About Wichita

Wichita is the largest city in Kansas with a population of 385,000 in the city limits and a metro population of 630,000. The city was incorporated in 1870, based on the success of businessmen who came to hunt and trade with native populations. The city lies on the Arkansas River near the western edge of the Flint Hills.

Wichita’s position on the Chisholm Trail made it a destination for cattle drives heading north to access railroads to eastern markets. From the early to late 20th century, aircraft pioneers began aircraft-manufacturing enterprises that would lead to Wichita becoming the nation’s leading city in numbers of aircraft produced and its nickname of the Air Capital of the World. Koch Industries, a global natural-resources empire, and one of America’s two largest privately held companies is headquartered in Wichita.

The racial makeup of the city was 71.9% White, 11.5% African American, and 4.8% Asian. 15.3% of the population was Hispanic or Latino of any race. Non-Hispanic Whites were 64.5% of the population in 2010.

About Old Town South | Rail Depot Property

The project area is a 9.5 acre property south of Douglas Avenue. Old Town lies immediately to the north and the Arena Neighborhood and Commerce Arts District are immediately to the west across the railroad line. It contains the historic Union and Rock Island Railroad station as well as a historic hotel and other structures. This property occupies the northwest section of a large block identified by the Project Downtown Master Plan as Old Town South that is bounded by Douglas Avenue on the north, Kellog Avenue on the south, the railroad berm on the west, and Washington Avenue on the east. Mead Street, a narrow private access drive open to public access, bisects this property south-north.
Project Scope

The City of Wichita, Kansas, has asked the Urban Sustainability Accelerator to provide expert assistance with the redevelopment of a 9.5 acre site containing two historic train stations, a hotel and other buildings, parking, and various rail-yard improvements. The City and the developers of the site are interested in integrating the redevelopment of this important downtown catalyst project with the implementation of various sustainability elements of the Project Downtown Master Plan, including green streets, improvements to bike and pedestrian access, shared parking arrangements, and historic building redevelopment using sustainable practices.

Challenges to Overcome

• Barriers to connecting with surrounding districts such as wide streets and elevated rail corridor
• Expanding transportation choices beyond the personal automobile
• Cost of structured parking
• Determining the appropriate market-supported development mix to develop a land use plan
• Incorporating new construction with historic structures in the historic districts
• Expanding the development project beyond the rail depot site
• Parking/land use ratio
• Development phasing
• Finding the RIGHT tenant mix to avoid an “after 5 PM dead zone”
• Identifying and utilizing incentive programs
• Economic Incentive process needs streamlining for faster submission, clarification and approval
• Identifying and utilizing all available incentive programs to be able to attain an effective rent rate in the market that is attractive to potential users

Project Goals

• Develop strategies for pedestrian connections across Douglas, Waterman, and the elevated rail corridor
• Determine an approach to expanding transit service and bicycle facilities
• Develop a shared parking strategy so that new parking is fully utilized by multiple uses
• Develop a land use plan for the rail depot and surrounding sites (mega-block)
• Explore financing strategies beyond current instruments
• Create inter-site pedestrian corridors
• Provide personal, site, and building security
• Provide public gathering spaces
• Create market demand by design
• Develop a database for replacement materials used across other cities for Federal and State Tax Credits to assist developers and contractors in selecting ‘approved’ materials to refurbish existing structures.
Redevelopment

Hotels, office space, and retail development have been identified as a likely market-support development program for this area in the Project Downtown Master Plan. A public plaza in front of the Union Depot has been suggested as an amenity that would help activate nearby uses and draw in pedestrians. This area is a short walk away from the Commerce Arts District and “thus could offer an important opportunity for additional low-cost arts and commercial space supporting growth of that district.”

Green Design & Infrastructure

The downtown master plan calls for Douglas Avenue to become a “green street” with more trees and landscaping to help offset the urban heat island effect, which is expected to become more significant with climate change. The Wichita project team may explore opportunities for creating a special district where heat, water, and energy use can be used more efficiently.

Transportation Choices

The Project Downtown plan calls for Douglas Avenue to become a transit focused street, carrying increased transit service. An on street bicycle lane has been proposed for Waterman Street, an improvement which is part of Wichita’s Bicycle Master Plan. Mead Street can be enhanced as a narrow, pedestrian-oriented street connecting Old Town north of Douglas and the arts district to the south.

Equity

This project will explore the types of opportunities that might exist for smaller and minority owned businesses to allow them to participate and profit from the revival of downtown.
Old Town South | Rail Depot

Scott Knebel, Downtown Revitalization Manager, Wichita-Sedgwick County
Contact: sknebel@wichita.gov
Scott is a certified planner and serves as Downtown Revitalization Manager responsible for coordinating the City of Wichita’s and Sedgwick County’s plan development and implementation efforts for Project Downtown, the master plan for the revitalization of downtown Wichita.

Jeff Fluhr, President, Wichita Downtown Development Corporation
Contact: jeff@downtownwichita.org
As President of the Wichita Downtown Development Corporation (WDDC,) Jeff is responsible for carrying out the mission of the WDDC to strengthen Downtown Wichita as “the heart of the region.”

Jason Gregory, Executive VP, Wichita Downtown Development Association
Contact: jason@downtownwichita.org
Jason is responsible for launching and guiding various initiatives and leading the implementation of Project Downtown, Wichita’s Downtown Master Plan, and the WDDC’s strategic business plan.

Janet Miller, District 6 Councilor, Wichita City Council
Contact: jlmiller@wichita.gov
A lifelong Kansan and 26-year resident of District 6, Janet Miller was elected to the City Council in April 2009. Since her election, she has had significant involvement in Visioneering Wichita, the Project Downtown Master Plan, Botanica’s Children’s Garden, NOMAR International Market, and the Bicycle Master Plan.

Lavonta Williams, District 1 Councilor, Wichita City Council
Contact: lwililliams@wichita.gov
Before coming to the Wichita City Council, Lavonta had just retired from Wichita Public Schools as a classroom educator for 28 years and the director of after-school programs for 7 years – serving a total of 35 years of service with youth.

Gary Oborny, Board President and CEO, Occidental Management
Contact: gary@occmgmt.com
Gary has over twenty-eight years of active entrepreneurial experience in a variety of business ventures. Occidental Management recently purchased the rail depot property and is currently planning for its redevelopment.

Paul Gunzelman, Traffic Engineer, City of Wichita
Contact: pgunzelman@wichita.gov
Paul reviews traffic control, traffic signal, and pavement marking plans for the CIP projects.

Mike Seiwart, AIA, LEED AP, Director of Construction and Project Management, Occidental Management
Contact: mike@occmgmt.com
Mike is manager of the company’s construction initiatives, with 35 years’ experience in the building/construction industry.