

# SECTION 5 Commercial & Industrial Development



**Luxury Dealership West of I-35**

## 5.1 Introduction

The highways that travel through Merriam have influenced the development pattern of commercial and industrial activities. The commercial land use pattern is generally contained within two major transportation corridors: I-35 and Shawnee Mission Parkway. These two major transportation corridors have led to the creation of several development nodes, each of which coincides with a full interchange on I-35.

The strategic location of Merriam on I-35 has resulted in much of the development activity in Merriam serving the regional metropolitan marketplace. Examples of this include automobile dealerships, regional health care facilities, hotels, and employment centers. The importance of the I-35 and Shawnee Mission Parkway corridors on commercial activity in Merriam is not expected to diminish in the next twenty years. I-35 will remain a principal traffic artery connecting the suburbs to the urban core of metropolitan Kansas City.

This does not mean, however, Merriam should not expect challenges to its marketplace attractiveness. Since suburbanization continues to move south and west in Johnson County, the epicenter of economic influence is shifting away from northern Johnson County. This is a phenomenon facing inner ring suburbs throughout the nation. Merriam in the year 2000 reveals a community that has reached its built-out state. In other words, Merriam is not going to add any new land area because it is surrounded by other cities and there are only a limited number of undeveloped or vacant infill sites remaining in Merriam. Accordingly, the challenge facing Merriam with regard to future commercial development is one of

### **In this section:**

- 5.1  
Introduction**
- 5.2  
Interstate 35 Corridor**
- 5.3  
Merriam Town Center**
- 5.4  
Downtown Merriam**
- 5.5  
Historic Downtown District**
- 5.6  
Farmer's Market**
- 5.7  
Vehicle Service District**
- 5.8  
Northside District**
- 5.9  
Downtown Revitalization Program Strategies**
- 5.10  
Conclusions**

responding to, and creating opportunities to accommodate changes in the local and regional economic landscape.

## 5.2 Interstate-35 Corridor

The I-35 corridor traverses a north-south tangent through the entire community bisecting Merriam. I-35 has played a major role in defining the land use pattern and greatly influencing Merriam's position in the metropolitan marketplace. The existing land use pattern of the I-35 corridor is linear in nature because it is based on a continuous ribbon of mixed land uses that have developed adjacent to the entire length of the corridor with many locations underutilized. The development pattern, and the resulting land use pattern, has been influenced by the interchanges that connect Merriam to the interstate highway. Merriam has five interchanges along I-35 in a three-mile stretch of the interstate. The interchanges are located at 1) Shawnee Mission Parkway, 2) Johnson Drive, 3) 67<sup>th</sup> Street, 4) 75<sup>th</sup> Street, and 5) Antioch Road. These interchanges have resulted in the creation of "development nodes" in Merriam. While the end result is a continuous ribbon of linear development along I-35, these nodes create an individual visual character and land use pattern.

### Antioch Development Node



**Industrial development at Antioch**

**Development Character.** The primary existing land use in the Antioch node is industrial. The Antioch Industrial Park is located at 55<sup>th</sup> Street and Antioch Road on the East Side of I-35. The West Side of I-35 is identified as the North Side District of Historic Downtown Merriam, which is described in the Downtown Merriam analysis of this section. Though the northern portion of Merriam, along Merriam Drive north of Johnson Drive, experienced industrial development during the late 1960's, remnants of an older Merriam from decades earlier still exists today. The older

development, which includes a mix of residences and businesses that serve the local market, is bound between 51<sup>st</sup> Terrace to the south and Antioch to the north. Examples of businesses located within the older structures include the Dutch Maid Motel and the Woodland Taxidermy. Several other businesses have located in renovated houses, including Mel's Barber Shop, and an animal clinic located further south near 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. The area is also home to a convenience store, tanning salon, and furniture store.

**Antioch Development Constraints.**

The following is a list of development constraints for the Antioch Development Node:

- Limited amount of vacant developable land on both sides of I-35.
- The land that is vacant is of limited size, which makes marketing a challenge to large users or users needing land for future expansion.
- Mixed existing land use pattern in the Northside District of Downtown Merriam. The area lacks a cohesive and marketable image.
- Many of the older industrial buildings were built to maximize land coverage. This presents a challenge to accommodate the maneuvering of large trucks into and on-site.
- The railroad tracks and associated trains may present an obstacle to attracting certain land uses/businesses into the Northside District.
- A portion of this area is in the flood plain which inhibits development.

**Antioch Development Opportunities.**

The following is a list of development opportunities for the Antioch Development Node:

- The completion of the new Antioch interchange creates new opportunities for development by offering convenient access and visibility to I-35.
- The Antioch interchange is one of the first opportunities along I-35 for businesses to locate in Johnson County as it is on the border.
- The older mixed-use development on the West Side of the Antioch interchange may change overtime.
- The City of Merriam is committed to enhancing Downtown Merriam and Merriam Drive.

**Antioch Visual Character.**

The following is an assessment of the current visual character of the Antioch Development Node:

- The Northside District of Downtown Merriam contains older industrial buildings developed in a time when little or no emphasis was placed on site amenities (landscaping, architecture, and yard area).
- The views from the interstate lack a cohesive and positive image for the area.

## Johnson Drive Development Node



**Development Character.** The existing land use pattern of the northwest quadrant is the general location of historic Downtown Merriam, while the northeast quadrant of the interchange is the location of Merriam Town Center. Downtown Merriam and Merriam Town Center are considered distinct commercial districts and are addressed separately in this section.

The southeast quadrant contains a small pocket of older commercial services adjacent to Johnson Drive, including Country Hill Motors Auto Sales, Weaver's Auto Body, and Lawrence Pest Control. The

construction of Merriam Town Center on the north side of Johnson Drive has stimulated market interest in taking advantage of the I-35 highway traffic and Merriam Town Center traffic/customers. Development of the Texaco StarMart convenience store and Papa John's pizza delivery reflect this trend. The land use pattern beyond the frontage of Johnson Drive is a residential neighborhood.

Traditional strip retail commercial and a mixture of industry and warehousing characterize the existing land use pattern of the southwest quadrant. The diverse mix of commercial and industry extends along Merriam Drive from Johnson Drive to Shawnee Mission Parkway. This area is part of the Vehicle Service District of Historic Downtown Merriam.

### Johnson Drive Development Constraints.

The following is a list of development constraints for the Johnson Drive Development Node:

- The close proximity of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad tracks with the Johnson Drive interchange.
- Limited amount of vacant developable land on both sides of I-35.
- Many of the commercially zoned properties along Johnson Drive (both sides of the interstate) have older structures that lack site amenities found in contemporary commercial development, such as adequate parking, unified architecture and signage, adequate access, building setbacks, landscaping.
- Some of the commercial uses along Johnson Drive (both sides of the interstate) are uses associated with highway/automobile services, which is often not consistent with community/regional retail shopping.

- The land near the Johnson Drive interchange is located in the Turkey Creek flood plain which inhibits development and major reinvestment.
- The retail businesses on the south side of Johnson Drive east of I-35 lack good visibility from the traffic traveling along the interstate.
- There are some transportation issues that should be addressed. Grandview Road intersects Johnson Drive just west of the traffic light at I-35's entrance and exit ramp. Due to the close proximity of I-35, it is difficult to turn west from Grandview Road onto Johnson Drive during peak traffic flow conditions. Realignment of Grandview Road should be considered. The second transportation concern is the at-grade crossing at Johnson Drive, just east of Merriam Drive. Due to the close proximity of I-35, the railroad crossing and the intersection of Merriam Drive and Johnson Drive, traffic flow is very congested and restricted when a train passes through. An overpass is not feasible over I-35 due to distance constraints.

### **Johnson Drive Development Opportunities.**

The following is a list of development opportunities for the Johnson Drive Development Node:

- Convenient and safe access to I-35.
- Close proximity (one-half mile) to Antioch Road and the Antioch interchange (one mile).
- The construction of Merriam Town Center enhances the market attractiveness of the development node.
- The older highway/automobile services on Johnson Drive on the East Side of the interstate may be approaching a point where the private sector seeks to capitalize on proximity to Merriam Town Center.

**Johnson Drive Visual Character.** The visual character of the Johnson Drive development node is addressed in Section 5.3 Merriam Town Center and Section 5.4 Downtown Merriam.

## Shawnee Mission Parkway Development Node

**Development Character.** The land use pattern for this node is characterized by commercial retail. Due to I-35 highway access and exposure, the southwest and northeast quadrants of the I-35 cloverleaf support land uses serving the Kansas City metropolitan market, as evidenced by the BMW automobile dealerships. There are also land uses associated with highways, such as hotels, restaurants, and gasoline sales. Land development adjacent to Shawnee Mission Parkway serves the Merriam community market, but also takes advantage of the high commuter traffic volumes. Examples of these businesses include K-Mart, Taco Bell, Checkers, and the Texaco gasoline and convenience store. The frontage road connecting Shawnee Mission Parkway with 67th Street supports a mixture of commercial retail goods and services, including several hotels, Chevy's restaurant, and Gold's Gym.



**Expansion of Baron BMW**

The development of the northwest quadrant of the cloverleaf is limited because of the location of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad tracks. Merriam Drive functions as a frontage road connecting Shawnee Mission Parkway to Johnson Drive. Development of the area includes a mixture of retail, services, and industry geared toward the automobile. Nationally known Aamco and Interstate Battery have locations in the area, alongside local, family-owned body shops, such as Macek's and Terry Morris, and used auto sales, such as the Whitney Motor Company. Though businesses along this strip of Merriam Drive focus on the automobile, this strip is also home to a roofing supply company, a landscaping company, café, steel fabrication business, and television repair business.

The commercial development of the northeast quadrant is vibrant with the remodeled Baron BMW and Volkswagen automobile dealership. The area also supports local government services, such as City Hall, police, and fire services. This quadrant contains the last single-family residential development abutting the I-35 corridor in Merriam, specifically the homes west of Grandview Avenue. The 1988 Comprehensive Plan Addendum included this quadrant in its study area. The plan addendum recommended commercial/office adjacent to the cloverleaf interchange, and high density residential for the area west of Grandview Avenue. The plan also shows 60<sup>th</sup> Street realigned to Johnson Drive.

The Turkey Creek Streamway Park linear trail, which is a pedestrian-oriented trail, has an access point at the southwest quadrant of the I-35 and Shawnee Mission Parkway

interchange. The trail, which is part of the Johnson County Parks and Recreation Department's Streamway Park system, follows Turkey Creek north, past Campbell Park, to Johnson Drive. The trail also follows Turkey Creek south to 75<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **Shawnee Mission Parkway Development Constraints.**

The following is a list of development constraints for the Shawnee Mission Parkway Development Node:

- No vacant developable land on both sides of I-35.
- An older office building across from Superior Chevrolet is facing occupancy constraints due to its architectural design which is residential and should be a focus of analysis.

### **Shawnee Mission Parkway Development Opportunities.**

The following is a list of development opportunities for the Shawnee Mission Parkway Development Node:

- The intersection of U.S. Highway 56 (Shawnee Mission Parkway) and Interstate 35, which makes this one of the busiest interchanges in Johnson County. Shawnee Mission Parkway is the primary east-west highway in northern Johnson County providing access into the midtown and Plaza areas of Kansas City, Missouri. A regional study is currently being conducted to evaluate whether synchronizing traffic signals regionally would improve traffic flow and travel time.
- The investment/reinvestment of the Mercedes and BMW automobile dealerships anchor this development node.

### **Shawnee Mission Parkway Visual Character.**

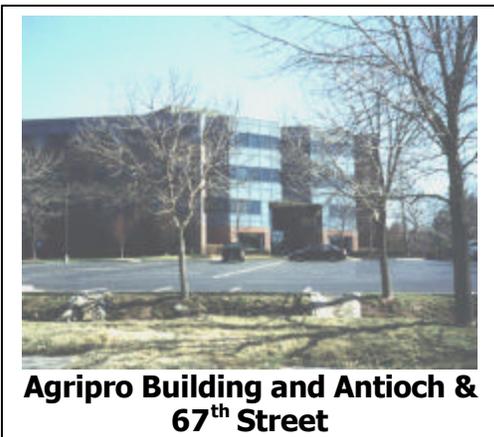
The following is an assessment of the current visual character of the area:

- The Mercedes and BMW dealerships are, or will become, strong visual anchors within the node. The sensitivity to architecture, building orientation, signage, and lighting creates a positive image for Merriam.
- The Shawnee Mission corridor lacks visual continuity. The corridor is a reflection of each business located along the roadway. There are no unifying design features that inform the public that this stretch of Shawnee Mission Parkway is located in Merriam. A list of recommended streetscape or corridor design elements is listed below.
  1. Parkway refers to a street with a park-like setting, yet Shawnee Mission Parkway lacks a cohesive use of street trees.
  2. Pedestrians presently do not have a pleasant and welcoming space in the corridor. Realistically, Shawnee Mission Parkway is going to have a

difficult time becoming a pedestrian environment. For Merriam, however, many of the retail businesses along the corridor are within walking distance to nearby neighborhoods. Commercial landowners and the city should work together to find a way to create a space where street trees, pedestrian lighting, and a sidewalk can be built.

3. Business signage, particularly the use of pole signs, and excessive building signage contribute to visual clutter and disorientation. Consideration should be given to restricting the use and placement of signs.
4. Perimeter parking lot landscaping and interior parking lot landscaping are two other important design features that can enhance the visual character of the corridor.
5. Franchise or corporate design dictates most of the architecture of commercial buildings in the corridor. This results in disharmonious mixture of visual contrast and chaos. The use of design guidelines to inform businesses about preferred exterior materials, colors, and building orientation and design can contribute to creating a more visually appealing corridor.
6. Enhanced Merriam entrance signage and more landscaping should be considered along Shawnee Mission Parkway.

### 67th Street Development Node



**Development Character.** The existing land use pattern of the 67<sup>th</sup> Street node offers a contrast to the previously discussed development nodes. While there are a few highway commercial uses at this interchange, there is the introduction of large corporate offices and light manufacturing. The existing land use pattern of the northeast quadrant contains a strip of commercial retail along the East Frontage Road. Once again, there are highway services, including a Fairfield Inn and Burger King, which take advantage of I-35 access and visibility. Offices such as the Seaboard, a major national

agribusiness company, have developed as a transition between the highway commercial businesses and the Vernon Place subdivision, a single-family residential development along 67th Street.

The southeast quadrant contains corporate office buildings in a campus-like setting, developed in the mid-1980's, from I-35 to Antioch Road. This office development includes Bayer, Lee, and Agripro.

The northwest quadrant of the interchange consists of a Phillips 66 gasoline and convenience store, and GE Capital Credit Services. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad also crosses 67th Street preventing more intense development west on 67<sup>th</sup>. However a self-storage facility, a small vehicle leasing business, and an animal shelter are located further west of the tracks. There is no frontage road along I-35 north of 67<sup>th</sup> Street, but west of the General Electric office is Carter Road which becomes Merriam Drive further north near Shawnee Mission Parkway. Carter leads to several industrial uses north of 67<sup>th</sup> Street, including the American Construction Iron Pipe Company, the Water District #1 facility, and businesses in the Carter Industrial Park.

The southwest quadrant is home to Lucent Technologies (formerly known as Western Electric) a communications company. The Consolidated Lumber Company and American Wood Products, Inc. are located adjacent to and west of the BNSF railroad, along with the Merriam Public Works Department. Development along the West Frontage Road south of Lucent Technologies has not occurred due to the steep terrain. Further south on the West Frontage Road are several businesses, which are tied to the 75th Street and Interstate 35 interchange.

### **67<sup>th</sup> Street Development Constraints.**

The following is a list of development constraints for the 67<sup>th</sup> Street Development Node:

- Limited amount of vacant developable land on both sides of I-35.
- I-35 is constructed on an overpass and 67<sup>th</sup> Street is built at a lower grade, which makes the land along 67<sup>th</sup> Street less visible from I-35.
- 67th Street terminates less than one mile west of I-35 and at Antioch Road east of I-35, thus limiting the ability of 67<sup>th</sup> Street to function as a major traffic artery.
- The topography that exists in the area, which can result in steep slopes, prevents continuous development along West Frontage Road from 67<sup>th</sup> Street south to 75<sup>th</sup> Street.
- The railroad tracks and associated trains may present an obstacle to attracting certain land uses/businesses. This area has an industrial character.
- There is land in the flood plain which limits development and reinvestment in the area.

### **67<sup>th</sup> Street Development Opportunities.**

The following is a list of development opportunities for the 67<sup>th</sup> Street Development Node:

- Convenient and safe access to I-35.
- Locational relationship to Antioch Road.

- A fairly large area of underutilized land exists at the Bayer site, which could result in a development opportunity.
- Attractive development pattern and favorable uses exist on the East Side of the interstate.

### **67<sup>th</sup> Street Visual Character.**

The following is an assessment of the current visual character of the area:

- The development on the east side of I-35 represents a contemporary “office campus” design and relates positively with the residential neighborhood.
- The placement of the L-shaped office building at 67<sup>th</sup> and Antioch (6700 Antioch Plaza) demonstrates how effective proper placement can enhance civic space and create a positive relationship to the street. This is in contrast to placing a parking lot between the street and building, and the building being lost in an asphalt parking lot.
- There are sidewalks on 67<sup>th</sup> Street from I-35 to Antioch. Antioch also had sidewalks. They contribute to connecting the area for pedestrians and enhance the mixed-use character.
- From an area-wide perspective, the land east of I-35 between 67<sup>th</sup> Street and 75<sup>th</sup> Street is a good example of mixed-use development. There are single family residential, multi-family apartments, office, commercial retail, and light industry.

### **75th Street Development Node**



**Georgetown Shops**

**Development Character.** The 75<sup>th</sup> Street development node contains a much different land use pattern and character than the other three interchanges. Only the northern quadrants of the interchange are within the Merriam city limits. Shawnee Mission Medical Center and associated medical uses are situated east of I-35 on 75<sup>th</sup> Street. The Georgetown Shopping Center, a 1960's development, is located in the northeast quadrant of the interchange. This shopping center can be classified as a neighborhood

shopping center because of its size and types of services, including a pharmacy, nail salon, and dry cleaner. The north side of the shopping center, which lacks visibility from 75th Street, houses several health-related services. The shopping center serves area residents to the north and south, and possibly employees and patrons of the

Shawnee Mission Medical Center complex. The Shawnee Mission Medical Center purchased the center in 1999.

The northwest quadrant has experienced a period of development beginning in the late 1980's through the 1990's. In many respects, this area represents the marketplace looking at infill sites that were bypassed as new development moved southward into Johnson County. Access to the West Frontage Road from 75th Street is not highly visible due to the terrain. As a result, businesses along the frontage road in this quadrant are represented primarily by larger-scale neighborhood services, including a fitness facility, two self-storage facilities, and an auto repair center. Representing highway service businesses is Hampton Inn, along with two vacant sites advertised for restaurant development. Highway services may consider access to the northwest quadrant of the interchange as an obstacle to overcome. An access point to the Turkey Creek Streamway Park is also located at the Northwest quadrant of the 75th Street and I-35 interchange.

### **75<sup>th</sup> Street Development Constraints.**

The following is a list of development constraints for the 75<sup>th</sup> Street Development Node:

- Limited amount of vacant developable land on both sides of I-35.
- The land that is vacant is of limited size, which makes marketing a challenge to large users or users needing land for future expansion.
- There are some older heavy industrial uses near 75<sup>th</sup> Street that might present challenges to intensive development, because of visual appearance, dust, and truck traffic.
- The retail shops at the Georgetown Shopping Center lack visibility from I-35.
- Recent development has increased traffic flow along West Frontage Road. A study should be done to determine whether West Frontage Road should be better connected at 75<sup>th</sup> Street and Farley in the future.

### **75<sup>th</sup> Street Development Opportunities.**

The following is a list of development opportunities for the 75<sup>th</sup> Street Development Node:

- Convenient and safe access to I-35 and 75<sup>th</sup> Street, which is a primary arterial in Johnson County.
- Good visibility and exposure to traffic on I-35 to the land along West Frontage Road.
- Location of the Shawnee Mission Medical Center. This offers an opportunity to capitalize on the growing medical needs and services facing the aging baby boom generation. Shawnee Mission Medical Center has purchased the

Georgetown Shopping Center and plans a mixed use development of medical retail and office activities.

- More buildings could be located along West Frontage Road if traffic congestion is addressed.

### **75<sup>th</sup> Street Visual Character.**

The following is an assessment of the current visual character of the area:

- Several of the newer buildings along West Frontage Road show a commitment to quality materials and design. They should set the standard for new development within the area.
- Consideration should be given to landscaping along West Frontage Road or I-35 right-of-way. The intent is to enhance the visual character of the area along I-35, while not obstructing the view of the businesses.

## **5.3 Merriam Town Center**

**Development Character.** Merriam Town Center, located at the interchange of I-35 and Johnson Drive, is the result of significant enhancement initiated by the City of Merriam in 1993. The city worked with a private developer to redevelop the Sharum residential subdivision and build the Merriam Town Center shopping center.

Construction of the center continues through 2000, and will ultimately contain approximately 500,000 square feet of leasable area. Merriam Town Center is located on a 65-acre tract, which, by the standards of the Urban Land Institute, qualifies as a regional shopping center. Merriam Town Center contains several national retailers, such as Old Navy and Home Depot, along with local market retailers, such as the Hen House grocer. The center contains a mix of retail businesses providing goods and services to the residents of Merriam. The center also serves the trade area of northern Johnson County and southern Wyandotte County, explaining the location of the Cinemark multi-screen cinema.

As with most redevelopment projects, Merriam Town Center created controversy and concerns about changing the character of Merriam and nearby residential neighborhoods. By its very nature, redevelopment disrupts and changes the character and use of an established area. The original community objectives were to 1) eliminate deteriorating conditions in the study area, 2) stabilize and improve the areas surrounding the study area, 3) create jobs and expand Merriam's position as an employment center, and 4) expand the city's property and sales tax base.

The city should identify measurable benchmarks to determine if the original objectives are being met. For example, market appraisals and price of home sales need to be documented to identify the impact on property values. Likewise, the number and type of police calls to the area can be documented to show if crime has increased. Sales tax

revenue can also be tracked and evaluated. For example, in 1999, Merriam Town Center generated over \$800,000 in city sales tax.

### **Merriam Town Center Development Opportunities.**

The following is a list of development opportunities for the Merriam Town Center area:

- The completion of Merriam Town Center suggests that development pressure is occurring on Johnson Drive immediately south of Merriam Town Center. There are several older retail/service structures near the interstate that make sense for increased intensity of use.

### **Merriam Town Center Visual Character.**

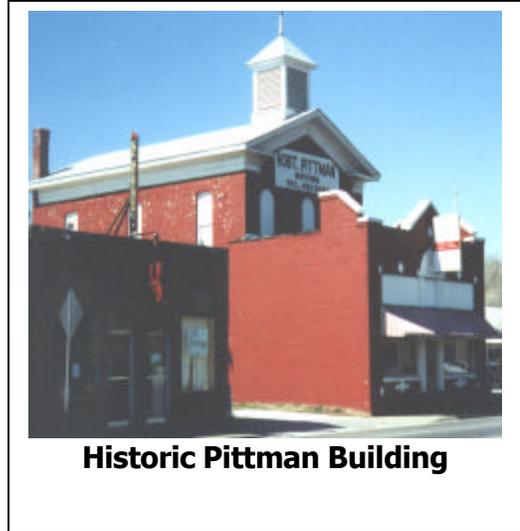
The following is an assessment of the current visual character of the area:

- Merriam Town Center reflects a unified architectural design with on-site parking for easy customer access.
- The site was designed to incorporate a large landscape berm paralleling Antioch Road. This feature acts to create a buffer for residential development located east of Merriam Town Center.
- Traffic ingress/egress is limited to along Antioch Road and Johnson Drive.
- Individual business signage is controlled and limited to facade signs. Each of these design elements of Merriam Town Center is reflective of shopping center design in the 1990's.
- There is a sidewalk along Antioch, and two sidewalks that enter Merriam Town Center. One is by the movie theater, and ends at the theater. The other is between Pier One and the eastern entrance, and ends at the north-south "street" in the Center.
- The views of Merriam Town Center from I-35 could be enhanced. The community should discuss with the owners how to present a more favorable image.

## **5.4 Downtown Merriam**

**Development Character.** Downtown Merriam is generally located between Merriam Drive and Kessler Road, with Johnson Drive as the southern boundary and 57<sup>th</sup> Street to the north. The downtown business district once included several blocks further east, but they were removed when Interstate 35 was constructed in the 1950's. Today, the downtown area consists of businesses that serve local residents and businesses. Businesses in the district include an auto parts store, a tavern, overhead door company, an exterminator, a violin shop, a computer store, and a few other small businesses. There are, though, several vacancies in the downtown, including four at the intersection of Merriam Drive and Johnson Drive. The city of Merriam purchased these buildings and

is proceeding with renovation that will integrate into the enhancement of the downtown area. The area does have historical significance. For example, though the City of Merriam incorporated in 1950, the Pittman building and the Merriam Community Center building, a few blocks to the north, were both at one time schools dating back to the turn of the 20th Century. Major remodeling of many of the Downtown buildings is not a marketable option because of the Turkey Creek floodplain. Floodplain regulations require building owners to flood-proof the entire building when substantial improvements are made to the structures making large scale reinvestment more expensive.



**Historic Pittman Building**

**HyettPalma Study.** The City of Merriam and the Downtown Partnership Committee has been working on improving the downtown area since 1998. HyettPalma, a national consulting firm with extensive experience in market analysis and enhancement, prepared “Merriam Downtown Economic Enhancement Strategy 1998”. The study includes a retail report documenting information on the Downtown Merriam primary retail trade area and researches demand for retail goods and services. Based on the findings of the market analysis, HyettPalma prepared strategies to improve the physical appearance and operation of Downtown, as well as identifying strategies to enhance the Downtown retail and service market.

HyettPalma defined the physical boundaries of downtown as extending along Merriam Drive from Shawnee Mission Parkway on the south to Antioch Road on the north. A graphic representation of Downtown Merriam is shown on Map 5-1 at the end of this section. The downtown is divided into three district components:

- 1) Historic Downtown District
- 2) The Vehicle Service District
- 3) North Side District

**HyettPalma Study Findings.** Based on the 1998 market analysis, the following indicators were identified for the Downtown Merriam retail trade area.

- The primary trade area has an estimated population of 131,703, with an estimated 56,261 households.
- The average household size is 2.33 persons, which is lower than the national average of 2.68.

- The total estimated annual income of households within the primary trade area is approximately \$2,656,000,000.
- The average household income for those in the primary trade area is \$47,214.

**HyettPalma Study Recommendations.** Two sets of strategies were recommended to guide the enhancement of Downtown Merriam. The first set outlined Downtown Districts and Improvements for managing the future growth and enhancement of downtown. The second set of strategies outlined tools for implementation. The plan outlined recommendations for each of the three districts that compose Merriam Downtown. Presented below are the HyettPalma recommendations.

**Vehicle Service District.** The goal for this district is to retain and augment its current uses, improve the district's physical appearance, and market the district as a single unit that offers consumers "multi-stop" variety and convenience in a single location.

**Historic Downtown Merriam.** The goal for this district is to create "a quaint, historic pedestrian area of Mom and Pop shops that is a community gathering place, has a small town feel, and recaptures our past".

**Northside District.** The goal for this district is to capitalize on the district's proximity to the new Antioch interchange and traffic created by Merriam Town Center. The objective is to recognize this area is in transition and to create a new identity and undertake public and private improvements.

### **HyettPalma Study Implementation Key Public Sector Strategies**

- Designate the entire Downtown project area as a Tax Increment Financing Conservation (TIF) District, and provide annual funding allocations to the overall enhancement effort from both the general fund contributions and funding from the TIF District.
- Revise the zoning regulations to 1) ensure the placement of retail, restaurant and office uses in Historic Downtown Merriam; 2) require zero front yard lot line development in this district, and do away with the now required 30 foot front yard setback, and 3) allow zero side yard setbacks when possible, determined on a case-by-case basis.
- Develop a creek side plaza on the West Side of Merriam Drive, south of Johnson Drive.

**Downtown Revitalization Program.** The City of Merriam hired PGAV consultants in 1999 to develop a downtown revitalization program. PGAV worked closely with Merriam Downtown Partnership and city officials to prepare the plan. Presented below are the recommendations of the Downtown Revitalization Program report. Sections of the report are reproduced to ensure continuity between the comprehensive plan and the downtown revitalization program. The plan incorporates the three districts identified in the HyettPalma study. The study also includes a special component that focuses on development of a Farmers Market in the Historic Downtown District that is entitled "The Farmers Market and Small Shops of Merriam." The focus of the conceptual design advocated in the study is to build upon the positive and unique aspects of Downtown Merriam as it exists today and historically.

The study recommends physical and architectural improvements which will contribute to Downtown Merriam's identity within the greater Kansas City area as a defined downtown district with recognized boundaries, a unique sense of place, opportunities for business development and growth and a strong image. Particular attention to improving pedestrian access to local business, while retaining or improving the availability of customer parking, and respecting the operational needs of existing businesses, is a key design element. The study stresses the importance implementing a coordinated and unified design strategy to the entire corridor even though the Merriam Downtown District has been divided into three districts.

## 5.5 Historic Downtown District

### Location

The Historic Downtown District is located between Turkey Creek and I-35.

### Concept

The history of this area of Merriam, the Merriam Community Center, the historic structure occupied by Pittman Moving and Storage and the variety of small business in the immediate vicinity, give the Historic Downtown District an important role as the nucleus of Downtown Merriam. Most of the buildings in this district are at or near the property line. The combination of buildings and a number of enhancements to the streetscape provide an opportunity to restore a vibrant urban streetscape. This will contribute to a visitor friendly image for this district and the study area as a whole. To enhance the Historic Downtown District as the heart of the Downtown Merriam revitalization program, specific improvements are recommended for traffic calming, parking, streetscape, signage, future land use, and historic downtown amenities.

#### 1. Traffic Calming

Merriam Drive in its current configuration passes close to the front doors of the retail businesses between Johnson Drive and 57<sup>th</sup> Street leaving limited pedestrian access along the street. Conceptual improvements include reconfiguring Merriam Drive to a 3-lane configuration with two through lanes (1-north and 1-southbound) and a

center, turn lane. Further, the three-lane configuration should improve traffic flow by reducing the confusion and backups that occur when left-turns are made in the existing four-lane configuration.

This reconfiguration will allow sidewalks along the retail frontage to be increased in width, improving pedestrian safety, customer accessibility to business entrances, and will further help to define the Historic Downtown as a pedestrian and vehicular business district rather than a vehicular through-way. Selected pedestrian crosswalks will be defined with distinct pavement treatments. Sidewalks throughout the district will be developed with a combination of concrete and decorative concrete pavers and public seating in selected locations. The combination of these improvements in conjunction with angled, on street parking in selected areas will slow traffic and increase visitor convenience and friendliness.

## **2. Parking Enhancement:**

In addition to these street improvements noted above, customer access to public parking will be improved by developing the following parking improvements:

- Construction of the Farmers Market includes public parking for 100-110 automobiles between 58<sup>th</sup> Street and 57<sup>th</sup> Street. This parking will also serve future retail development along the west right-of-way of Merriam Drive, support all existing business in the Historic District and provide overflow parking during special events at the Merriam Community Center.
- On street, angled parking is proposed and will also help to slow traffic in the downtown district further enhancing the districts identify as a pedestrian environment.
- Improvement of customers/employee parking lots to the rear of the business along the west side of Merriam drive has already been completed. Similar improvements are suggested for the off-street parking along 58<sup>th</sup> Terrace and 58<sup>th</sup> Street.

## **3. Streetscape Improvements**

In order to strengthen the visual recognition of the Historic Downtown as a defined retail/commercial district the following streetscape improvements are proposed.

- Development of entry markers to the Historic Downtown District at its northern and southern boundaries.
- Installation of decorative street lights and seasonal/event banners along the street right-of-way.
- Selective use of street trees and landscaping improvements to improve underutilized greenspace particularly at the northwest corner of Johnson Drive and Merriam Drive.

- Installation of pedestrian benches, trash receptacles and raised planters along the sidewalks in selected locations.

#### **4. Signage**

The signage has been designed to incorporate a “family” of signs, which include monument signs, display signs and markers. The design of each utilizes a combination of brick and stone materials following and maintaining the historic character of the Downtown District.

- Entry markers identifying the southern and northern boundaries of the Historic Downtown District are proposed just north of the intersection of Johnson and Merriam Drive and just south of the bridge abutment at Turkey Creek and Johnson Drive.
- The development of distinct and unique signs for the retail businesses along Merriam Drive should be encouraged. One theme discussed involves using an object from the business (i.e. violin or book or light bulb, etc.) as a three-dimensional object incorporating each business signage. Further guidelines should be developed to implement this concept, as desired.

#### **5. Future Retail/Commercial/Residential Development**

The support of existing business as well as opportunities for new mixed-use development within downtown are identified in the conceptual plan and include:

- Renovation of three city owned buildings – the former Bank at 5854 Merriam Drive and two retail storefronts on the west side of Merriam Drive at 5842 and 5846 Merriam Drive as leaseable retail/commercial services space. (Recommendations for these buildings are included in a separately, bound component of this study).
- Creation of a defined zone for new mixed-use commercial/retail/residential type development (first floor retail/commercial services, second floor, office/residential) along the west right-of-way of Merriam Drive between 58<sup>th</sup> Street and 57<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Public improvements in parking and streetscape within the right-of-way to enhance the viability and attractiveness of existing business within the district.

#### **6. Historic Downtown Amenities**

Several opportunities exist which will help Downtown Merriam develop a unique sense of place. These include:

- The potential for the development of a symbolic/memorial fountain or sculptural landmark at the northwest corner of Johnson and Merriam Drive.

- Consideration of the development of a Farmers Market and associated “Small Shops of Merriam” in the heart of downtown, in order to bring increased customer traffic and provide a venue for the support of special community events and build a unique community flavor in downtown.
- Recognize the unique role of Turkey Creek and the adjacent Streamway Park system and develop the green space along the eastern boundary of the creek as a public park amenity that can be readily utilized by visitors, and employees in Downtown Merriam and the Farmers Market.
- Long-term recognition of the rail hub on the eastern boundary of the downtown district.

## 5.6 Farmers Market

### Location

The proposed Farmers Market would be located on city-owned property west of Merriam Drive between 58<sup>th</sup> Street and the Community Center on the site formerly occupied by Terry's Auto Body Shop and Smith Environmental.

### Concept

The development of a Farmers Market in the heart of the Historic Downtown District offers an excellent opportunity to infuse the area with additional activity and visitors. Development of this underutilized site would also provide additional parking that could be shared by businesses during the week and the Community Center in the evenings.

Conceptual alternatives for the Farmers Market were explored with the Downtown Partnership. A preferred concept was developed which provides the following:

- Space for approximately 36 vendors in phase one with public parking for 100-110 automobiles.
- Capability for future expansion.
- Site plan organization with an adjacent zone of 2-story mixed-use commercial/retail/residential walk-up structures (first floor, retail/commercial services and second floor, office/residential). The proposed “Small Shops of Merriam” are deliberately placed along the west street frontage of Merriam Drive to further extend the downtown street façade that exists further south. The development of these properties via a public private partnership with an interested developer would provide Downtown Merriam with a new variety in small business opportunities, while simultaneously contributing to the success of the Farmers Market and existing downtown businesses.
- A strong connection with the adjacent Streamway Park System and Werner Park is also envisioned. The greenspace between the Farmers Market and the creek provides an excellent opportunity for recreational activity for children and adults immediately adjacent to the market. The combination of downtown business,

Farmers Market and Streamway and Werner Park offer an opportunity to create a very successful and inviting community market environment which will contribute to the overall level of business activity and identity of downtown.

## 5.7 Vehicle Service District

### Location

The Vehicle Service District forms the southern edge of Downtown and follows Merriam Drive from Johnson Drive on the north to its southern boundary at Shawnee Mission Parkway.

### Concept

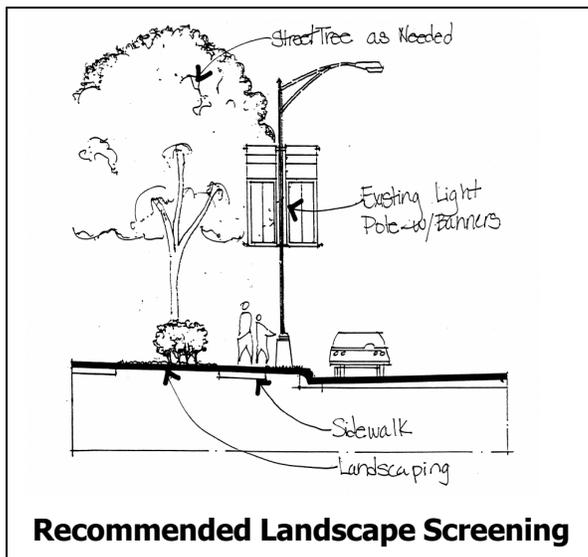
This district is home to a varied collection of businesses ranging from a building supply and café to vehicle servicing, repair and sales. The Downtown Revitalization Program addresses signage, parking and screening, pedestrian access, and amenities to improve the public perception of the district as an identifiable portion of Downtown Merriam.

#### 1. Signage:

- Monument type signs identifying the northern and southern boundaries of this district are proposed.

A unique auto display in the east right-of-way of Merriam Drive near Merriam Avenue is proposed. This sign would accommodate the display of a feature automobile restored or repaired by Merriam businesses and would anchor the southern edge of vehicle service district. Brick and limestone monuments adjacent to the display area would identify the landmark as a thematic feature of Merriam’s Downtown District.

#### 2. Parking and Screening:



The paved driveways and aprons surrounding many of the businesses within the vehicle service district extend into the public right-of-way and are heavily used by business owners for access and delivery of goods, customer or employee parking and display of automobiles for sale.

Where possible landscape and low screening improvements are proposed within the public right-of-way particularly along the west side of Merriam Drive to provide a more

uniform and attractive street edge and provide a visual screen or buffer between

the street edge and the business properties. Close attention will need to be given to the needs of individual business owners as these improvements are implemented.

### **3. Pedestrian Access**

The development of an improved sidewalk along the western right-of-way of Merriam Drive is proposed.

### **4. Amenities:**

Additional amenities intended to define the vehicle service district as an integral element in Merriam's Downtown include:

- Installation of decorative/event banners on existing light standards along Merriam Drive.
- Protection and improvement of the greenspace along the east right-of-way of Merriam Drive adjacent to the railroad tracks.

## **5.8 Northside District**

### **Location**

The North Side District follows Merriam Drive and is bounded on the south by the bridge at Turkey Creek and on the north by Antioch Road.

### **Concept**

The wide variety of businesses along Merriam Drive in this district, contribute to its somewhat disorganized character. In order to strengthen and improve the public's perception of this district as an identifiable portion of Downtown Merriam the improvements are recommended to improve signage, landscaping and screening, and amenities.

#### **1. Signage**

A monument type sign will be developed at the northern boundary near the intersection of Antioch Road and 49<sup>th</sup> Terrace. This signage will serve to anchor the northern boundary of the Merriam Downtown District and will serve as a threshold or entry point.

#### **2. Landscaping and Screening**

The density of business properties in the North District is lighter than in the Vehicle District to the south with fewer instances of pavements for customer parking or building access extending into the right-of-way. Selected improvements within the right-of-way might include the selective placement of landscape screening and street trees to encourage the development of a consistent street edge along Merriam Drive.

### 3. Amenities

Additional amenities intended to define the North Commercial District as an integral element in Merriam Downtown include:

- Installation of decorative/event banners on existing light standards along Merriam Drive.
- Development of the park property on the east side of Merriam Drive just south of 51<sup>st</sup> Street. Community known as "Water Fall Park", this facility should be enhanced as a significant greenspace within the Downtown District including improving its pedestrian and bicycle links to Brown Park to the west and the Streamway Park, Community Center and Farmers Market site to the south.

#### 5.85.9 **Downtown Revitalization Implementation Strategies**

##### **Zoning**

Consideration should be given to revising the City's current zoning ordinance to enable the downtown district to evolve into a new economic role and identity. The creation of a special zoning district dedicated to Downtown might be considered.

Some items of particular importance to address in this revision or special district would include:

- Building setback and side yard requirements
- Density
- Architectural design guidelines
- Parking requirements and restrictions
- Signage and landscaping
- Vehicle storage, and display
- Status of storage yards

##### **Design Guidelines/Materials**

The City and Downtown Merriam Partnership should consider developing development design guidelines for all new or enhancement projects in Downtown. These guidelines would outline architectural and site development parameters that would aid in the realization of revitalization efforts. Given the wide variety of materials and styles of buildings currently existing in downtown, it is difficult to suggest that a strict limitation on acceptable building materials be considered for the downtown district. However, new developments within the historic downtown district should be encouraged to utilize traditional native limestone, brick, glass and metal materials compatible with the revitalization concepts outlined by the City and addressed in this study and further outlined in development of design guidelines.

## 5.10 Conclusions

There are many positive elements that contribute to making Merriam a successful commercial and industrial market. Location and convenient access to I-35 and metropolitan Kansas City are the principal strengths. Even though suburbanization continues to move west and south in Johnson County, as well as the outward growth of North Kansas City, Blue Springs and Lee's Summit, the City of Merriam will retain its central location.

The challenge facing Merriam during the next two decades is responding to market changes and new competition developing in suburban growth areas. The simple fact is Merriam is a mature commercial and industrial real estate market. There are only a few vacant developable parcels remaining in the city. Subsequently, new commercial or industrial growth is not going to occur unless existing areas increase or change their land use intensity.

Increasing land use intensity is only one tactic that should be employed to ensure Merriam retains its market attractiveness and competitiveness. Another tactic is to acknowledge that change is inevitable and then build collaborative relationships so that community change leads to innovation and adaptation. The strategy being contemplated for Downtown Merriam seeks to upgrade the visual quality of the area, introduce pedestrian-friendly amenities, and enhance the market image of the area. Each of these strategies is intended to reinvent and reinvigorate Downtown Merriam and prevent its slow decline, both physically and economically.

Without local leadership, Merriam could fall victim to the distress exhibited of older inner ring suburbs. A concern voiced by several of the commercial real estate professionals was the need to ensure that Merriam maintains the integrity of residential neighborhoods, commercial, and industrial areas. They recognized the risk of Merriam becoming complacent to older areas of the community accepting a lower standard of property maintenance, which eventually could facilitate a decline in property values.

Merriam appears to be positioned to attract small industrial uses looking for an older building with convenient access to I-35. Several of the industrial Realtors interviewed commented how they wished they could find some vacant land to market. The commercial realtors stated that Merriam could continue to attract specialized retail goods or services seeking to take advantage of I-35, but there are few vacant developable tracts. To conclude, Merriam planning officials need to continue to evaluate how established retail nodes and corridors could be improved to retain, or in some instances regain, a competitive advantage in a changing marketplace.

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