

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.

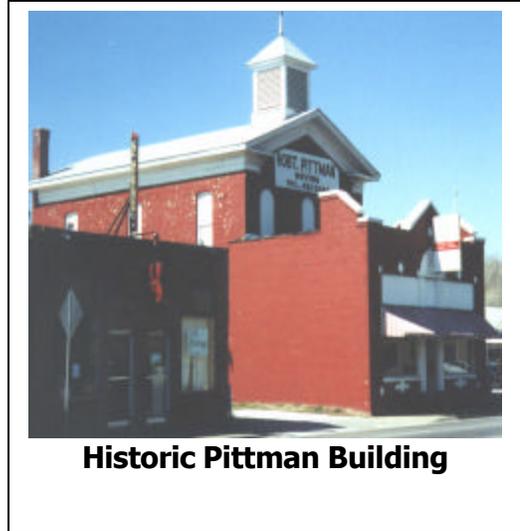
The following is an assessment of the current visual character of the area:

- 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 57th 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 57th 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 58th Street and 57th 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 58th Terrace and 58th 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 58th Street and 57th 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 58th 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

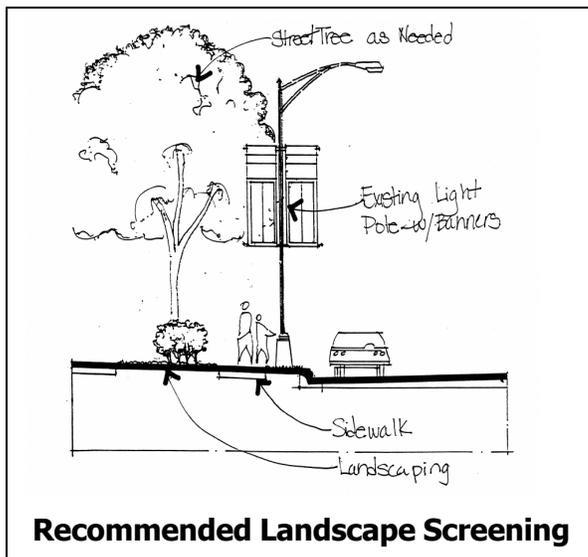
This district is home to a varied collection of businesses ranging from a building supply and café to vehicle servicing, repair and sales. The Downtown Revitalization Program addresses signage, parking and screening, pedestrian access, and amenities to improve the public perception of the district as 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 49th 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 51st 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.