

PHASE I PLAN: AFFTON-GRAVOIS BUSINESS CORRIDOR



*Prepared by: St. Louis County Department of Planning
St. Louis County Economic Council*

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AFFTON-GRAVOIS BUSINESS CORRIDOR STUDY: PHASE I REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

The Affton-Gravois Business Corridor is the symbolic heart of the community of Affton and plays a key role in defining the community's character. Phase I of the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor Plan is the product of the ideas, commitment, energy, and efforts of community leaders, the Affton Chamber of Commerce, civic minded people, and St. Louis County government officials and staff.

The Affton-Gravois Business Corridor is diverse in nature. As a result of this diversity, the Corridor was divided into several key nodes or planning sub-areas. This report reflects the recommendations and strategies for the "Commercial Strip" area defined by the St. Louis City limits on the east and Weber Road on the west.

PHASE I ACCOMPLISHMENTS AT A GLANCE:

The Steering Committee and the St. Louis County Department of Planning and the St. Louis County Economic Council:

- , Developed a comprehensive corridor Master Plan with design guidelines.**
- , Created a facade improvement program that enables business owners to receive up to \$7500 in matching funds for exterior building and site improvements.**
- , Initiated the formation of a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) Community Betterment Association to ensure the plan would continue to be carried out by the community.**

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor study is to develop a Master Plan outlining strategies for the revitalization of the Business Corridor through a series of tangible actions and defined responsibilities. The first phase focused on the design elements and capital improvements needed along Gravois Road. Phase II will center on market analysis and redevelopment.

The St. Louis County Department of Planning and the St. Louis County Economic Council partnered on this project to provide a comprehensive package of planning and development expertise, technical tools, and financial resources.

Parsons Harland Bartholomew & Associates (HBA) was hired to provide urban design services for the Business Corridor which yielded a Streetscape Master Plan, Building Exterior Guidelines, Sign Guidelines, and a "Model" Block Plan.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

This Plan has been prepared with extensive involvement from the Affton Chamber of Commerce, local business merchants, and area residents. To help insure ownership of the planning process, several community meetings were held. The result has been the creation of a plan truly reflective of a process of community based planning.

The planning process was overseen by the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor Steering Committee, an ad hoc committee appointed by the Affton Chamber of Commerce, County Councilmen, Kurt Odenwald (5th District), and Jeff Wagener (6th District), and State Representative, May E. Scheve (District 98).

The Steering Committee members represent citizens who have an investment in the Affton Gravois Business District including members of the Affton Chamber of Commerce, local residents, and business merchants.

Phase I of the Affton-Gravois Business Plan is the product of more than two years of planning and effort by many people who have recognized the importance of the Affton community. This Plan represents a combination of interests in sustaining the core Affton business district, strengthening the economic base, upgrading the infrastructure, and beautifying the physical setting of the community.

**For More Information Contact:
St. Louis County
Department of Planning
615-5186**

BUSINESS CORRIDOR GOALS & STRATEGIES

The goals and strategies for the business corridor included:

1. Strengthen existing retail commercial areas.
2. Create a pedestrian atmosphere on Gravois Road to encourage business activity.
3. Create a sense of identity for the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor through consistent streetscape and facade improvements, which projects a viable and unique commercial business district image.

These goals are achieved through the following strategies:

- Creating a clear definition between streets, parking areas, and sidewalk/storefront areas.
- Developing a standard "set" of design elements which can be used in different ways to create consistency along the Corridor.
- Addressing parking problems and shortages.
- Providing pedestrian friendly amenities such as: sidewalks, street lighting, landscaping, planters, benches, informational signage, and banners, to promote additional business activity.
- Organizing exterior signage into zones for increased identification and legibility.
- Restoring storefronts, entrances, and windows to an original or similar style to maintain architectural integrity and variety.
- Providing well defined pedestrian access from available parking areas to storefronts through the improved use of sidewalks, crosswalks, and signalized crossings.

ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

Issue Identification was completed through a series of facilitated workshops and a business survey. These facilitated workshops were specifically designed to focus discussion on the issues that the Steering Committee felt should be addressed throughout the planning process.

The process identified several key issues impacting the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor: Economic Development, Building Facade, Signage, Infrastructure, and Code Enforcement. Created to address these issues were four (4) Task Forces to study in greater detail the concerns of planning participants.

The first issue impacting the Business Corridor is the functional obsolescence of many buildings. The Affton Business Corridor competes with the larger, regional shopping malls. Shops along Gravois Road have problems deriving from their age. The stores are smaller, which mean smaller inventories and less selection for the shopper. The lots are shallower which prohibits expansion. The streets are narrow which inhibit circulation and access. The parking is inadequate in many areas which is a detriment to convenience.

As Gravois Road becomes overly congested, especially during peak hours, motorists who are viewed as potential customers are more apt to remain in the flow of traffic rather than attempt to move in and out of heavy traffic in order to shop at these stores. Consequently, shoppers turn to the more convenient shopping centers for their needs.

The lack of adequate, convenient parking is a major problem. Currently vehicles parallel park on the roadway shoulder. This parking blocks the sidewalk and is dangerous to pedestrian movement. Another primary safety issue is the lack of identifiable pedestrian sidewalks and crosswalks. Several critical links are missing allowing for complete "walkability".

The Corridor is predominately auto-oriented with respect to the speed of traffic and the lack of pedestrian facilities. The street has a lack of controlled vehicle access points. For example,

THE PLANNING PROCESS:

- , **Surveyed the local businesses along Gravois Road to study the business climate and trends. Approximately 240 businesses were sent surveys. Almost half of those businesses responded.**
- , **Conducted facilitated workshops designed to identify issues and establish priorities.**
- , **Presented the design standards, streetscape improvements and model block at community wide meetings for public comment.**
- , **Held monthly meetings were held with the Steering Committee and subsequent Task Forces to analysis the status of the planning process, develop goals, objectives and strategies culminating in this plan document.**
- , **Held open house meetings for Phase I of the ISTEA improvements.**

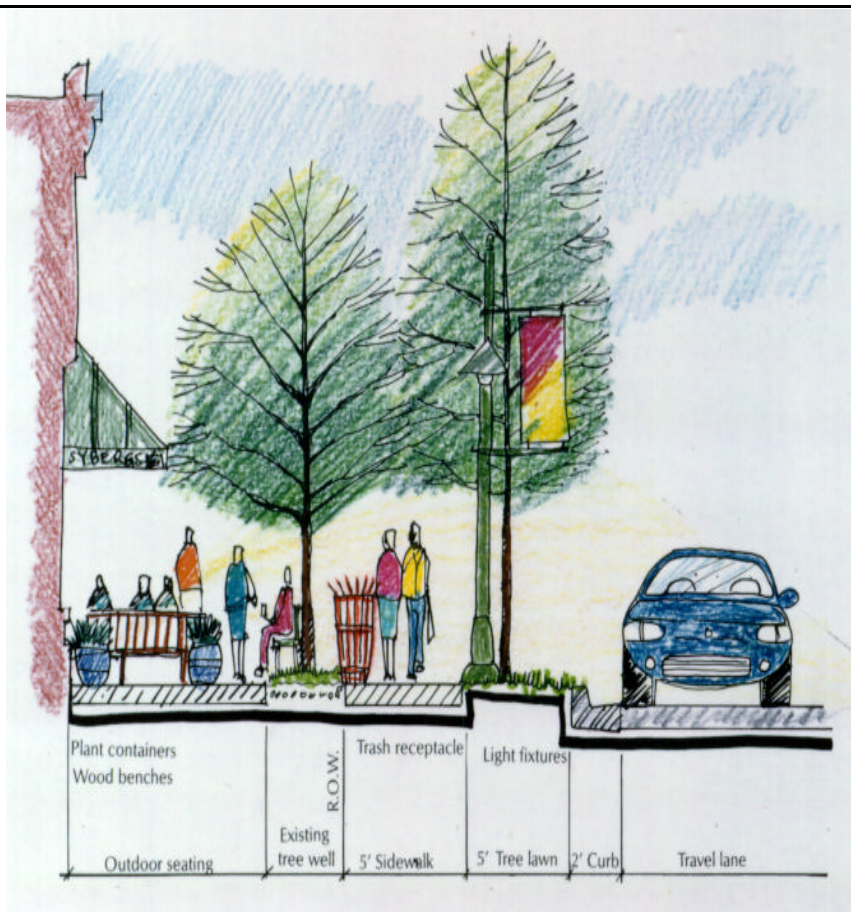
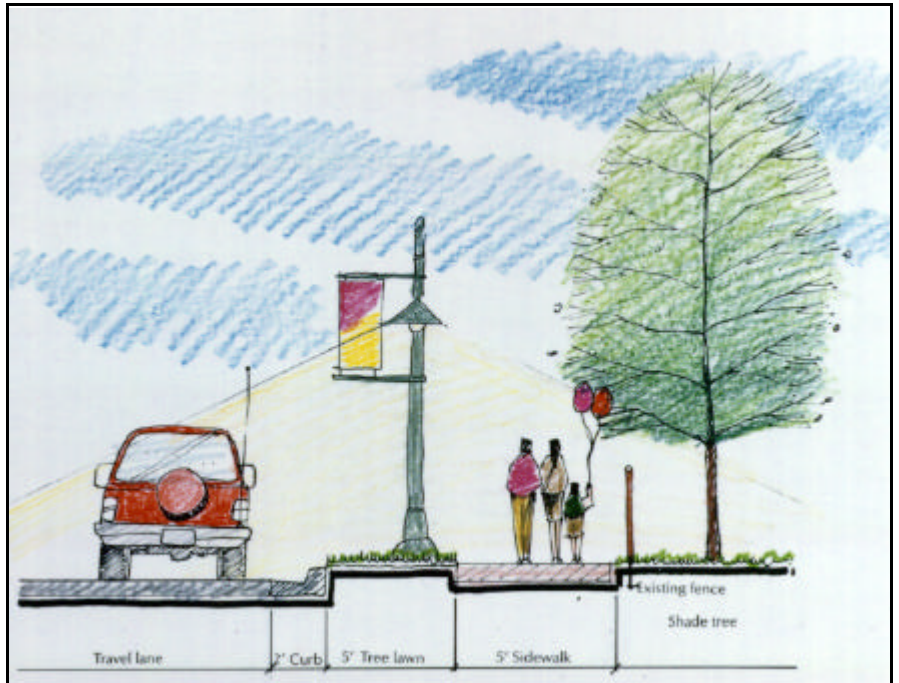
driveway entrances and curb cuts are located indiscriminately along Gravois Road. The lack of controlled access promotes random movement on and off Gravois Road.

The appearance of the Corridor was consistently cited as a concern by both business owners and residents. Poorly maintained buildings and lots, high weeds, trash and litter, and derelict vehicles are some of the problems identified as detracting from the Corridor's curb appeal. Many of the businesses along the Corridor are in violation of the sign ordinance. Several businesses have too many signs or the signs are in disrepair. This proliferation of signs increases the visual clutter along the Corridor.

CORRIDOR PLAN

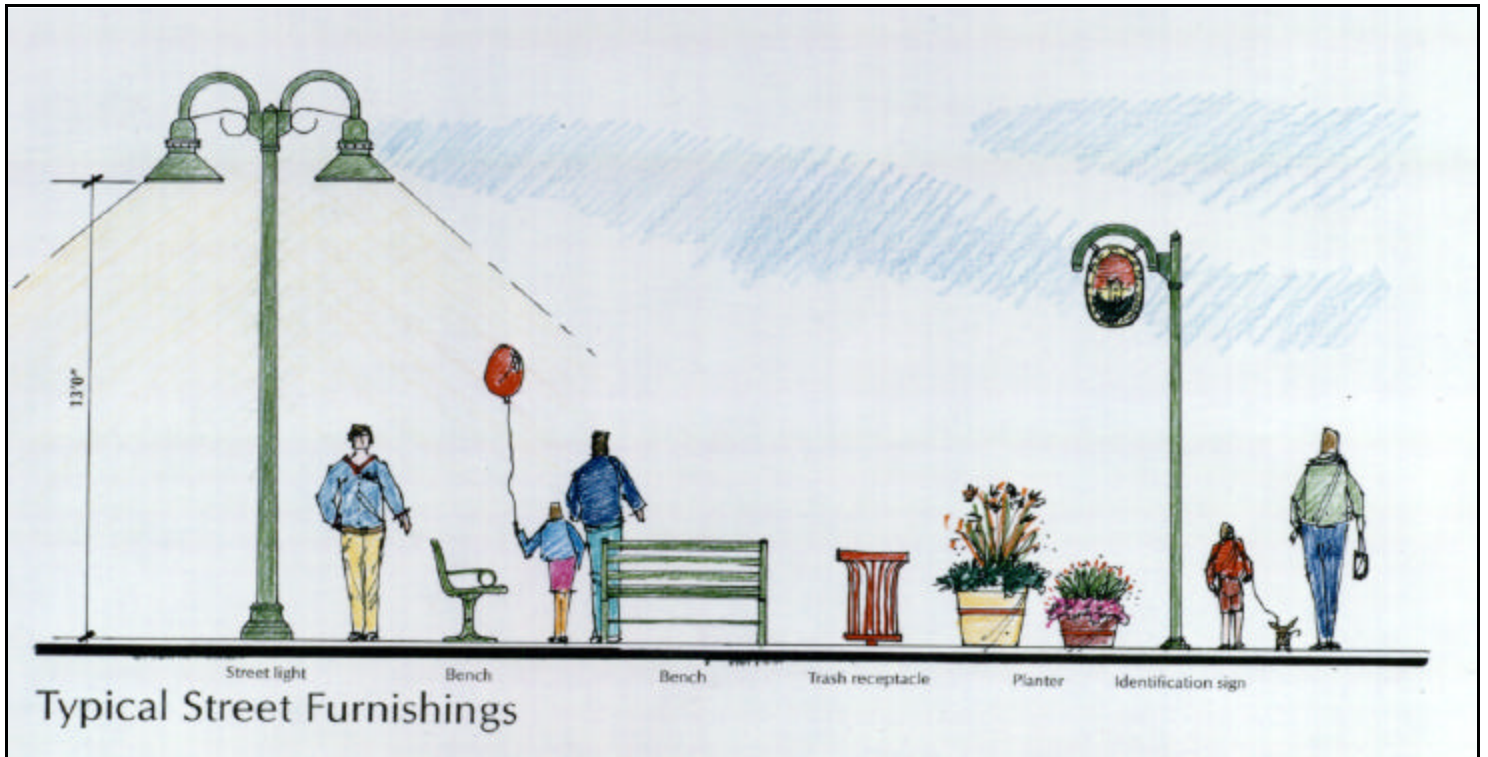
The Design Guidelines for the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor were developed based on a "Main Street USA" theme. This concept consists of a unified treatment of the following elements: sidewalks, landscape areas, curb and gutter, roadway, and parallel parking, combined with facade improvements to restore and enhance the architecture of the diverse buildings along the Corridor. Together, these improvements will form a cohesive streetscape, which will tie the business district into an identifiable area.

The Design Guidelines were endorsed by the Affton Chamber of Commerce. The full design guidelines are



considered a part of this Plan and can be obtained through the Affton Chamber of Commerce or the St. Louis County Department of Planning.

The Corridor Master Plan provides a framework for the future development and redevelopment of land and buildings in the area, affecting both public and private entities. When developing individual improvement projects, such as the landscaping of a parking lot or the installation of public signs and markers, this Plan should be used. It should also be used in preparing long-range capital improvement programs for the Business District and in managing ongoing maintenance and upgrading utilities. All work throughout the Affton-Gravois Business District should be coordinated with this Plan such that individual projects coincide and compliment the long-range District goals.



Landscape Areas

A well coordinated landscape will unify the streetscape fabric and present a cohesive image of Gravois Road to the public. Landscape plantings include both street tree plantings and shrub plantings. Together these plantings should be utilized to improve the overall visual quality of the Corridor while projecting an image of a unified business district.

Sidewalks

The Affton-Gravois Business Corridor Master Plan recommends a continuous 5 foot wide (minimum) concrete sidewalk throughout the project area. This sidewalk is intended to encourage pedestrian browsing at various locations along the Corridor.

Sidewalks connecting from adjacent neighborhoods will provide pedestrians easy access to the Corridor.

Signage

Visually appealing business districts have signs that clearly identify businesses, but do not detract from an attractive streetscape. Different types of signs placed at varying heights and locations create clutter and confusion. Sign competition actually

makes it more difficult for a customer to locate a business. The Master Plan recommends that signs be more uniform in appearance and placed in several standardized zones on or near buildings. This consistency will reduce and simplify signs along Gravois Road, assist motorists in locating businesses, and allow unique architecture to be visible from the street.

Parking

A substantial component of the Affton-Gravois streetscape is the addition of parallel parking areas along Gravois Road. The intent of these areas is to provide for the replacement of "head-in" parking which currently exists. The current parking configuration obstructs pedestrian movement and does not aid in creating the feeling of a "walking" commercial district. It is also very dangerous.

Roadway with Curb and Gutter

The Missouri Department of Transportation has indicated that their programmed improvements for Gravois Road will maintain the current pavement width and configuration. This Corridor Plan concurs that Gravois Road should consist of four travel lanes, each with a planned width of 11 feet.

E Site Furnishings

Site furnishings for the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor include benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, planters, tree grates, and identification signs. Site furnishings should be functional and contribute to a uniform visual image of the Business Corridor. Site furnishings should be selected for compatibility with building materials, forms and colors, and harmonize with the surroundings.

A HEALTHY BUSINESS CORRIDOR:

- Builds a positive image for the entire community.**
- Reflects the community's confidence in itself and its future.**
- Creates jobs and opportunities.**
- Attracts new businesses and strengthens service and retail markets.**
- Saves tax dollars through stabilizing the tax base and protecting the investment already made in the infrastructure.**

District Identification Signage

The Affton-Gravois Business Corridor will need signs to identify certain areas within the Business Corridor. A unified signage system should complement the other site furnishings, yet be easy to read. Areas which would require identification signs are: public parking, bus shelters, and the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor boundaries.

Lighting

Lighting systems for the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor should provide adequate illumination for nighttime safety, security and visibility. A unified and coordinated lighting system which promotes a sense of security, and encourages the nighttime use of the area is one objective of adding lights to the Corridor. The use of standard light fixtures and poles, illumination levels, and light sources can provide uniformity and improve the day and nighttime appearance of the area.

Utilities

Existing utilities have a significant visual impact on the Affton-Gravois Business Corridor. On the north side of Gravois Road, overhead electric lines suspended on large wooden poles, located within five feet of the road edge, dominate motorist and pedestrian views of the Corridor. Relocating these poles behind the buildings along Gravois Road would represent a significant visual improvement to the Corridor. Moving these utility poles is a goal of the Corridor Plan, but also represents a significant financial commitment. However, opportunities to achieve this goal should be investigated.

CEC'S FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Facade Improvement Program is offered through the St. Louis County Economic Council (CEC). The goals of the facade improvement program are to work in partnership with business owners to: stimulate private investment in the area's older neighborhood commercial districts; generate additional revitalization by focusing the investment on improvements visible to customers, neighborhood merchants, and residents; and beautify business districts so that they reflect positively on neighboring residential areas. The CEC will reimburse the applicant one-half of the construction cost up to \$7,500.

In addition, the CEC provides up to five (5) hours of professional architecture design assistance. All new improvements must adhere to the adopted

Design Guidelines to be eligible for reimbursement.

How It Works

- (1) CEC staff contacts applicant to discuss project goals upon receipt of application form and two 4x6 color "before" photos of building facade.
- (2) CEC staff and a licensed architect meet applicant on site to discuss design issues, project scope and budget.
- (3) Architect prepares a design sketch of improvements with estimated budget.
- (4) Applicant and CEC staff approve design.
- (5) Applicant submits contractor bids to CEC staff. Three, competitive, written bids are required, one of which should be a minority or women owned business. A bid package is available from CEC.
- (6) Applicant submits certificates of additional insured for workers' compensation and general liability for the contractor selected.
- (7) Prior to any contractors being paid, applicant should check with CEC staff to make sure all requirements have been met. Applicant submits paid receipts, canceled checks and two 4x6 color photos of completed project.
- (8) CEC staff issues rebate upon review and inspection of completed project.

Program Requirements:

Applicant provides:

- # Application and two 4x6 color "before" photos of the building facade.

- # Certificate of Additional Insured for general liability insurance on the applicant's policy naming St. Louis County Economic Council as an additional insured with at least \$500,000 in coverage. The applicant calls his/her insurance agent and has a certificate sent directly to the St. Louis County Economic Council.

Contractor bids for all work. The applicant is required to obtain three, competitive, written bids and copies of all bids should be submitted.

- # Original Certificate of Additional Insured for workers' compensation insurance from the general contractor or each subcontractor if there is not a general contractor, noting the project address and naming the St. Louis County Economic Council as an additional insured.

Upon completion of the project, submit:

- # Receipts signed "paid in full", canceled checks from payments, and two 4x6 color photos of the finished building.

Program Summary

To date, ten (10) facade applications have been completed valued at \$50,000 in grant money. An additional ten applications are pending valued at \$75,000. A sample of completed projects include:

- , 8100 Gravois Road (Affton Veterinary Clinic)
- , 8715 Gravois Road (Pirone's Restaurant)
- , 8909 Gravois Road (Accu-Brake, Inc.)
- , 5923 Weber Road (Gateway Alarm)

For more information contact:

**Facade Improvement Program
St. Louis County Economic Council
121 S. Meramec, Suite 900
Clayton, Missouri 63105
(314) 615-7663**

Once there is an agreement on the design, submit: