 4) Working with the Lathrop Chamber of Commerce, establish “themes” for downtown storefronts to create a sense of unity between merchants.
- 5) Reconfigure parking in the downtown area to accommodate more patrons, with an emphasis on improving traffic flow.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) Construct a community gathering place, such as a bandstand or community court yard, within the downtown area. Such a structure would be a focal point for community fairs, organizational meetings, and outdoor performances.
- 2) City should seek matching funds to assist downtown business owners with storefront improvements (masonry, windows, awnings, etc.), with a common historic design as determined by the downtown merchants. Such an initiative will help to further define the look and feel of Lathrop, and create a regional tourist destination.
- 3) Modify traffic routes in the downtown area to accommodate an alley system capable of handling deliveries. This will help to eliminate congestion caused by delivery trucks double-parking during business hours and improve the safety of the area.

Goal 2: Increase property values in the City.

Through the establishment of official municipal policies, the City of Lathrop should strive to increase the property values throughout the community. Higher property values reflect a healthier community, and improve the return on investment for homebuyers.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) City should enforce current and, as needed, create new ordinances to address:
 - a. **abandoned buildings.** Vacant, dilapidated structures pose a threat to public health, encourage vandalism, and generally depress adjacent property values.
 - b. **disabled automobiles, large appliances, and other salvage.** These items, particularly on residential lots, are dangerous to neighborhood children and create an environment supportive of rodents and stray animals.

- c. **weeds, brush, and overgrowth.** Excessive, unmanaged vegetation is generally considered unsightly and burdensome to adjacent property owners
- 2) Lathrop provides an area for citizens to dispose of yard waste. In addition, the city works with the Region D Solid Waste District to facilitate white goods, tire, and hazardous materials collections at designated times during the year to assist homeowners in disposing of troubling items and promote home maintenance.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) The City should work with local faith-based organizations to support the creation of a volunteer home repair/construction organization, similar to *Habitat for Humanity*, to assist low-income persons with housing needs.
- 2) City should budget resources specifically for the enforcement of municipal ordinances designed to maintain minimum standards of public health, safety, and city beautification.

Goal 3: Utilize modern, equitable building codes to ensure the construction of safe, sturdy structures within the City.

Building codes allow a community a level of oversight regarding the safety of structures built within the city limits. Further, periodic examinations of existing structures regarding code compliance, such as when a building expansion is proposed or an obvious structural problem has developed, will help to reduce the presence of unsafe, dilapidated structures.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) The City of Lathrop, to the extent possible, should actively enforce compliance with existing building codes, both during the construction of new buildings, and when existing structures are modified/remodeled.
- 2) Building codes should be routinely and systematically reviewed to ensure best practices are always in place in the City.
- 3) For new developments, building codes should include provisions that construction is completed in a timely manner, property is maintained in perpetuity, and meets the style and overall aesthetic value of the City.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) City should hire a full-time, fully-qualified building inspector, who receives direction from and reports to the city administrator. The city may consider integrating this position with the local fire district to utilize existing staff and expertise.

Goal 4: Maintain and expand sidewalks, streets, and streetlights network.

The sidewalks and streets of a community represent more than simple transportation facilities. A well-maintained sidewalks and streets network presents a cohesive aesthetic value for a city, while improving property values and providing an alternative for recreation. In addition, a cohesive and complete streetlight system helps to improve the safety of a community, while adding to nighttime aesthetics.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

- 1) The City should develop a five-year sidewalk improvement and expansion program designed to replace deteriorating sidewalk segments and place new segments where none exist. The plan should identify and focus on the highest pedestrian traffic areas in town. All new sidewalk construction and replacement should conform with the 1990 *Americans with Disabilities Act*.
- 2) The City should develop a five-year streetlight plan designed to replace outdated or broken streetlights, and add lights to areas of the community where none currently exist.
- 3) The City should work with the Missouri Department of Transportation to facilitate a safe pedestrian crossing at the new high school, and examine the pedestrian facilities near the other school buildings.
- 4) The City should maintain the street system, ensuring a smooth road surface, curbs and gutters, and the elimination of any non-paved streets within the corporate limits.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

- 1) The sidewalk improvement and expansion program should be implemented according to the city's plan, facilitated by a line item included in the annual municipal budget.
- 2) The streetlight replacement and expansion program should be implemented according to the city's plan, facilitated by a line item included in the annual municipal budget.
- 3) The City should develop a cost-share program to assist homeowners in offsetting the cost of new/replacement sidewalk sections on their property.

Goal 5: Beautify and apply a common theme to the entrances to Lathrop.

The entrances to a community along major routes help to define the image of the town. Signposts and other decorative elements represent one of the first opportunities to make a positive impression on community visitors, and a common theme can help define the community's identity.

Short-Term Action Plan (implement within 5 years)

1. In partnership with the Lathrop Chamber of Commerce, maintain and improve current signage at the entrances of Lathrop. Improvements to lighting and structure while maintaining the sign's

paint and landscaping will help to ensure the signs remain attractive and representative of Lathrop.

2. City should place signage and other design elements, consistent with existing signage, at entrances to Lathrop that currently lack such features.

Long-Term Action Plan (implement within 10 years)

1. Work with landowners along U.S. 116, between the city and Interstate 35, to place signage directing visitors to Lathrop. Signs should be consistent with other municipal signage, and help to portray pride in the community.
2. Work with Clinton County and the Missouri Department of Transportation to make beautification improvements at the intersection of U.S. 116 and Interstate 35.



Entrance sign at intersection of U.S. 116 and U.S. 33