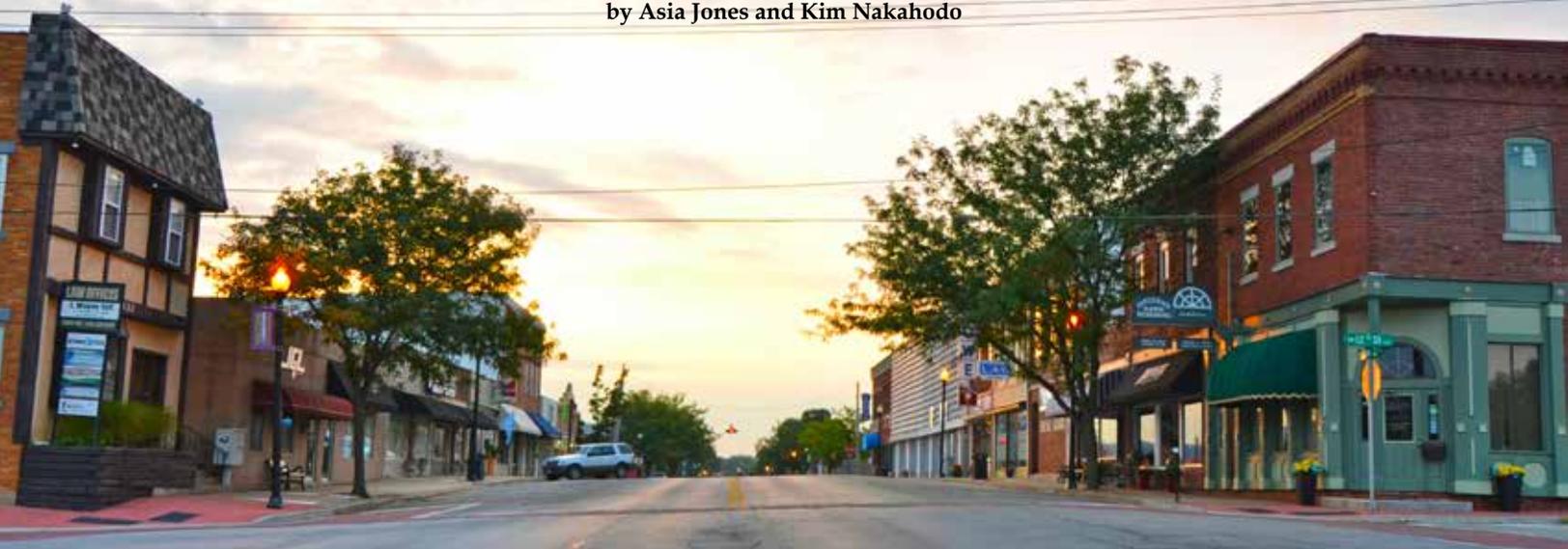


CITY OF BLUE SPRINGS

by Asia Jones and Kim Nakahodo



The city of Blue Springs, Missouri, has a rich history that can still be seen throughout our community. As we plan for the future, we work to preserve the history while embracing the changing needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

Incorporated in 1880, Blue Springs was developed in the early 19th century as settlers built the town around an abundant water supply coming from a spring of the Little Blue River—hence the name Blue Springs. As the City expanded, growth centered around the new railroad tracks still visible in the downtown corridor. In the past 40 years, the population grew from 6,779 to the current populace of more than 53,000 residents. To meet the needs of such a fast-growing community, a conscious effort was made to invest in places and people, bringing vibrancy and convenience to the residents.

The Blue Springs community has a vision for a vibrant, mixed-use downtown that is the economic and social heart of the City. This concept has been achieved through years of intense community discussion, including multiple citizens' visioning sessions. As a result, the Downtown Master Plan was adopted by the Blue Springs City Council in 2007.

To date, more than \$1.6 million has been invested in downtown Blue Springs as part of the Downtown Master

Plan to construct new infrastructure, leverage façade improvements, and add historic-style streetlights. Funding for these improvements was made possible through the Community Development Block Grant program and Chapter 353 Tax Abatement through the Main Center Redevelopment Corporation.

The City has made significant progress in the downtown corridor by developing relationships with various community partners, including Downtown Alive!, an enthusiastic group of volunteers. As a four-year participant of Missouri Main Street Connections, Downtown Alive! has engaged and connected with Blue Springs community members to provide improvements to downtown that are both aesthetic and functional. One of the primary advocacy goals Downtown Alive! was to address was the lack of parking for downtown patrons.

As the City began to plan for a major renovation to the Howard L. Brown Public Safety Building, the design committee incorporated the community's desire to increase public parking into the scope of the \$22 million dollar project. By working with private land owners and the Blue Springs Chamber of Commerce, the City was able to add 160 parking places and nine handicap parking places to the downtown district in 2014, for a total investment of approximately \$450,000. With this increased parking capacity,

the Howard L. Brown Public Safety Building is slated for completion later this year and will feature a more customer service-oriented design to better serve the residents and police officers.

Streetscape improvements also have been a major project for Downtown Alive! and the City, including the addition of new benches and new recycling/trash receptacles along Main Street. Placing recycling bins throughout downtown gives community members the option to increase recycling and improve livability in the corridor. Another addition to the corridor was bikeracks, handcrafted and donated to Downtown Alive! by Blue Springs Bike Shop. This increased accessibility for bicyclists who visit the downtown corridor. Such enhancements won the City, Downtown Alive! and the Blue Springs Chamber of Commerce the Streetscape & Public Improvement Project Award from Missouri Main Street Connections in 2015. As a result of the City's infrastructure investments, many new and established businesses have relocated from major corridors to the thriving downtown district, showing that working closely with community partners makes a positive difference for residents and business owners.

In the process of bringing new life to the downtown corridor, Blue Springs is careful not to erase its history. One

method of preservation is the 'Remnants Restored' Public Art Project, a result of a partnership between the Blue Springs Public Art Commission and Downtown Alive!. This project celebrates the City's history by featuring two sculptures that incorporate recovered materials from Blue Springs' past, including recovered aluminum from downtown's historic America's Community Bank building and steel from the downtown water tower, a former City landmark. The artists have been commissioned and each of the unique pieces will be installed in fall 2015

As downtown Blue Springs comes to life with new amenities and boutique businesses, the City also is investing in its residents' recreational and wellness needs. One such investment was the creation of the Blue Springs Fieldhouse, formally known as Sports City. The purchase of the facility was made possible through a generous donation by long-time resident and parks champion Linda Landhal Edison. This project serves as a win-win as it redeveloped an aging, function-specific building and saved a significant amount of taxpayer dollars by repurposing a building already located in the community. With a final cost of approximately \$6.5 million, the facility was purchased and renovated using existing resources, private funds, and a self-sustaining pro forma to eliminate the need for additional tax payer support. Thanks to this innovative reuse of an existing facility, Blue Springs now provides fitness and recreation opportunities that can benefit residents in all of Eastern Jackson County, no matter their fitness level.

Within its 76,000-square-feet of indoor space, the Fieldhouse offers four, hard-surfaced courts that can be used for basketball, volleyball or pickleball; two walking tracks, one hard-surfaced track, an artificial turf track; and a new artificial turf field for indoor soccer, flag football or sports training. These areas can be used for pickup games during open gym sessions or for league play, appealing to the novice or more advanced athlete.

Created with people in mind, the Fieldhouse provides recreational opportunities the entire family can enjoy together. While one person uses the instructor-led spin and aerobics classes, another family member can try an interactive workout through the Fitness On Demand™ feature, allowing them to follow along with



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a virtual instructor. Another option is to use the state-of-the-art fitness center measuring 6,500 square-feet outfitted with equipment that has the latest technology to help users track and maintain their fitness goals. While parents workout, children can hang out in the Kidz Corner, a child watch area that provides activities for youth. To maximize the facility's usefulness to residents, the majority of the amenities can be used by paid members and by non-members who purchase a day pass.

Both the renovated Fieldhouse and the successful revitalization efforts in the downtown corridor

have strengthened relationships with community partners and created a more vibrant Blue Springs. □

Asia Jones is a University of Missouri J-School alumna with a passion for local government. She has served as a board member for the City of Kansas City, Missouri, and now works in Communications for the City of Blue Springs, Missouri. **Kim Nakahodo** is the Assistant to the City Administrator and has served in local government for more than 17 years, more than five years with the City of Blue Springs, Missouri.