



Posted on Fri, Feb. 20, 2009

## Strategic planners tackle tough items

By RUSS PULLEY  
The Kansas City Star

Volunteers in Lee's Summit who are working on a strategic plan for the city are showing that they're willing to tackle controversial questions.

A subcommittee working on proposals for the transportation section on Tuesday suggested this plank: Develop Lee's Summit Municipal Airport as an economic tool.

The subcommittee also offered a strategy of lengthening the main runway to attract more air traffic. It said the group should tell the City Council to support the expansion without putting the issue to a vote of the public.

Chairman James Freeman, a former councilman, said the committee hadn't decided to recommend that as the group's position, but offered it to get reactions overall.

It opened discussion on an issue that's been divisive in Lee's Summit for years. Residents are split on whether the airport is an asset or nuisance. The issue prompted an attempt to amend the city charter and has been hot potato for the City Council.

For more than a decade, incremental work has continued on the airport — mostly paid for with federal grants — as officials danced around making a final decision.

John Ivey, a developer and longtime critic of the airport, quickly differed and was joined by others.

"I'd like my right to vote, as a taxpayer, on this capital improvement," Ivey said.

Some noted that the city subsidizes operations at the airport. A report this summer estimated deficits for airport operations at about \$78,000 in 2008 and rising to \$119,000 in 2013, if the runway isn't lengthened to accommodate business jets.

Freeman, who favors an election on the airport, said the airport has an economic benefit, although an exact determination of how much is not well established.

Because of the airport, he said, "there are businesses that have located in Lee's Summit; they're just not touted."

Other members noted that the city had commissioned an in-depth study of costs for closing the airport and analysis of whether expansion would be successful in making it self-supporting. They advocated waiting until the results of that study before a decision was made.

Derek Okubo of the National Civic League, serving as facilitator, asked for a show of hands. A majority of about 100 people supported expansion without an election, but a significant minority wanted the public to have an opportunity to vote.

Okubo asked the committee to take the feedback and work on a compromise.

The group, Lee's Summit 360° — Charting Tomorrow, is striving to reach consensus on the recommendations for a final report to be completed in March.

The city's first plan, written in 1993 and updated in 1999, outlined projects that included a new City Hall, more parks and improving public safety.

Having decided on "key performance areas," the group is working in subcommittees, setting goals and action steps. It will include suggestions for which part of the community, city, schools, nonprofits or others should take the lead for reaching each goal.

After research and brainstorming, subcommittees are to submit their work to the entire group. They hope to reach consensus on each recommendation.

Other transportation issues the subcommittee is tackling include "Complete Streets" concept to provide safe access for motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians and transit riders — including a speedy completion of the city's greenway system in

the next five years — and to start acquiring rights-of-way and working with other governments on regional mass transit.

Other subcommittees for key performance areas also made preliminary reports.

The education committee is looking at ways to create better networks so residents can find solutions at area institutions for lifelong learning and new job skills and possibly a task force to look at better funding solutions for education, instead of reliance on property taxes.

The health and human services group would like to see the city's Health Education Advisory Board given more responsibility and become the Health & Human Services Commission. It would be a step short of creating a city health department, a program considered and dropped in the previous strategic plan because Jackson County government already fulfills that function.

The commission could investigate gaps in services in the city and look for ways to meet the needs of underserved residents. It could help form networks, coordinate volunteer efforts and educate the community.

The quality-of-life subcommittee is looking at goals that include increasing the quantity and variety of arts programming available in Lee's Summit, diversity and encouraging health lifestyles.

The economic development subcommittee proposes more work to create a diversified tax base and determine if current and future land uses would generate tax revenues that offset the cost of providing services required by those businesses or homes.

Local government goals included leadership development, emphasizing environmentally sound development and maintaining fiscal sustainability by pursuing regional infrastructure and cooperative purchasing.

#### **ON THE WEB**

To make suggestions to Lee's Summit 360°, go to: [www.lsmo360.com](http://www.lsmo360.com).

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## Revitalization plans and fiscal issues top community-to-do list in the new year.

### Schools

Superintendent David McGehee says the biggest challenges facing the Lee's Summit district are largely grounded in one big issue: the faltering national economy. Losses in local revenue are expected as property values decline and as state officials begin discussions to cut school spending.

Those cuts, he said, will make it harder to increase standards for proficiency in state and national testing programs. And uncertainty over energy prices will make it difficult to plan for transportation and utility costs.

### Economy

How does Lee's Summit maintain a balanced budget in a troubled economy, with less revenue to pay for daily operations?

Lower-than-expected revenue from property and sales taxes and fees from licenses and permits, along with flat sales tax — all ripple effects of the national recession — are largely to blame for a leaner budget than in years past.

A three-year financial model indicates that the city will consume significant portions of its reserve balance. In response, it is looking for ways to trim operating costs. How? In part, by not filling some vacant positions and deferring contractual services.

Even then, the city remains committed to funding the expansion of its police officer base to increase patrol districts from seven to 10 during the next three fiscal years.

### Land use

Lee's Summit has 10 percent of open space that remains available for development. Approximately half of that is designated for nonresidential use, such as business, retail or manufacturing.

The nonresidential tax base is the economic engine that helps to support residential services. So the focus is on attracting high-quality development.

### Redevelopment

While development has slowed, Lee's Summit is focused on exploring redevelopment issues in the older corridors along Missouri Highway 291, U.S. 50 and other commercial areas to attract new investment dollars. These are areas that have the greatest potential for economic opportunities during the economic slowdown.

Mark Dunning, the city's codes administration director, and Rich Caplan, area economic development specialist, recently were charged with this major effort. Their new assignments will give the city a better understanding of the economy's impact. Among the largest redevelopment efforts: renovation of the downtown area around a new \$12.6 million City Hall campus.

### Neighborhood strength

The city's data indicate a correlation between the calls for police services and code enforcement violations in residential neighborhoods. As neighborhoods begin to age and properties become vacant due to slow property sales and foreclosures, property maintenance will be an increasing priority.

The city has started addressing some of these issues by adopting a foreclosure ordinance — said to be one of the first in the country — requiring that these properties be listed with the city. The mayor and City Council also are considering other steps that would help to keep neighborhoods maintained throughout the city.

### Lee's Summit 360: Charting Tomorrow

How will Lee's Summit look 10 or 20 years from now? What challenges will the community face? Answers to these questions and more — as well as recommendations in key performance areas — will emerge from decisions made as part of the Lee's Summit 360: Charting Tomorrow strategic planning process that is under way.

Effective planning is seen as a way to ensure that the city's efforts align with community values.

The Lee's Summit 360 project is the third strategic planning process that the city has undertaken since the early 1990s. The initiating committee identified nearly 300 key stakeholders who would begin working on a plan in September. Since then, the stakeholders have dedicated three hours of their evenings every three weeks to an innovative process in order to help chart Lee's Summit's future.

### Storm water

Storm-water control is a major budget priority for the City Council, as identified in the 2007 council survey.

Residents helped the city to begin accomplishing storm-water goals with a voter-approved \$15.4 million bond issue. The money will be used to address issues involving structural flooding occurring from storm-water runoff.

The second phase of city storm-water improvements will continue until summer and includes the final design of selected alternatives for projects in the construction phase.

According to the city's 2008 DirectionFinder Survey, more than 58 percent of residents are very or somewhat concerned about storm water in the city. These residents identified several objectives as most important: minimizing property damage, minimizing contaminants in storm-water runoff and minimizing environmental damage to lakes and streams.

### New landfill

Residents recommended that the city find a new landfill site when the current operation, at 2101 SE Hamblen Road, reaches capacity in about five years.

A site selection team worked nine months to find appropriate options and will present its recommendations to the City Council early this year, with a goal of finding a regional solution to long-term solid-waste issues. The challenge extends well beyond the Lee's Summit boundaries and affects eastern Jackson County and northeast Cass County.

### Water utility renewal

Lee's Summit's water utility infrastructure includes supply lines and water storage facilities, as well as conveyance lines and sewage pumps.

The age of underground lines varies, and the system must be properly maintained — and eventually replaced — to prevent breaks and system failures.

The city uses a systematic approach to test and replace infrastructure with minimum disruption to customers. The technology helps develop operating and water supply models to establish the city's capital replacement program.

One challenge will be implementing that approach without seriously increasing water rates.

### Airport expansion

The question of whether to expand the airport to attract additional corporate aviation activity has vexed the community for several years.

The mayor and City Council have directed city staff members to gather information on the potential long-term benefits of expanding the airport and comparing those with the benefits of redeveloping the airport area for some other economic development use.

Yen for '09

KC Star

1/3/09

Lee's Summit Journal  
1-9-09

Thursday, Jan 08, 2009

## LS 360 at halfway point

By Miranda Wycoff, The Journal Staff

The Lee's Summit 360 strategic planning process is at its halfway point and the work done thus far was presented to the Lee's Summit City Council on Thursday.

"Its been going very, very well," said co-chairman Jon Ells.

The entire process began in the summer of 2008 with the initiating committee, which laid the groundwork for the plan that is to become the city's guidelines for perhaps the next 10 years.

The committee selected the name of the new strategic plan — Lee's Summit 360: Charting Tomorrow, — a meeting site, created sub-committees and chairs and identified the stakeholders. Lee's Summit 360 stakeholders include more than 275 Lee's Summit residents, including former councilmembers and the R-7 school district's superintendent, Dr. David McGehee.

"We opened the stakeholders up to everyone," Ellis said. "We wanted to make sure everyone knew they were welcome."

According to the National Civic League there are three phases to developing a community's strategic plan:

- To establish a vision statement, which outlines the stakeholder's vision for the future of the community.
- Identify community scans and trends, which identifies what changes need to be made and where the city is going.
- And select the Key Performance Areas and begin the action planning.

So far, the stakeholders have completed the first two tasks and have begun mapping out the visions for each of the KPA's selected.

"Lee's Summit is a sustainable and vibrant city with a dynamic spirit of cooperation among its diverse citizens, businesses, organizations, educational systems and governments," reads the Lee's Summit 360 vision statement available on the Web site. "Through comprehensive community planning and regional collaboration, Lee's Summit enjoys economic independence and a high quality of life as a recognized destination city."

Vicky Cundliffe, co-chair of the Lee's Summit 360 strategic planning committee said all the stakeholders put in ideas toward developing the vision statement and it was approved by the stakeholders on Nov. 18.

Phase two of the process, identifying community trends, was completed with the aid of two reports — the results of the Civic Index Survey and a community assessment of the current status of many projects and issues in Lee's Summit.

From those two reports, the stakeholders defined six KPA's in which to focus: - Transportation, - Economic Development, - Education, - Health and Human Services, - Local Government and - Quality of Life. The stakeholders divided into subcommittees specific to each KPA, and on Tuesday presented to the rest of the group their "mini-visions."

The KPA groups will continue to develop their plans by developing KPA goals and the rationale for each area, Ellis said.

The stakeholders will then create one coordinating plan outlining each KPA and how to implement it and present the final draft of the Lee's Summit 360 Strategic Plan to the Council in May. "This is the voice of the community," Ellis said. "Not just the city, but the city is instrumental in making things happen."

For more information about Lee's Summit 360, visit the Web site at [www.lsmo360.com](http://www.lsmo360.com). The Journal will be highlighting each of the Key Performance Areas in the weeks ahead.

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