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# CREATING THE LEGACY OF A CORRIDOR

by Kevin Corwin and Jeremy Lutgen



In 2011, the city of Saint Charles recognized a national and regional movement where existing roads were being reimagined to generate economic growth. The idea centered on enhancing the social benefits of existing communities by improving streets so they serve the neighborhood and all modes of transportation. The design concept is called “Great Street.”

Great Street creates a sustainable atmosphere where walkable, inviting spaces facilitate collaboration and promote commerce. The street reflects the community it passes through. It is scaled, designed, and built on the desired character of the neighborhood and its uses. Capable of generating considerable economic value, these streets become a destination where people want to spend their time and participate in commerce.

The city of Saint Charles viewed Fifth Street as a possible Great Street since it is the first major north-south route serving the City west of the Missouri River. Although the road serves as the primary access for retail development at the Streets of Saint Charles, Ameristar Casino, SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital - St. Charles, government offices and tourist destinations along Main Street, it was not unlike other commercial arterials

across the region. It was uninviting, uninspiring, and unappealing. When first constructed, the roads’ central purpose was the movement of vehicle traffic from one point to another. The relationship between the street and its adjacent buildings and neighborhood was not a consideration. It was not meant to be conducive to any activity other than moving vehicular traffic.

To be successful, a street improvement project requires a mindset of teamwork, geared toward problem solving. When planning, scheduling, and constructing a road improvement project, the city of Saint Charles has always considered numerous factors, including: business owner concerns, retail shopping patterns, holidays, tourism, potential weather concerns, material transport, differing site conditions, and residents. Most change is difficult and a major street revival is just that - difficult. The city of Saint Charles knew it could make better use of connections to the historic neighborhoods and their adjacency to significant employers along Fifth Street. A transformation would unlock value for property owners and indirectly the City, but the public needed a voice in the process.

On the evening of June 9, 2011, the City hosted a public workshop.

The meeting provided residents and business owners with a platform to share ideas with the City on how Fifth Street could be great. It was a conversation that built into a four-day planning session and came to involve other streets that serve as “gateways” to the City’s downtown area. Together this group created a detailed series of recommendations, high-quality plans and renderings that accurately reflected the vision of the community. The planning session raised expectations and built enthusiasm. The outcome was a solid master plan.

There was a plan and support, but the Fifth Street Gateway was estimated to cost nearly \$9 million. The City had to address funding. In 2012 and 2013, the City applied to East-West Gateway Council of Governments for federal funding to support the design and reconstruction of Fifth Street. Applications were submitted to the Saint Charles County Road Board to receive funds from the county-wide half-cent transportation tax. The applications were successful and created multiple funding sources that would make the project a reality.

On the horizon, was a sustainable future for Fifth Street that would improve the quality of life for Saint Charles residents, businesses, and

visitors. This project would create an official entrance to the City and create a space that would separate it from other municipalities. This future would see businesses thrive as they became guardians of an area that embraced community, became a destination, changed the existing landscape, and encouraged new and repeat visitors. Redeveloping the physical infrastructure of Fifth Street, while balancing the needs of businesses and residents, would be challenging. In order to achieve this type of sustainability within a road improvement, the City would be required to monitor every change and communicate these changes effectively to stakeholders.

To build upon the flow of communication coming out of the planning session, the engineering design team held a number of public meetings to garner input on the final design. When the time came for construction to begin, the Saint Charles Department of Economic Development organized weekly progress meetings with business stakeholders. The meeting locations varied to show continual progress on the construction. One week the meeting would be held at a bank. The next week, the meeting would take place in a strip mall. Every meeting was attended by the city project manager, the contractor,

city engineer, various public works employees and the department of economic development. If a stakeholder could not attend a meeting, answers were never more than a phone call away. The department of economic development spent many weeks simply visiting business owners. These visits were meant to address concerns head-on. In many cases, the business would be provided with the phone number or email addresses of a contractor or someone within public works.

The reconstruction of Fifth Street began in early 2015 and progress has been continual throughout the project. Drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists are now welcomed to Saint Charles by an almost calming, river wall “gateway” structure along Fifth Street, north of Boone’s Lick Road. Overhead utilities have been removed and sidewalks have been widened on both sides of Fifth Street. Decorative lighting was added from Boone’s Lick Road to First Capitol Drive to promote pedestrian activity and safety improvements have followed the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines. An intelligent transportation system infrastructure with signal coordination was added to reduce congestion on Fifth Street during peak-traffic periods. This will improve safety for vehicles and pedestrians. New pavement will be laid from

Bass Pro Drive to First Capitol Drive. Streetscape plantings and trees will be added from Boone’s Lick Road to First Capitol Drive in the coming months. Improved wayfinding will be completed by implementing standard signage throughout the corridor. The project, when complete, will improve traffic flow and safety while enhancing the aesthetics of Fifth Street. The project was, and is still, predicted to take just over 400 working days, with substantial completion in June 2016.

The city of Saint Charles has taken steps with its gateway project to separate itself and attract redevelopment to a unique region. This capital investment project, when completed, will allow Saint Charles to stand apart from other communities and help nurture economic growth. Fifth Street will no longer be just a transportation channel. It will be a cog that powers businesses and Saint Charles’ local economy. Fifth Street will be reborn and become a sustainable model for the City moving forward. □

**Kevin Corwin** is an engineer with the city of Saint Charles, and **Jeremy Lutgen** is the public works coordinator with the City. Learn more about Saint Charles at [www.stcharlescitymo.gov](http://www.stcharlescitymo.gov).



Photo by Matthew Seeds