



Northwest Arkansas

A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOUNDATION

Johnson, Arkansas

JOHNSON CITY HALL

Technical Assistance Panel | April 29–30, 2026

About

Urban Land Institute

Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

Cover: The City Hall in Johnson, Arkansas, sits along Main Drive and across the street from a popular public park.

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ULI Northwest Arkansas

ULI Northwest Arkansas is a district council of the Urban Land Institute, a global organization which for more than 80 years has been dedicated to improving the quality of urban areas. ULI is the sum of its members, who themselves deliver the ULI mission through programs and events and positively shape the future of real estate and land use disciplines throughout Northwest Arkansas. Members include real estate developers, builders, finance and equity professionals, architects, engineers, urban planners, elected officials, engaged citizens, and more. ULI shares best practices through practical professional development education programs and ULI's research and publications. The organization sets the standard for high quality information on urban planning, real estate development, growth and land use. Simply put, ULI Northwest Arkansas's goal is a built environment that better serves more people.



Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

ULI harnesses its members' technical expertise to help communities solve complex land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Technical assistance panels (TAPs) provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues. Drawing from its professional membership base, ULI Northwest Arkansas offers objective and responsible guidance on various land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The sponsoring organization is responsible for gathering the background information necessary to understand the project and present it to the panel. ULI panelists spend two days interviewing stakeholders, evaluating the challenges, and ultimately arriving at a set of recommendations that the sponsoring organization can use to guide development going forward.

Learn more at arkansas.uli.org.

About

Technical Assistance Panel

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The panel toured the city with Mayor Chris Keeny, stopping at the Carol E. Van Scyoc Trailhead, along Mud Creek.



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Acknowledgments

ULI Northwest Arkansas would like to thank the City of Johnson, Arkansas, for inviting ULI to help frame a request for qualifications for a comprehensive master plan to serve the community as it continues to grow in the coming years. In particular, ULI thanks Mayor Chris Keeney and Korab Vranovci, City Planner, for their insights during the panel's briefing and community-wide tour. Finally, ULI would like to thank the Johnson steering committee members and other stakeholders who generously shared their time and experience with the panel throughout the course of its study.

Executive Summary

The city of Johnson, Arkansas, is anticipating significant population growth in the coming years as a function of broader Northwest Arkansas growth as well as its appeal as a compelling small-town environment in a booming region. City leaders and municipal professional staff recognize that preserving this charming small-town character while accommodating significant new development is an important challenge on the near horizon that will require careful planning today.

To meet the challenge, City of Johnson (City) leaders and staff turned to the Urban Land Institute Northwest Arkansas District Council (ULI) for insights and advice. ULI, through its regional Plan Local and Planning Partnership programs, assembled a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) of ULI members with the expertise needed to help guide the City. The panel's charge was to help frame a request for qualifications (RFQ) to help the City identify a multi-disciplinary consultant team to assist the City with comprehensive master planning work. The following summary outlines those key elements, calling attention to current needs as well as projected needs of the community.

Context and Constraints

Encompassing just over 3 square miles, the city is constrained by its geography and yet has significant parcels of undeveloped land. The city's downstream position along regional waterways creates development constraints that will impact how the City shapes future

land use patterns. Increased density will be key to the housing demands of a population that is expected to double by 2040.

The panel outlined the following scope and anticipated deliverables the City should request through the RFQ process.

Consider external impacts. Elements generally outside of the City's control will impact how development can occur in Johnson. The RFQ should ask teams to consider elements including: flooding and stormwater management; utility capacity, as provided by neighboring jurisdictions; and local and regional development pressures and trends that will affect growth. The city's defined municipal boundary and roadway infrastructure will also have measurable impacts.

Address internal impacts. Factors the RFQ teams should address that generally fall within the City's jurisdiction include its active transportation plan and streets master plan. It also should consider the city's natural resources, including streams, trees, and open spaces, as well as its built resources, like its historic district. Policy, safety—particularly pedestrian safety—and financial sustainability should also be woven throughout the plan.

Include a community and stakeholder outreach and engagement plan. The planning team will need to be skilled in community engagement and should also provide guidance for the City's ongoing engagement and outreach. A culture of planning and open communication will serve the comprehensive planning efforts well while also laying a solid foundation for future planning endeavors.

Policy Recommendations

The following policies align with a set of community goals that will help the city meet growth demands while maintaining its small-town character.

Identify land use place types. Land use policies will influence how development takes shape across the community and should start by identifying the development codes that have worked well and should be replicated. Transportation, use intensities, and protecting existing neighborhood character should also be considered within the context of place types.

Address zoning. In addition to shifting to a form-based approach, additional zoning concerns in the plan should include mapping current and intended use areas, preserving the best of the overlay zones, and a possible shift to a transect approach to organize use and building types along a continuum.

Support densification. A greater range of housing options—sizes, configurations, and densities—are required to meet population and demographic demands. The planning team should be ready to support density with context-sensitive infill frameworks. Areas that can support higher density, e.g., along commercial corridors and in centers of activity, should also be identified

Include floodplain and stormwater management. Municipal policies should protect the city's floodplain, its stormwater management and capacity, and include green infrastructure. Other important tools

could include a tree preservation code, streamside protection, floodplain protection and construction erosion control standards, and possibly sponge parks.

Factor in utilities. The planning team will need to collaborate with utility companies to assess development capacity. The City's role will center around ensuring utility infrastructure support and guiding utility placement.

Build a culture of community engagement and planning. The consulting team's work should be built upon the City's goals and informed by community input. Effective community engagement is supported by meeting people where they already gather and curating additional spaces that are publicly owned and publicly accessible. Digital tools and working with trusted partners can help keep the community informed and help build public trust and a culture of planning.

Place Types and Future Growth

The panel identified core place types that can help shape future development. The city's identity should also be leveraged as a planning tool—embedded in zoning, design standards, and the RFQ process itself.

Regional Centers

The land surrounding Interstate 49 and Johnson Square are distinct in Johnson and could serve as regional centers, requiring separate consideration from the more "Main Street" pursuits elsewhere.

Main Drive as Downtown

Main Drive, between North Hewit and Bryant Place, was identified as the downtown corridor. It is auto-centric today, with both legacy single-family homes and undeveloped land along its edge. Shifting to a more walkable downtown commercial district will take time.

Encourage residential transformation.

Shifting single-family residential uses away from Main Drive can be supported by the comprehensive plan and will likely follow a progression that starts with adaptive reuse of the home into office, eventual sale, and then land assembly, demolition, and new development. Planning intervention—design standards, form-based codes, or a corridor plan—is required to improve on what exists today, and the pace and quality depends on the City's proactive planning.

Focus on the streetscape and pedestrian experience.

Shifting the roadway from auto-centric to human-scale and walkable can be accelerated by providing continuous sidewalks and shade, improved bike connectivity, and human-scale lighting and furnishings.

Modify land use and building form. New construction and redevelopment along Main Drive will change the look and feel of the corridor over time. Buildings should move to the street edge and include two- to three-story mixed-use buildings. Design standards and form-based codes will foster the preferred corridor character.

Encourage economic vitality and mixed use.

The mix of uses can support the corridor's vibrancy and economic resilience. Additional local-serving retail and dining should be encouraged as should live-work and attainable housing options.

City Park as Corridor Anchor

City Park adds to the vitality of Main Drive and helps anchor the community to the corridor. The park supports families, school children, and foot traffic, which is essential for neighboring businesses. The park is also a model for public investment, demonstrating what intentional public investment can achieve for a community.

Johnson Square

Johnson Square can serve as an example of future desired development for Johnson. In addition to creating economic vibrancy residential optionality, Johnson Square shaped a town square for the city and provides services and amenities for residents. The development demonstrates New Urbanism in its walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods and diverse housing types. The development brought approximately \$200M in investment to Johnson and bolstered the city's sales tax revenue and fiscal health. It has also catalyzed surrounding investment, is shaping a new civic identity, and provides a proof of concept for other quality development.

Third Spaces

Beyond home and work, third spaces are places where community life happens and

everyone enters the door as an equal. The spaces often include coffee shops, parks, plazas, libraries, barbershops, and community gardens. Third spaces require housing nearby to supply the daily foot traffic and community of regulars that give them life. City Park is the only publicly-owned third space along Main Drive, and more are needed.

Johnson's Greenspace Assets

Johnson has exceptional natural resources and greenspace assets. The potential to weave nature through the fabric of the city is significant. The City is encouraged to preserve and celebrate natural areas while building compact, active neighborhoods directly adjacent to them. The goal is integration, not separation.

Additional Considerations

Beyond the scope of the TAP, the panel included the following additional recommendations for the City.

- Update the zoning code to align with the new plan.
- Review, adjust, and streamline City processes to shorten development approval times.
- Increase interaction with adjacent cities and utilities to facilitate even smoother pathways to new development.
- Educate residents about ADU opportunities.
- Incorporate language translation resources to facilitate broader community engagement



- Incorporate a reservation process for City facilities.
- Hire a Community and Economic Development Manager. The hiring could align with the planning work ahead, ideally filling the position in time to help conduct the community engagement.

RFQ Priorities, Scope, and Summary

The budget and scope for the RFQ and planning process, as provided through ULI's Plan Local program, will actually provide room for additional support that could include a policy update for the city as well as assistance with implementation and strategy. The first priority remains the land use plan update, but the rest should also be considered.

RFQ Scope. The RFQ scope of services should include community and stakeholder

engagement, existing conditions analysis, a needs assessment, vision and concept planning, identification and evaluation of zoning and other regulatory tools and updates, a mobility and infrastructure strategy, floodplain and watershed integration, and an implementation framework.

Consultant selection recommendations.

The City would benefit from a multi-disciplinary team with a wide range of preferred expertise, including policy and regulations, watershed planning, and civil engineering. While one team is unlikely to possess all of the preferred experience, a collaborative approach, combining resources from multiple firms could be used to form a complete project team. Finally, the panel shared evaluation criteria that can assist the City in reviewing the consultant team's qualifications.

Conclusion

As City leaders and ULI work together to draft an RFQ that will identify the right planning team to help shape the development future of Johnson, the City is encouraged to lean into what has worked well in the city to date and be willing to take a new approach to things that have not produced the desired results. The work ahead will take patience and diligence, but the elected and staff leadership in Johnson have demonstrated their capacity to tackle hard projects, work across departments, and collaborate to make their community the kind of place that residents are proud to call "home."

Introduction and Background

Like many communities across Northwest Arkansas, Johnson is growing at an impressive rate. The community of over 3,500 residents is landlocked, bordered by Springdale to the north and Fayetteville to the south. To meet anticipated population growth, new development in Johnson will need to take a different approach, shifting away from building primarily single-family homes on large lots toward more dense housing options.

The City of Johnson (the City) is led by a team of elected leaders and municipal staff who are passionate about their community and pragmatic in its daily operations. Residents and community leaders appreciate the small-town character of Johnson, yet City leaders and staff recognize that increased density will need to be a part of their community's future.

Recognizing the need for density while also balancing the city's small-town nature, community leaders turned to the Urban Land Institute Northwest Arkansas District Council (ULI) for guidance. Using its Plan Local and Planning Partnership programs, ULI provides assistance to smaller communities in the region, facilitating key planning efforts, co-drafting requests for qualifications (RFQ) for planning consultants, and funding deeper professional assistance suited to a particular community's planning challenge. To support Johnson's early planning and RFQ efforts, ULI convened a panel of real estate, municipal, and land-use professionals. Using its trusted, objective technical assistance

panel (TAP) program, the ULI panel was tasked with identifying the areas of focus and the elements required to conduct a comprehensive master planning process to help the city foster responsible land use while maintaining the community character valued by residents and community leaders.

Over the course of two days, the ULI panel toured Johnson, met with City leaders, and interviewed a series of stakeholders who shared their perspectives on the opportunities and challenges ahead for Johnson.

What the Panel Heard and Observed

The panel spent most of the first day of the TAP touring the community with City leaders and meeting with stakeholders. The following themes emerged from the panel's observations, including current and potential constraints on real estate development in the community.

- Residents of Johnson feel deep community pride, and the community has a rich history shaped by the former grist mill, the mines, and the railroad. They are proud to call Johnson "home."
- Johnson has a distinct small-town character that residents value.
- The city is on a growth trajectory, with the population expected to double by 2040.
- City leadership is fully supportive of the comprehensive planning work on the near horizon.

TAP Questions

The City's TAP steering committee posed the following questions to the ULI panel.

- How can the City phase growth to protect its neighborhood scale?
- How can the City create attainable housing without displacing character?
- How can the City connect 8,578 future residents without using car-first design?
- How can the City intensify corridors without losing the local-business ecosystem?
- How can the City reach residents who have never attended a planning meeting?
- How can the City build density while protecting Johnson's green character?

The City also asked the ULI panel to assist it with crafting an RFQ for a Comprehensive Plan, setting forth a vision and goals for the city's future and providing an overall foundation for future land use, mobility, and connectivity.

"The plan will incorporate the character of Johnson, the new Active Transportation Plan and its importance of promoting shared places in the community while protecting open space and built environment. The City intends to create spaces where residents gather and increase density through promoting walkable spaces." (TAP briefing materials)

Further, the City asked the panel to tailor the RFQ to a reasonable budget for the consultant contract and articulate the areas of expertise, strengths, applicable experience, etc. required for the work.

- The community used to be a “pass-through” city, with commuters traveling through to reach Interstate 49, running north and south through the western half of the city. The addition of restaurants and retail has encouraged drivers to slow down, which residents appreciate.
- Johnson has a small but mighty municipal staff, with elected leaders and staff wearing multiple hats and serving in multiple roles on any one day.
- There is currently a mismatch between the city’s zoning code and its future land use map.
- The city is landlocked and unable to annex additional land. Future development will need to be denser, building up rather than spreading out.

- There are significant parcels of open land currently held by a small number of landowners, one of whom has plans to develop several multifamily buildings that would deliver over 2,000 housing units.
- Stormwater drainage from surrounding cities feed into Johnson’s waterways. Nearly one-third of the community sits in a floodplain, which poses significant development constraints.
- The city’s water and sewer services are provided by utilities controlled by neighboring jurisdictions, which limits the City’s ability to control utility connections for future development.
- The area is known for its locally owned restaurants and bespoke retailers, both of which attract regional visitors.

- Johnson has a rich natural environment, with streams running through the city and a healthy tree canopy.
- The city has a future walkable community mindset, with today’s infrastructure improvements supporting future pedestrian connectivity.
- Even with improved walkability and bikability, Johnson’s anticipated population growth will likely lead to increased automotive traffic.
- Third spaces, like City Park and Johnson Square, are important to the community, and the City would benefit from having more of them.
- The city would benefit from a focus on economic development to assist with business attraction, curation, and retention.



Local restaurants, like Wright’s Barbecue, are a draw for local residents as well as visitors from across the region.



Pedestrian infrastructure is installed with other improvements, making use of the construction timing, even when associated development remains on the horizon.



Large open spaces and vacant parcels are not uncommon in Johnson.

Regional Context

Within the context of Northwest Arkansas, Johnson sits at an important crossroads, with roadways, watersheds, and other interconnected systems crossing through the community.

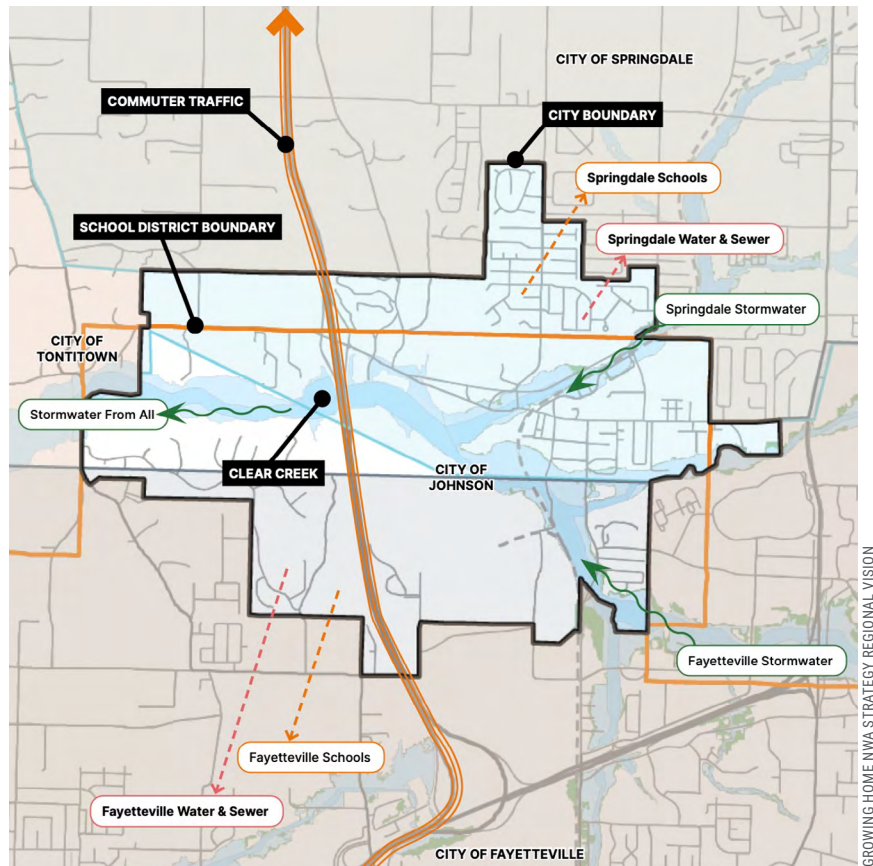
Published in April 2026, the [Growing Home NWA Strategy Regional Vision](#) report takes a closer look at the overlapping resources and interconnectivity of the communities comprising the broader metropolitan area.

The regional growth strategy “builds on work already underway across the region, including transportation planning, wastewater studies, zoning updates, and downtown investment strategies, and brings those efforts together into a shared regional framework... to align infrastructure and development so growth strengthens the region as a whole.”

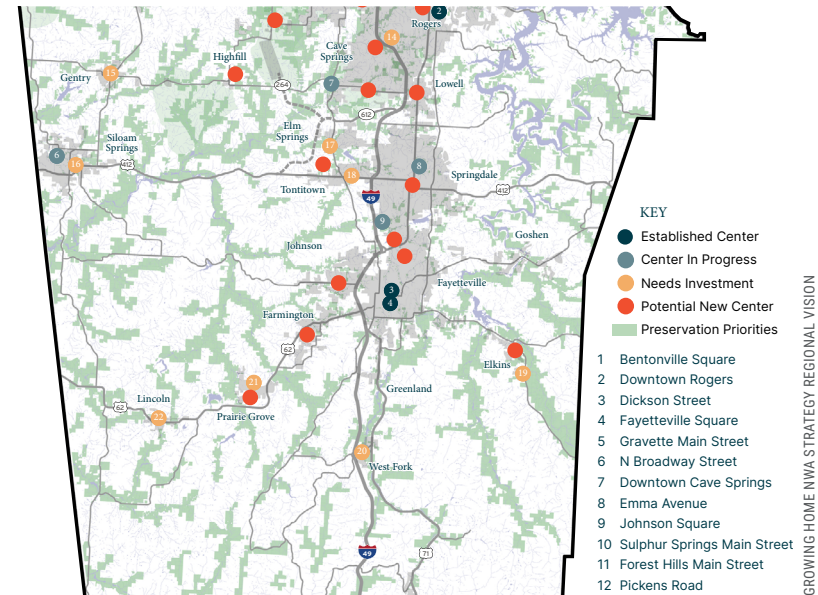
Johnson is referenced multiple times in the framework and is a key example of how the region’s systems are intertwined. “The city of Johnson illustrates how regional systems

overlap. The city is served by two school districts, relies on two water and wastewater providers, and receives stormwater carried into creeks from surrounding communities, showing why regional coordination is essential for managing shared infrastructure and growth.” ([Growing Home](#), page 46).

Additionally, the report points to Johnson Square as a place that could serve as one of 20 potential new centers for the region, presenting not only opportunities for growth, but also “opportunities to enhance the social fabric of the region ... By focusing development into complete, connected places, the region can reduce pressure on rural landscapes, maintain agricultural viability, and preserve the open lands that define Northwest Arkansas.” ([Growing Home](#), page 9).



The 2026 *Growing Home* report notes the overlapping services in Johnson, pointing to the importance of regional cooperation.



Growing Home notes the potential for Johnson Square to serve as a regional center.



Context and Constraints

The city of Johnson presents a unique planning environment. Encompassing just over 3 square miles, the city is constrained by its geography and is also characterized by significant parcels of undeveloped land. The streams that traverse the community add to its beauty, yet the city's downstream position places significant pressure on and limits potential uses of low-lying areas. Finally, increased density will be needed to meet anticipated population growth within this landlocked city. Planning efforts must balance preserving the small-town character Johnson residents value with accommodating new development to house a population expected to double in 15 years.

When considering the expertise needed to meet the city's planning and growth challenges, the ULI panel outlined a scope for a request for qualifications for comprehensive master planning. The following elements, analysis, and anticipated deliverables should be included in the RFQ.

Existing Conditions Analysis and RFQ Deliverables

The RFQ should request that work begin with an analysis of the city's existing conditions, addressing both external and internal factors that will impact growth and development.

External Impacts

There are a host of existing factors in surrounding cities and the broader region that will impact work in Johnson and therefore need to be considered in the City's planning efforts.



MATT LOOS

The Razorback Greenway runs along Mud Creek in Johnson.



SPRINGDALE WATER

Springdale Water supplies water to a significant portion of Johnson's geography.

- **Flooding and stormwater.** Johnson sits downstream and receives stormwater from surrounding communities. The selected planning team will need to identify key floodplain resources and make recommendations for effective future stormwater management.
- **Utility capacity.** Water and wastewater utilities are managed by Springdale and Fayetteville and are thus outside of the City's control. The planning team will need to coordinate with Springdale Water and Fayetteville Water to identify available capacity and develop a strategy to accommodate future growth in Johnson.
- **Regional reports.** Information and insights from regional development efforts, reports, and projections can provide valuable guidance and important context for regional development.
- **Development pressures.** Development pressures include construction costs, market demands, development trends, the pool of viable development companies, and more. The planning team should identify development patterns and trends in Johnson and neighboring cities and then recommend steps the City can take to encourage growth while preserving the city's small-town character.
- **Defined boundary.** The city is constrained by its geography and lacks options to annex additional land. The planning team will need to consider external boundaries and previously approved developments within the city limits.

- **Major roadways.** In addition to Interstate 49 bisecting the city into eastern and western sections, Johnson Mill Boulevard and Main Drive are commuter thoroughfares that divide the city north and south. The planning team should be asked to provide an analysis of commuting impacts and future roadway connections on Johnson.

Internal Impacts

The following factors generally fall within the City’s jurisdiction, which may provide greater opportunity to adjust the potential influence these factors may have on planning efforts.

- **Active transportation plan.** At the time of the study, the City’s active transportation plan was nearing completion. The final report recommendations should be incorporated into the comprehensive plan.
- **Streets master plan.** The [2017 Master Street Plan](#) provides clarity around current and future roadway infrastructure. At the time of this study, the City was preparing updates to the Master Street Plan, which should be incorporated into the comprehensive plan..
- **Natural resources.** The streams, trees, open spaces, and other natural resources will impact development in the city. The planning team should be asked to map the city’s natural resources and associated ecosystem services in order to support conservation efforts. The panel noted Johnson’s robust tree canopy; protecting that canopy should be a key element

of any plan going forward. Additionally, the planning team should recommend low-impact development (LID) and green infrastructure measures across the city to increase its ability to manage stormwater and reduce flood losses. See [Using Low Impact Development and Green Infrastructure to Get Benefits From FEMA Programs](#) for more information and guidance.

- **Historic district.** The city has a locally recognized historic district centered around the intersection of Ball Street and Second Street. The consultant team should be ready to provide guidance on further preservation efforts in the district as well as identify redevelopment opportunities that would align with the district’s historic features and character.
- **Policy.** Policy is firmly in the City’s control, with regional, state, and federal policies also influencing development. The planning team should identify what is working well, provide recommendations for updates to the City’s existing land use policies, and recommend policies that would support measured growth going forward.
- **Safety.** The city has a robust public safety division and is taking steps to create a safer pedestrian environment along its streets and public spaces. The consultant planning team should provide recommendations for additional enhanced lighting and safety measures.
- **Financial sustainability.** Interviews with the Mayor made clear that the City is



Pedestrian infrastructure links City Hall with City Park across Main Drive.



The confluence of Mud and Clear creeks adds to the natural beauty of the area while creating water management challenges for the City.



City staff and ULI members consider planning updates for Johnson at ULI's recent Place Summit.

committed to financially sustainable operations, and long-range plans should align with and support that position. The relationship between land use and the city budget should be clear, and the consulting team should provide market and economic analysis for both current and recommended zoning policies.

Community and Stakeholder Outreach & Engagement Plan

Community engagement is best managed at the local level. The City knows its residents best and should work to meet them where they are. Rather than requiring residents to come to City Hall for informational meetings or to share feedback, elected leaders and staff are encouraged to reach out into the community and go to the places where

people already gather and spend time. The planning team will be asked to provide guidance on continuing engagement and improving future community communication and engagement.

The planning team should also have experience developing and performing engaging meetings with stakeholders and community members. Johnson's diverse population requires the selected team to conduct outreach in multiple languages.

Johnson's small-town character is further supported by its highly accessible public officials and City staff. Continuing that approach and facilitating a culture of planning and collaboration will assist the City with its current comprehensive planning efforts and foster success in future endeavors.



Johnson Square offers a welcoming public gathering space for residents and visitors alike.



Policy Recommendations

The panel turned to the range of policies that the City will need to consider through its comprehensive planning efforts. Each policy aligns with a set of community goals that can help the City begin to meet its growth projections within a framework that is informed by the community's resources, character, and values.

Land Use Place Types

The policies that guide land use will determine how development takes shape across the community. By establishing land use place types—both existing types that the community would like to see replicated or new types that would complement the city's character—the public sector can support growth and development in the city's neighborhoods, activity centers, and commercial corridors in a manner that aligns with the community's vision. This work should also align with the City's current transportation planning efforts.

The place type aspect of the comprehensive plan should address the following elements.

- **Identify what has worked well.** The City and the planning team should identify the desirable elements of Johnson's development code, elements from the City's 2015 planning work, and preferred elements of existing developments to develop a basis for a policy map and development code updates.
- **Factor in transportation.** Consideration will need to be given to transportation (vehicular and active) access to key

places. The city's anticipated population increase will likely be accompanied by increased traffic volume on city streets, from both local drivers and those driving through.

- **Identify the intensities of use.** Use intensity is an important element in city planning. The city's development guidance should align with its preferred intensities, which can be mapped across a spectrum of desired intensity, defined by housing density, clustering commercial uses, daily visitor volume, and other constraints.
- **Protect existing neighborhood character.** Throughout the planning efforts, it is important to communicate with residents, making clear that the planning work is intended to both guide future development and preserve Johnson's existing character.

Zoning

The plan's zoning policies should help the City prepare for a form-based zoning approach. Rather than focusing on uses within a district or zone, a form-based approach will place greater emphasis on the physical structure of the space, which can assist the City with its placemaking efforts and walkability initiatives.

The consultant team's goals should be as follows.

- **Map current and intended use areas.** Identify where single-use, mixed-use, industry, and limited or restricted development are appropriate. This will involve identifying where these uses exist today and where they should be encouraged or allowed going forward.



The development pattern of Johnson Square could be replicated in other parts of the city.

- **Preserve the best of the overlay zones.**
Review existing successful overlay zones and identify which of those should be incorporated into the new plan.
- **Consider a shift to a transect approach.**
Several neighboring communities have adopted a land-use model based on transect zones. This approach organizes land use and building types along a continuum, moving from rural to suburban to urban, which can create smoother transitions between densities. The panel recommends that City leaders and the planning team determine if a transect-based approach to the city's zoning is appropriate and, if so, determine where and how the city's successful overlay standards should be incorporated into the new transect zones.

Densification

City leaders recognize that greater density will be required if the city is going to grow and welcome new residents. By diversifying and expanding the available housing options, the City and development community can provide a greater range to meet population demands. Similarly, a range of densities should be considered. Denser multifamily, multi-story options may make sense along commercial corridors and in activity centers, while more gentle density—including accessory dwelling units (ADUs), townhomes, and cottage courts—can help expand housing in areas where additional units would be welcome.

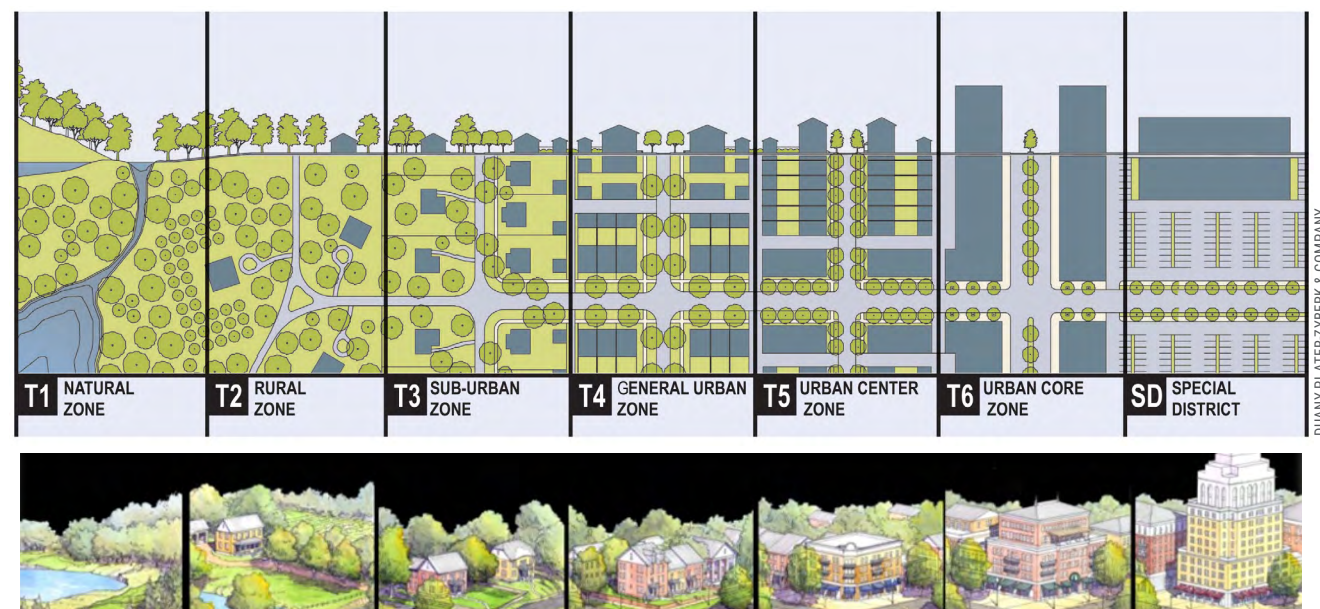
The following goals should be included in the planning efforts to support further densification in Johnson.

- **Build density gently.** Use ADUs and context-sensitive infill to gradually increase density. Johnson has adopted an ADU policy, yet additional education may be needed to help homeowners understand how and where they can build or expand.
- **Identify areas for higher density.** Identify key locations for medium-intensity or mixed-use housing options. Johnson Square has set a new standard for density along the city's commercial corridors, garnering community acceptance. This approach could provide a model for higher-density areas going forward.

As the planning team considers how and where density could be increased, the City should provide the team with insights into particular context sensitivity in neighborhoods or other areas that may not be readily apparent to the consultants.

Floodplain and Stormwater Management

Water management is critical in Johnson. While upstream policies will continue to influence the amount of water the city must manage, municipal policies for Johnson's geography can help protect the city's floodplain and its ability to manage water locally. Policy guidance in the new comprehensive plan should address floodplain protection and help the community embrace green infrastructure as an essential element of the system.



DUANY PLATER-ZYBERK & COMPANY

A transect approach to zoning considers the organization of uses based on intensity.

The following policies can require or incentivize best practices that can support effective and sustainable stormwater management.

- **Create a tree preservation code.**
The city has a good tree canopy that helps mitigate heat and absorb water. Supporting the future viability of these trees will help preserve their critical heat and stormwater mitigation functions.
- **Use streamside protection.** The ability of the area’s streams to flow, expand, and contract leverages a natural system that also allows for water absorption along the way. Adding impervious surfaces, structures, or further channeling the waterways simply pushes the issue downstream and does not help mitigate the challenges water can present locally.
- **Adopt floodplain protection and construction erosion control standards.** Similarly, allowing the floodplain to do its work, absorbing and filtering water, can help lessen the impacts of water in other built areas. Erosion control measures for construction projects will be particularly important in anticipation of the new development expected across the city.
- **Use green infrastructure and low-impact development (LID).** Innovations in infrastructure, construction methods, building and product technologies, and landscape design and maintenance can actively help mitigate stormwater runoff. These measures will be particularly

important for Johnson, and the consulting team must be knowledgeable about them. Adopting green infrastructure measures in new projects can also begin to have a measurable, cumulative impact on the community—and installing these measures during initial construction will be much more impactful and cost-effective than retrofitting later.

- **Consider building sponge parks.** A sponge park—an open space designed to capture, store, and filter stormwater runoff—can help the city actively manage the water that comes its way. The land around the Carol E. Van Scyoc Trailhead is already acting like a sponge park, and with additional care and native plantings, the area could be put to even more effective use, further mitigating the stormwater from the surrounding neighborhoods as it flows to Mud Creek.

Utilities

Johnson is particularly reliant on neighboring communities for key utilities. With water and wastewater services provided by Springdale and Fayetteville, City staff are in constant communication with those communities’ utilities, working to determine future capacity needs and current capacity constraints. The planning team will need to collaborate with those utility companies to assess development capacity and identify the following elements.

- **Ensure infrastructure support.** With a clear understanding of utility capacities,

Design with Natural Systems

In the ULI publication, [*Ten Principles for Building Resilience*](#), the eighth principle focuses on practices that leverage natural systems to improve resilience of structures, community spaces, and the people moving around and living within those places.

“Planning and designing in concert with nature not only builds for resilience, but also provides amenities for communities and value for investors in development. Parks, green spaces, and stormwater management features can enrich the quality of a development or neighborhood, and potentially enhance resilience, community cohesion, and public health. The quality of concept, design, and execution of these resilient solutions is essential to creating their shared value.”



Ball Street, running north and south through the city, is a good example of an interim solution that allows the confluence of Mud Creek and Clear Creek to join and flow while still permitting traffic movement.

the City can deliver the infrastructure needed to support future development. (It should be noted that the City has an important role to play in also leveraging green infrastructure and LID practices in its public projects.)

- **Guide utility placement.** Future utility delivery will need to align with the city's development plans. The consultant team will need to determine where utilities will be required and located, including under streets, in front-yard easements, in alleys, and more.

Community Engagement

Planning should not happen in a vacuum. The consulting team's work should be built upon the City's goals, which are informed by community input. Ensuring that the community is heard throughout the process can help support the eventual implementation of the comprehensive plan

across the city. Moving beyond City Hall, City leaders are encouraged to use publicly owned spaces and publicly accessible venues to strengthen existing community participation and broaden the range of voices providing input. Whether participating in existing events with an information table or hosting a cookout at City Park, there are many ways to interact with the community without requiring their attendance at a meeting at City Hall.

Working with the planning team, the City's community engagement activities could include the following measures.

- **Identify meeting spaces.** Identify the publicly accessible spaces that can be used for educational, informational, and consensus-building events.
- **Leverage digital tools.** Expand existing digital tools to increase awareness and engagement of the City's efforts, plans, and progress.

- **Strengthen public trust and build a culture of planning.** The City's relationship with the community is always evolving. Strategic outreach efforts can help strengthen public trust and increase community members' participation in the planning process.
- **Explore public-private partnerships.** Community organizations and other privately-led entities are already at work in Johnson. The City can partner with these organizations to leverage shared opportunities to share information, gather input, and build consensus.
- **Keep residents informed.** Information, particularly legislative updates that affect private property, is important to residents. The City can play an important role in gathering information that could impact Johnson residents and disseminating it across its communication channels.



Community engagement should include the places where people are already gathering. It can also include site visits and more bespoke informational updates from City leaders.



Place Types and Future Growth

The city's comprehensive planning work presents an opportunity to also address and update the city's identity and placemaking efforts. Throughout the TAP, community members and City leaders referenced the city's small-town character and village feel, expressing a desire to preserve it, particularly in light of anticipated population growth. To that end, the panel considered the city's identity and explored how placemaking could support the village feel while also attracting new visitors, future residents, and businesses to Johnson.

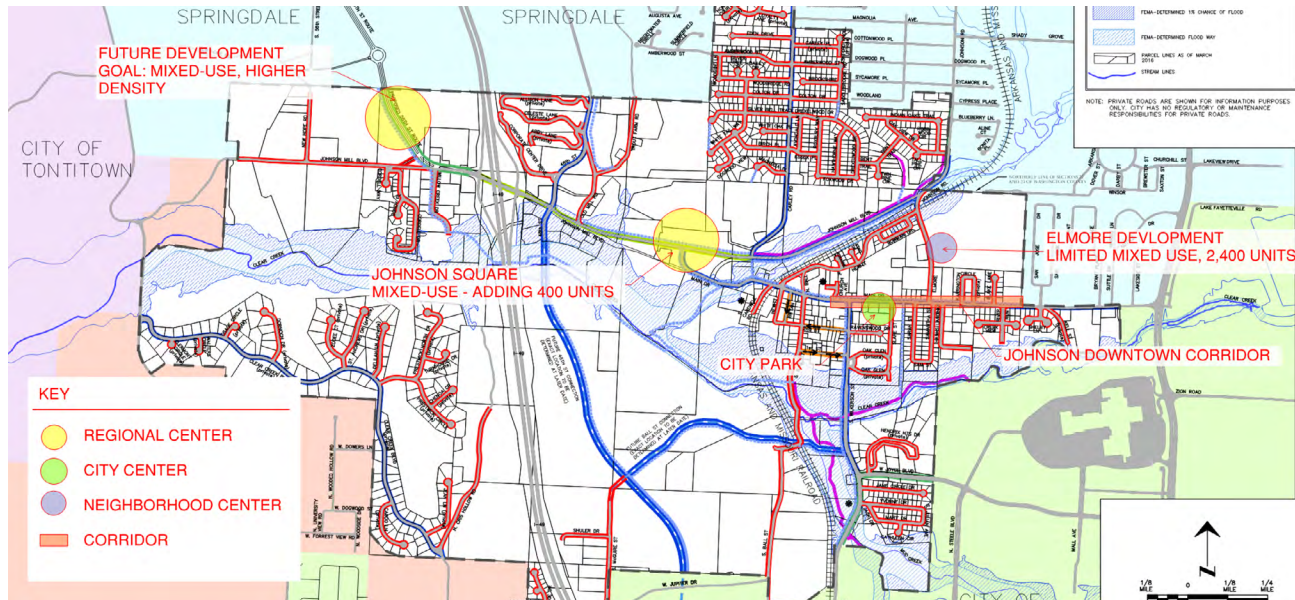
The city's current infrastructure and built environment form three core place types for Johnson: regional centers, Main Drive, and community anchors. These place types will continue to drive growth and can each be further leveraged to accommodate future growth while also supporting the city's unique identity and character.

A Unique Village

Johnson is a village within a region. Residents view the city as a boutique community, a bespoke environment, and a place that prides itself on being a small town.

Johnson is not a suburb, nor is it a node in a regional growth pattern. Johnson is a place with its own character, rhythm, and way of doing things.

The community is boutique by nature, and bespoke by intention. There are no big box stores or franchise sprawl in Johnson. The city aims to grow in a way that preserves what makes Johnson a great place to live.



The panel used the City's Streets Master Plan to consider where regional centers are located. Panelists also noted the Johnson city center and neighborhood centers where additional development is anticipated.

Use scale as a feature, not as a limitation.

Johnson's small size is an asset. Village-scale development—characterized by walkable blocks, local ownership, and human-scaled buildings—is exactly what distinguishes Johnson from the larger cities to the north and south.

Opt for curation over volume. The absence of big-box retail is not a gap—it is, instead, a deliberate position city leaders have taken. This approach signals that the city is selective about its investments, prioritizing locally owned, independent, and one-of-a-kind businesses that contribute to a distinct sense of place.

Leverage identity as a planning tool. The village identity should be embedded in

zoning, design standards, and the RFQ process itself—shaping not just what gets built but what kind of city Johnson continues to be as it grows. Growth and character are not opposites, and intentional growth can reinforce the community's character.

Regional Centers

While City leaders have made clear their desire to preserve Johnson's small-town character, there are important regional considerations at play.

- **Interstate 49 development.** The interstate acts as a barrier today, effectively separating the city to the east and west. Should a big box store (e.g., Trader Joe's or Costco) be interested in

opening a location in Johnson, the northwest corner of the I-49 and Johnson Mill Boulevard intersection could be a good location for the type of use that attracts broader regional draw.

- **Johnson Square.** The compelling urban design and commercial mix found at Johnson Square has also created a regional draw. The City could use the planning and development principles of this project as models for new development in other appropriate areas of the city.

Main Drive Corridor, Downtown

Historically, downtown Main Street environments are marked by small-scale buildings with zero lot lines, structures built up to the sidewalk, and on-street parking lining the front of the buildings. Although Johnson does not have this type of “main street” district, it has an opportunity to create the downtown main street it would like to see.

Within Johnson’s city center, the panel identified the approximately one-mile length of Main Drive between North Hewit and Bryant Place as the city’s downtown corridor.

- Main Drive functions as the city’s primary commercial corridor.
- The corridor’s design embraces an incremental, auto-oriented development pattern.
- The corridor is characterized by a mix of commercial spaces, single-family homes, and undeveloped land.

Existing Conditions

Unlike many historic downtowns, Main Drive does not feature a pedestrian-oriented configuration, but there is an opportunity to create a framework for future growth that uses this design approach.

Building type and scale. Main Drive is characterized by predominantly single-story or low-rise, multi-tenant strip commercial buildings. Buildings are separated from the

roadway by surface parking lots, a hallmark of 20th-century suburban commercial development.

Architectural quality. The buildings in this area are predominantly concrete block, brick veneer, or low-pitched metal or other veneer structures. Facades are flat and minimally detailed, with business signage creating the majority of any visual identity. The corridor lacks a consistent architectural identity, style, or design across parcels.

Uses and tenants. Commercial spaces are occupied by small professional offices, IT firms, insurance agencies, print and sign shops, and neighborhood-serving retail. These are secondary commercial uses that frequently gravitate to affordable, utilitarian, multi-tenant space.

Streetscape and pedestrian experience. Along the corridor today, street trees and pedestrian infrastructure may be planned but are largely missing at present. The streetscape is nondescript and fragmented;



This historic district in Rogers features a classic main street commercial area.



Many of the commercial buildings in Johnson sit back from Main Drive, separated by surface parking lots.

it is functional but not destination-oriented. The area lacks a unified identity that could help define the district and create a sense of place.

Downtown Residential

There are a number of single-family homes along Main Drive. These homes are holdovers from the corridor's earlier residential character and are one- and two-story houses that generally predate or coincide with the early suburban commercial buildout.

Sitting on the city's main commercial arterial, these homes create an eclectic streetscape rather than a compelling commercial destination. The result is a visually disjointed frontage in which a residence may sit directly adjacent to a strip-tenant suite or a small-scale office building. There is no clear separation between residential and commercial zones along this stretch, which has likely influenced the corridor's somewhat haphazard evolution.

Residential Trajectory

To create a highly functional, sustainable, and thriving Main Drive commercial corridor, an evolution of its residential properties will be needed.

Near-term adaptive reuse. In the coming few years, as Main Drive homes are placed on the market, they could be converted into small commercial uses—such as offices, salons, or studios—with minimal exterior improvements or investment. The residential form will remain in the near term, but adding

Housing along Main Drive, Planning Impacts

There are a number of modest one- to two-story single-family homes sitting along Main Drive with front yards and driveways adjoining the corridor. These homes sit between commercial uses rather than in discrete residential clusters, and there is no clear block-level separation. This residential presence on a key commercial corridor reflects an incomplete commercial transition. Main Drive is a corridor at an early-to-mid stage of land-use evolution. With proactive planning guidance, Main Drive can, over time, transform into a thriving, vibrant, and walkable downtown main street.



The commercial center in the foreground sits across Main Drive from several single family homes.

signage and parking spaces can signal the building's commercial nature and better accommodate the business's clientele. This transition is already underway in parts of the corridor.

Medium-term economic obsolescence. Over the next five to fifteen years, as land values rise along the corridor, aging homes will become economically obsolete relative to their land value. Corridor homeowners will begin selling to investors or developers rather than reinvesting in aging structures.

Longer-term redevelopment. In the longer term, residential lots will be assembled, homes demolished, and one- and two-story commercial or mixed-use buildings will begin to take their place. The quality of the new buildings will depend entirely on the existence of new planning standards.

Planning implication. Without intentional intervention—including design standards, form-based codes, or a corridor plan—replacement buildings along Main Drive are unlikely to improve significantly on what exists today in terms of architectural quality or pedestrian experience. The pace and quality of transition depend on the City's proactive planning.

A Vision for Main Drive

Based on existing conditions and the current evolution of the roadway, and with the goal of optimizing Main Drive as a vibrant downtown corridor, the panel developed a long-range vision for Main Drive. In this

vision, Main Drive evolves from a fragmented, auto-oriented thoroughfare into Johnson’s most walkable and economically vibrant streetscape—a true community corridor connecting people, businesses, and neighborhoods.

The following Main Drive improvements, which could be implemented over time as resources allow, can help the City bring this new vision for Main Drive to life.

Address the streetscape and pedestrian experience. Shifting the roadway from auto-centric to human-scale and walkable can be supported and accelerated through the following measures.

- **Create continuous sidewalks and shade.** A connected, shaded sidewalk network along both sides of Main Drive is needed. Street trees should be planted to create a canopy that improves pedestrian comfort and safety year-round.
- **Improve bike connectivity.** Protected bike lanes or shared-use paths linking Main Drive to the Razorback Greenway and surrounding neighborhoods will improve mobility, reduce reliance on personal automobiles, and mitigate the impacts of additional residents and visitors on parking resources and traffic flow.
- **Install human-scale lighting and furnishings.** Adding pedestrian-scale lighting, benches, and landscaping can give the corridor a sense of place, improve walkability, and invite people to linger along the corridor to shop, eat, and play.

Shift land uses and allowable building form. New construction and redevelopment along Main Drive can significantly shape the corridor’s experience, altering the streetscape’s look and feel over time.

- **Shift buildings to the street edge.** New development should be oriented to the sidewalk, with parking located behind or to the side of buildings. This will replace the current large building setbacks and forward-facing parking lot pattern that dominates today.
- **Encourage two- to three-story mixed-use buildings.** Mixed-use, multi-story buildings should be encouraged, featuring ground-floor commercial uses with residential or office space above. This approach will add density while maintaining a human-scale street wall that is appropriate for a small city corridor.
- **Update design standards.** Using form-based codes and updating the city’s design standards will help ensure that redevelopment contributes to a coherent, attractive corridor over time.

Focus on economic vitality and mixed use.

Over time, the corridor can evolve into a walkable, vibrant downtown main street that serves as an economic engine for the city. The mix of uses and the diversity offered by various commercial spaces can add economic resilience, an element often lacking over the long term in single-use, big-box retail buildings.

- **Encourage local-serving retail and dining.** The goal for Main Drive should be a mix of neighborhood-serving shops, restaurants, and services that meet residents’ daily needs and generate foot traffic, again helping to reduce car dependency for Johnson residents.
- **Encourage live-work units and attainable housing.** Upper-floor residential options and live-work units add residential space to the corridor without interrupting the first-floor flow of commercial operations. The residential options in these upper floors can help support the city’s workforce and add activity and vibrancy to the corridor after the 9-5 businesses close for the day.
- **Support Johnson’s civic identity.** Ultimately, Main Drive will become a place that reflects Johnson’s distinct identity within the region. No longer a pass-through community, Johnson instead becomes a destination in its own right.

Main Drive as an “A Street”

Main Drive should be treated as a corridor spine organized into districts, each with a distinct character. As the main street and downtown of Johnson, the corridor should receive the highest level of design investment and walkability intervention. Using the investment approach, where Main Drive is an “A street” and secondary streets, “B streets,” are treated accordingly, can help ensure that resources are concentrated

where they will have the greatest impact. ([Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time](#))

City Park as a Corridor Anchor

The presence of City Park along Main Drive is important to the experience of the corridor. Throughout the day, the park draws people of all ages to the city center and adds vitality to downtown.

A civic anchor on the corridor. City Park is one of the few publicly owned, publicly activated spaces directly on Main Drive. It gives the corridor a civic identity and a reason to stop, which is something commercial development sometimes tries to manufacture, often with limited success.

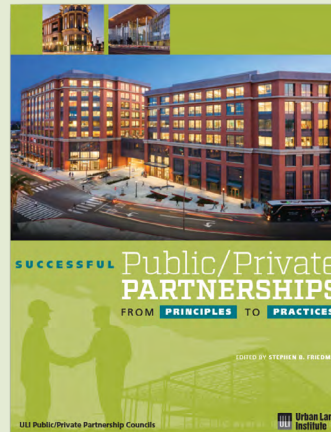
Support for families and foot traffic. The park draws residents of all ages to the corridor on a daily basis. This foot traffic can become a natural economic activator for



City Park is welcoming for all ages and abilities.

Public-Private Partnerships

From the ULI publication, [Ten Principles for Public/Private Partnerships](#), “a transparent process, achieved through open communication, information-sharing, and participation in the decision process, increases the potential for broad support for public/private partnership projects, particularly from non-stakeholders.”



From the ULI publication, [Successful Public/Private Partnerships From Principles to Practices](#), development project deals are typically negotiated and “the public entity bears a unique responsibility to fully define what is being sought and to seek proposals that fully address complex public issues.”

nearby businesses. It can also serve as a model for the kind of activity a revitalized Main Drive could cultivate along its length.

A model for public investment. Whether it is a public investment or a public-private partnership (P3), the park demonstrates what intentional public investment can achieve for a community. The park improves the city’s connections to the sidewalk network, it adds shaded seating to the corridor, and it provides links to future streetscape improvements, all of which can be replicated to a certain degree—or even amplified—along the streetscape. While many of these spaces could be developed privately, as a function or feature of a corridor-facing business, the P3 development model could provide the City with opportunities for longer-term influence and control.

Johnson Square

As a regional center, Johnson Square serves Johnson residents and the broader metropolitan area, drawing visitors, workers, and investment from across Northwest Arkansas. Johnson Square could serve as an example of the type of development the City would like to see emulated for other parts of the city.

Contributions to the community. In addition to creating economic vibrancy and residential optionality in its district, Johnson Square provides a number of benefits to the broader Johnson community.

- **An instant town square.** Johnson Square gave the city its first true town square—a place for community gathering, commerce, and shared public life that previously did not exist.
- **Services and amenities for residents.** Medical, retail, dining, and professional offices at Johnson Square serve the daily needs of Johnson’s growing population, reducing the need to drive to Fayetteville or Springdale for everyday services.
- **New Urbanism at the city’s edge.** A walkable, mixed-use neighborhood with diverse housing types demonstrates an alternative to the auto-centric suburban pattern that characterized Johnson’s earlier growth.

Economic impact. In addition to providing the city with a model for mixed-use urban development, Johnson Square is having a positive financial impact on the city.

- **Approximately \$200M in total investment.** The 93-acre development represents one

of the largest private investments in Johnson’s history, generating construction activity, permanent jobs, and an expanded tax base.

- **Sales tax revenue and fiscal health.** Commercial activity at Johnson Square generates sales tax revenue that directly funds City operations and services. It is presently a critical driver of municipal fiscal sustainability for this small city.
- **Catalyst for surrounding investment.** The development raises land values and market confidence along the broader Main Drive corridor, creating conditions for private reinvestment in adjacent properties.

Civic identity. Johnson Square has added an interesting and compelling layer to Johnson’s civic persona.

- **Johnson on the NWA map.** For decades, Johnson was perceived as a pass-through between Fayetteville and Springdale. Johnson Square has given

the city a distinct address—a draw for residents and visitors from across the region.

- **A gathering place for community.** The town square format—with its mix of outdoor space, local restaurants, and walkable streets—creates opportunities for informal gathering and civic life that strengthen community bonds. This is an element that has been missing in Johnson and could be replicated in other parts of the city.
- **A proof of concept for Johnson.** Johnson Square shows that the city can attract quality development and build compelling urban environments, setting the bar for future development.

Third Spaces and Greenspace

Third spaces are the places between home and work where community life happens. Third spaces are places where neighbors meet, where civic identity forms, and where a



Johnson Square is an excellent example of a privately-funded community third space, complete with open green space for gathering, flexible seating, and games. Residential units and commercial businesses are found on the surrounding streets.

The Importance of Third Places

From The Brookings Institute: "Third places' is a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg and refers to places where people spend time between home ('first' place) and work ('second' place).

They are locations where we exchange ideas, have a good time, and build relationships... the most effective ones for building real community seem to be physical places where people can easily and routinely connect with each other: churches, parks, recreation centers, hairdressers, and gyms. Third places have a number of important community building attributes. Depending on their location, social classes and backgrounds can be 'leveled-out' in ways that are unfortunately rare these days, with people feeling they are treated as social equals.

Informal conversation is the main activity and most important linking function. One commentator refers to third places as the "living room' of society."



city feels alive. They can be publicly or commercially owned and operated and often include coffee shops, parks, plazas, libraries, barbershops, and community gardens.

Johnson's third-space assets. City Park is currently the only City-owned third space along Main Drive. City leaders recognize the importance and value of third spaces and, rather than fund another one, would like to foster conditions that allow commercial and civic third spaces to emerge organically as the city develops.

Housing must be close. Third spaces—whether commercial or public—do not thrive in isolation. They require proximate housing to support the daily foot traffic and the regulars who give them life. Density is a prerequisite of great public spaces.

Johnson's Greenspace Assets

Johnson's ravines, creek corridors, tree canopy, and natural topography represent

genuinely exceptional greenspace assets for the community. These assets are the envy of most communities and should be woven through the fabric of Johnson's planning efforts.

Isolation would be a mistake. Using greenspace as a buffer—to separate uses or push development away—squanders both the natural asset and the development potential. Isolated parks without adjacent density become underused amenities rather than beloved community anchors.

As one panelist advised, "Make nature into nature. Make the rest into neighborhoods." The City is strongly encouraged to preserve and celebrate natural areas fully—the trails, canopy, and creek corridors—while building compact, active neighborhoods directly adjacent to them. The goal is integration, not separation, which means positioning housing and daily life close enough to nature that it becomes part of ordinary life.



The city's greenways are compelling active transportation and recreational assets.

Additional Considerations

Throughout its deliberations, the panel identified the following additional recommendations that the City may wish to consider as it moves through the RFQ, comprehensive planning, and implementation processes.

- **Update the zoning code.** The planning work on the horizon is likely to trigger certain updates to the City’s zoning code. These alignments should be addressed as early as possible to avoid confusion or pre-development delays.
- **Review, adjust, and streamline processes.** With the new comprehensive planning process underway, the City may also wish to proactively update City Council and Planning Commission processes to shorten development approval times. Updates to meeting frequency and the number of commissioners needed to adequately meet development demands should be considered.
- **Increase interaction with adjacent cities and utilities.** New development will hinge on utility capacity. The City has established relationships with the adjacent cities and their utility companies, and further strengthening those connections is encouraged to facilitate even smoother pathways to new development.
- **Educate residents about ADU opportunities.** There are exciting opportunities to add gentle density to existing neighborhoods, including historic areas, by adding ADUs on single-family

lots. Homeowners may just need additional information about the concept and process to increase their comfort with the venture. In some communities, to facilitate increased ADU construction, homeowners can obtain and use city-approved ADU plans, which can make the process somewhat easier.

- **Incorporate translation resources.** The nearly 20 percent foreign-born population in Johnson points to a strong need for translation services in the city. These efforts can facilitate stronger community engagement from a broader population of Johnson residents, which helps ensure that all voices are heard and that everyone has access to key information from the City.
- **Incorporate a reservation process for City facilities.** The pavilion at City Park is available for public use, but it lacks a reservation system. Using a digital platform, potentially integrated into the city’s smartphone app, could help with the process. A small permit fee could help recover the cost of adding the system to the City’s services and support the ongoing maintenance and operation of the park.

Community and Economic Development Manager

The City has a culture of staff and elected leadership chipping in and lending a hand on whatever work needs to be done. While this has included economic and community

Gentle Density

Gentle density is a zoning mechanism that positions low-density housing close to single-family homes and gradually builds to medium and higher densities in areas closer to the city center or other high-traffic areas of activity and commerce. A gentle density approach encourages a range of housing scales and multi-unit housing types, from single-family homes at the lowest density to apartment buildings at the highest density.

In a gentle density approach, the context of the current built environment influences the density and scale of new buildings, helping create diverse housing opportunities across the city while maintaining, and even preserving, the scale and character of existing neighborhoods. Adding housing to Johnson in this manner can help meet demand for housing of all types, scales, and price points, and support a vibrant commercial corridor by bringing more consumers to the area. Infusing the city with a wider and deeper range of housing types can also support the community by providing residents with more options for staying in Johnson or even in their own neighborhood when they are ready for a different home or to downsize.



The Cottages on Vaughn in Clarkston Georgia, are small, single-family homes built around shared public space.

development responsibilities in the past, the city's growth trajectory and pending development opportunities are placing it in a position where focused professional attention on the business attraction, retention, and community development matters is warranted.

The new position should be structured with a clear strategy, performance measures, and progress tracking. The hiring could align with the planning work ahead, ideally filling the position in time to help conduct the community engagement associated with the planning process. The panel outlined the following responsibilities for the role:

- **Guide growth with intention.** The manager should strive to help the city grow while protecting its small-town identity and shaping thoughtful, community-centered development.
- **Lead community engagement and programming.** The position should connect the City and residents by creating events, feedback opportunities, and quality-of-life programming to build pride, connection, and everyday vibrancy. These programming efforts also support the community's identity.
- **Support local businesses.** As the economic development manager, this

person should help strengthen opportunities for existing businesses, identify service or retail gaps, and attract amenities to serve residents.

- **Activate more third spaces.** Working with the business community, the manager could help strengthen resident spending in Johnson and activate the community's third spaces with programming, either City-led or in partnership with private entities. Pop-ups, food trucks, and community gatherings can actively encourage community gathering, enhance community and business vibrancy, and keep dollars circulating locally.



CITY OF JOHNSON

Johnson Square was built around an open space that serves as a town square for Johnson.

RFQ Priorities, Scope, and Summary

As the City looks toward crafting the RFQ with ULI and selecting a planning consultant team, the Panel recognized that the budget and scope for the process, as provided through ULI's Plan Local program, will provide room for additional support beyond the initial land use plan. With that knowledge, the panel identified the following recommended priorities for its comprehensive master plan efforts:

Priority 1: Land Use Plan Update

Priority 2: Policy Update Recommendations

Priority 3: Implementation and Strategy Recommendations

The addition of the policy updates, along with implementation and strategy services, will help the City address critical process and policy needs and set it on a viable, active implementation path.

RFQ Scope

Across all efforts, the City should use a competency-based approach, seeking specific demonstrated expertise across a variety of areas. It is also important to note that no single firm is likely to possess all the desired expertise; instead, firms will partner with trusted, capable colleagues to round out the team's qualifications, responding as one firm but representing several entities. To meet Johnson's specific planning needs, the panel anticipates that the RFQ's scope of services should include the following items:

- Community and stakeholder engagement
- Existing conditions analysis

“

“We want to deliberately build a resilient community, not just a city.”

—MAYOR KEENEY

- Needs assessment
- Vision and concept planning
- Identification, evaluation, and updates to zoning and other regulatory tools and inclusion of recommended updates
- Mobility and infrastructure strategy
- Floodplain and watershed integration
- Implementation framework

Consultant Selection Recommendations

Additionally, the panel recognized that the City would benefit from a planning team with the following preferred expertise:

- Policy and regulations
- Economic analysis
- Financial sustainability
- Community engagement
- Civil engineering
- Planning
- GIS mapping and resource inventory
- Landscape architecture

- Watershed planning
- Wayfinding and placemaking
- Branding and storytelling
- Ecological planning

When it comes to evaluating the responding teams, the following evaluation criteria can assist with reviewing the qualifications:

- Market and economic analysis
- Relevant planning and design experience
- Strength of approach and team
- Familiarity with Northwest Arkansas and growth challenges
- Demonstrated success with stakeholder engagement
- Collaborative approach

Conclusion

Small but mighty, the City of Johnson leadership team epitomizes all that residents love about their community, including the can-do attitude, small-town approach, and the bespoke nature of how the city operates and presents itself. While these qualities may be tested in the coming years, as the city's population continues its rapid growth, the planning work on the near horizon should help position the city's leadership, its capable staff, and community members to meet these challenges with the knowledge, tools, and resources needed to maintain a growth pattern that serves existing residents well while also attracting new residents to the city. It is an exciting time to call Johnson, Arkansas, "home."



About the Panel

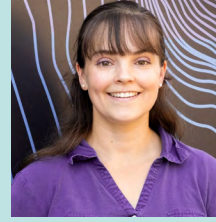


Matt Loos
Panel Chair
Vice President
Olsson, Inc.



Matthew Loos, PE, LEED AP BD+C, ENV SP, is a Vice President and Group Leader based in Fayetteville, Arkansas, for Olsson's Site Design team, leading multidisciplinary engineering projects primarily throughout the Northwest Arkansas region. Licensed in Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma, he specializes in land development, site civil engineering, stormwater management, entitlement coordination, and sustainable site design for commercial, multifamily, institutional, mixed-use, and public-sector projects. With more than a decade of experience, Matthew helps clients navigate complex development challenges while balancing technical, regulatory, and economic considerations. As a LEED Accredited Professional and Envision Sustainability Professional, he brings a strong focus on resilient infrastructure and sustainable development to every project.

Jocelynn Crowther
Senior Project Engineer
Laneshift



Jocelynn studied civil and environmental engineering and received both a bachelor's and master's degree at Brigham Young University. Her mother introduced her to bike riding when she was in high school, and they enjoyed riding along the country roads while avoiding puncture vine. She kept up riding on trails in Utah Valley and introduced her husband, Nathan, to the joy of riding before they moved to NWA in 2017. Jocelynn and Nathan have three sons who are eight, five, and three years old. Jocelynn joined Laneshift as an engineering consultant in 2022 and is adding her experience with municipal engineering, project design and construction, and active transportation projects to the team.

Jessica Hester
Chief Executive Officer
Verdant Studio



Jessica Hester is the Founder and Principal Architect of Verdant Studio, a Northwest Arkansas-based, woman-owned design firm focused on shaping thoughtful, high-performing places. A native of the region, she leads the firm's strategic direction, client partnerships, and design vision across a range of residential, commercial, and community-driven projects.

A Placemaker at heart, Jessica operates at the intersection of design, development, and feasibility—helping clients translate ideas into built outcomes that are both financially and socially impactful. With a background in real estate, she brings a developer-minded perspective to design and decision-making, particularly in early-stage site evaluation and housing strategy.

In addition to Verdant Studio, Jessica is Co-Founder of Lever Communities, a design-forward modular housing platform focused on delivering high-quality, attainable housing with greater speed, cost certainty, and scalability.

Jessica holds a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Oklahoma and a Master of Science in Design Research from the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. She is a registered architect and an active leader in the Urban Land Institute (ULI), where she serves in a district leadership role, and is a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

Ethan Hunter

**Director, Planning & Development Services
Runway Group**

Ethan Hunter is a planning and development professional based in Northwest Arkansas, currently serving as Director of Planning & Development Services at Runway Group. In this role, Ethan leads initiatives at the intersection of land use, policy, and real estate development, helping shape community growth and strategic projects across the region.



Amber Long

**Planner
City of Rogers**

Amber Long is a planner for the City of Rogers, Arkansas, and a published writer, with great enthusiasm for community service and creative storytelling. She graduated from The Ohio State University with a B.S. in City and Regional Planning, and a B.A. in English and Comparative Studies. She is experienced in working with historically marginalized and underserved groups, including people of color, youth, seniors, and returned citizens.



Matt Petty

**Co-Founder and CEO
Pattern Zones**

Matthew Petty spent nearly 13 years on the City Council in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he authored legislation on ADUs, mobile food vendors, pocket neighborhoods, and many other zoning and land use reforms.

He's since consulted for municipalities in more than two dozen communities including Memphis, Orlando, Salt Lake City, and Houston.

As a grantwriter, he's won awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Knight Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation.

Matthew rock climbs in his spare time. He has degrees in Mathematics and Political Science, and lives in Fayetteville with his family.



Kelly Rich

**Executive Director
Downtown Fayetteville
Coalition**

Kelly Rich serves as Executive Director of the Downtown Fayetteville Coalition (DFC), where she leads efforts to strengthen and celebrate Fayetteville's downtown district. With 15 years of experience in downtown revitalization and community development, she relocated to Northwest Arkansas in 2023 to establish and lead DFC after working in similar roles in Shreveport, Louisiana, and Jacksonville, Florida. Kelly is dedicated to building connections among businesses, residents, and visitors through impactful events and programs that support a thriving downtown community.



Kate Shirley

**Green Infrastructure
Program Manager.
Illinois River Watershed
Partnership**

In her role with IRWP, Kate coordinates the installation of stormwater management features that protect our watershed while supporting initiatives in research, education, and outreach. She was born and raised on the Texas Gulf Coast, and earned her BA in Geography and Masters in Landscape Architecture from the University of Texas at Austin.

Her professional background includes work in landscape design, environmental planning, horticulture, organic agriculture, academic research, cartography, and GIS. She is currently a member of the City of Fayetteville's Urban Forestry Advisory Board, where she serves as a liaison between the community and city government on arboricultural matters.



Sharon Tromburg

**Director of Planning
City of Springdale**

Sharon Tromburg serves as the Director of Planning and Community Development for the City of Springdale, a role she assumed in April 2025 after progressing through multiple positions within the department since joining in 2020. A Northwest Arkansas native, Sharon brings both technical expertise and a deep personal commitment to the communities she serves.

Her work focuses on guiding thoughtful growth, implementing effective land use policy, and supporting development that strengthens long-term community vitality. Sharon is passionate about balancing responsible growth with preserving the qualities that make Springdale a place where families can live, work, and thrive.

