

Departing into the Future

An Adaptive Reuse Plan for the Historic Union Depot, Joplin, MO

June 2023



TAB
Technical Assistance
to Brownfields



**SOUTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY**
School of Design

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Introduction

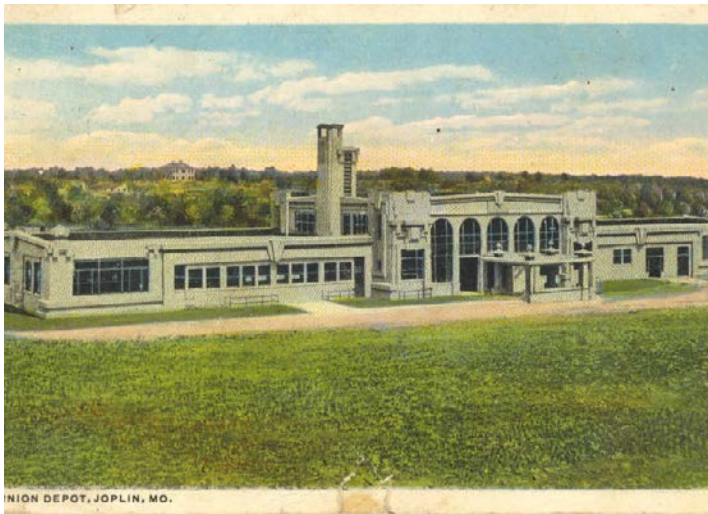
Four faculty and eight students from South Dakota State University's (SDSU) School of Design (SoD) collaborated with community members to imagine a new and viable purpose for the historic Union Depot in Joplin, MO. Funding for this project was provided through a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency's Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) program coordinated through Kansas State University (KSU).

Dr. Sabine Martin worked closely with Lori Haun (Executive Director of Downtown Joplin Alliance) and Joplin Mayor Doug Lawson and staff to coordinate appropriate logistics technical assistance. The SDSU SoD, as a TAB partner, provided site inventory and ideation in the form of generating images to capture potential reuse ideas for the Historic Union Depot and its surrounding property based on community input. The City of Joplin is interested in revitalizing the Historic Union Depot which has sat empty since the last train departed the station in 1969. According to Joplin's application for technical assistance, "several attempts have been made to re-purpose and rehab the facility, (but) nothing has come to fruition." The application describes the situation as follows.

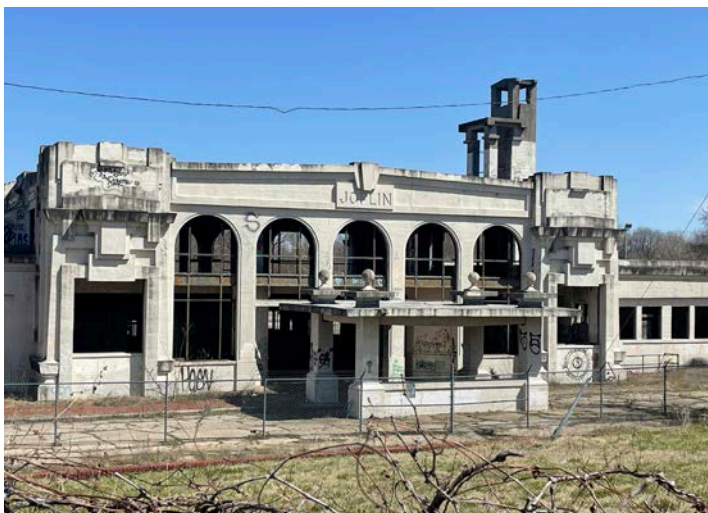
The community generally loves the building and understands its value, but after years of vacancy and multiple failed starts, the Depot has started to feel hopeless to the community. Our organization has recently partnered with Mo DNR and a local commercial real estate firm to be able to list and market the property. While we've had inquires and interest in the property, we are working to create a detailed package to share with developers that will help them understand the potential and the community needs and desires for the property.

The building is unusual and doesn't really fit the typical loft over retail conversions we've seen in recent years in downtown. As downtown has recently had significant investment and revitalization, we think it is time that a project at the depot can be successful, but are not sure exactly what will be the best fit for the location and space.

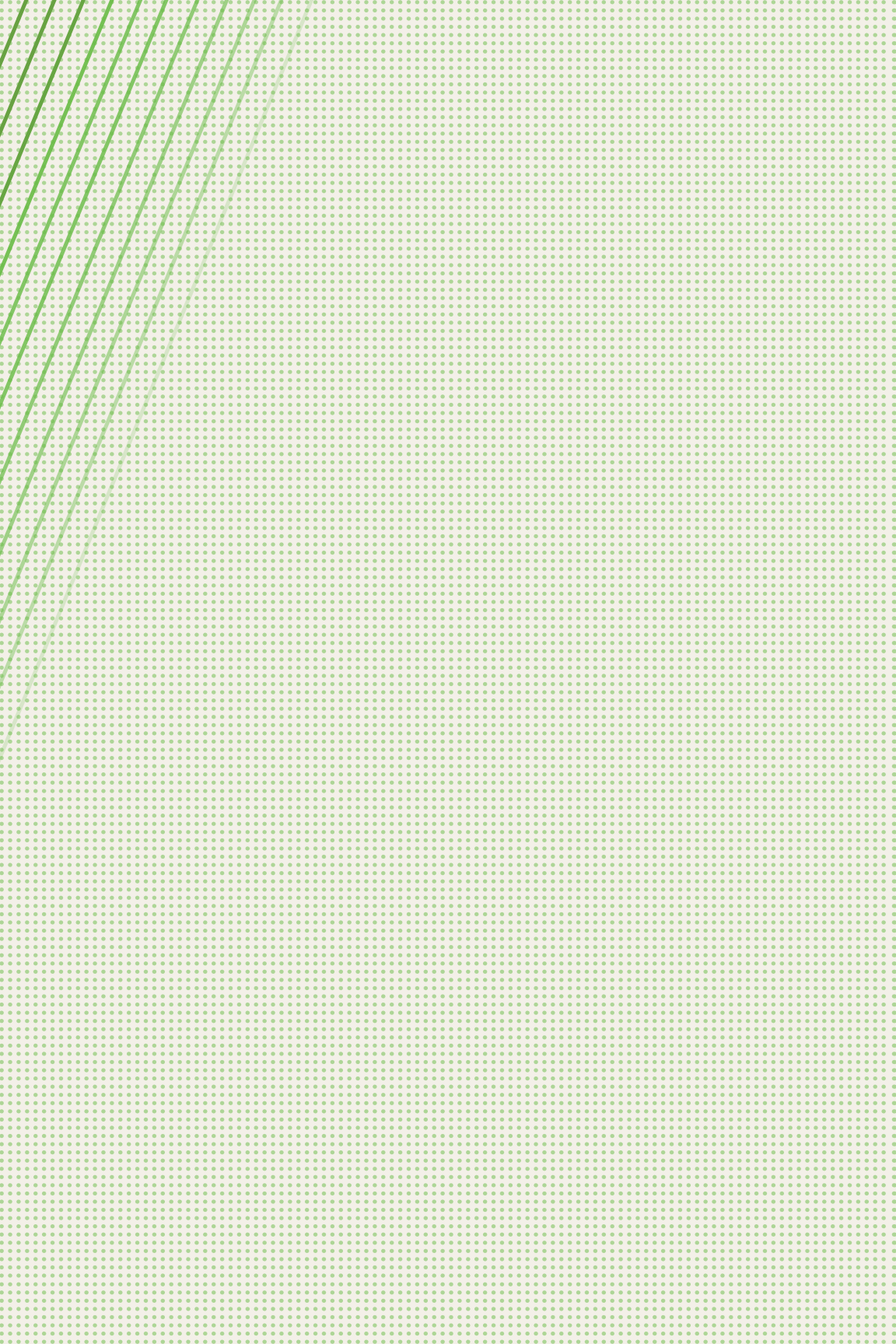
There's also an adjacent 12 acres that could be purchased to add to a larger development that might include townhouses, apartments, hotel, etc. Ultimately, if we could come up with a concept that could then have a request for proposal and/or feasibility planning done, that would go a long way towards a prospective investor understanding the project potential.



Vintage postcard



Site visit photo spring 2023



Process

This report will share visioning and placemaking work provided by faculty and students of SDSU SoD in collaboration with KSU TAB to envision a new and viable purpose for the Historic Union Depot. Working as partners on the project, faculty, academic researchers and students from the SoD brought forward skills from a variety of disciplines including architecture, art education, graphic design, interior design, and landscape architecture to re-imagine a sense of place.

The faculty and academic researchers have a long history of practicing placemaking strategies in small and mid-size American towns. They believe that placemaking is an important piece of knowledge and should be acquired by students in both the visual arts and built environment disciplines. During fifteen weeks from January to May of 2023, SoD students were provided active-learning opportunities to gain competency in placemaking strategies which directly and positively impacted the visioning portion for the Historic Union Depot. Class activities included gathering and analyzing site inventory data, listening and recording citizens' ideas and concerns, envisioning possible changes to the built environment, and digitally rendering images that effectively communicated proposed ideas for the Historic Union Depot and the surrounding property. Students were also introduced to ways that graphic objects can be utilized as tools to encourage citizen participation in the visioning process.

1

Site Visit Preparation

Prior to the site visit February 9-12, 2023, students on the research team gathered demographic and other data to better familiarize themselves with the City of Joplin and its railroad history. Students shared interesting historic facts about Joplin, its relationship to the Historic Union Depot and the city's prominence along Historic Route 66. They were also interested to understand any impact the 2011 tornado might have had on the Historic Union Depot site.



SDSU SoD students brainstorming and sharing solutions



The professors providing guidance



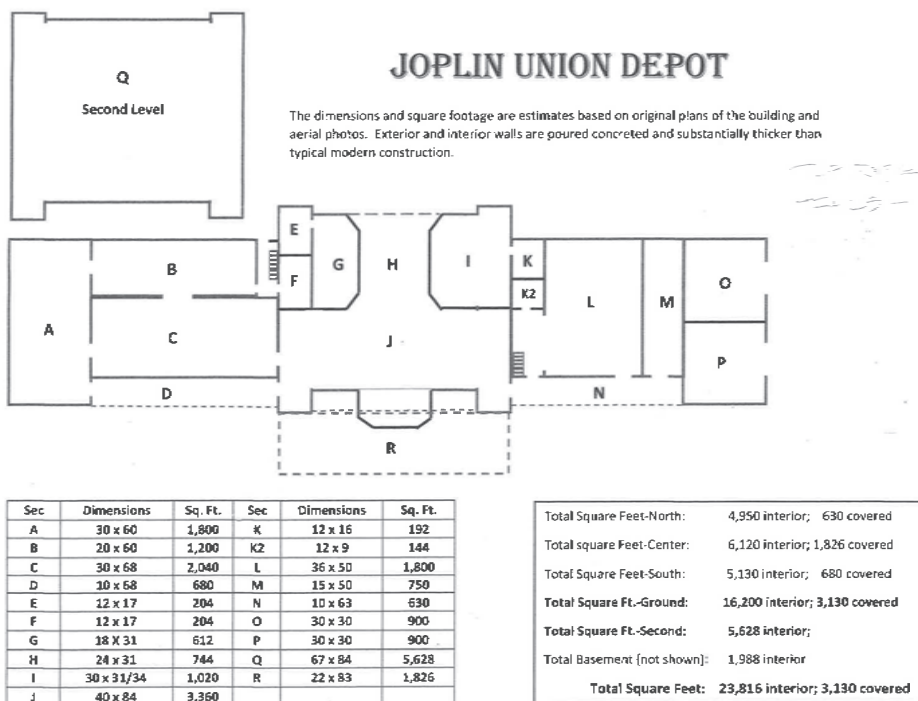
Students working in Grove Hall studio space

2

Site Visit

Two scheduled site visits provided ample time for the research team to investigate the Historic Union Depot. The faculty and students explored and photographed the surrounding property and its relationship to the recreational trail, active rail lines, local street patterns, the creek, and the topography. They also toured downtown Joplin to better understand the urban context surrounding and supporting the Historic Union Depot

The Historic Union Depot was completed in 1911 by Louis Curtiss, an innovative Canadian born architect. Curtiss was an early pioneer of glass curtain walls and made extensive use of reinforced concrete. The depot was one of the first fireproof, reinforced concrete structures to be built in the United States. Curtiss used local mining waste to increase the structure's tensile strength. The original thirty acre site included five acres of gardens and a greenhouse located on the depot's second floor.



Historic Union Depot Plans and Details



View of railroad tracks from the rooftop



Mezzanine



Students conducting on inventory at Union Depot

3

Meetings for Stakeholders and Community Members

Faculty and students met at city hall with key stakeholders, the mayor, and members of the city council on the morning of February 10th to hear their visions for the site and any concerns regarding redevelopment.

This followed with an engaged lunch with city staff to learn about previous attempts to revitalize the Historic Union Depot, to understand limitations for development, and discuss ways to connect the existing recreational trails to the site.



The city staff meets with and helps inform the students



Table discussions provide a breadth of knowledge and ideas



The local business helped the students understand Joplin's character



Listening to stakeholders at a meeting held in the Joplin City Hall

4

Union Depot Community Round table Session

TAB partners and Downtown Joplin Alliance met to gather public comments at a public meeting held at Chaos Brewing Event Center. Public notice was made in advance and approximately 80 people attended. A variety of re-purposing schemes were discussed. Students recorded and prioritized all conversations for future analysis and theme coding.

The public workshop followed a set format provided by Dr. Martin which has been found to be successful in assisting community members to envision revitalization efforts in their communities. Joplin community members were seated at round tables at Chaos Brewing. Each table was hosted by a SoD student who took visible notes of the community members' discussion.

Discussions were prompted by asking questions regarding services or types of venues people found lacking in the downtown area. Once these deficiencies were identified, Dr. Martin asked for suggestions of how reuse of the Historic Union Depot, possibly including the surrounding 12 acres, could remedy these deficiencies.

After a comprehensive discussion of potential uses had taken place, the top recommendations from the notes at each table were shared with the whole room. After representatives from all the tables had reported their group's top priorities for developing the depot site, everyone received five votes in the form of five, sticky dots. The community members voted on the ideas they liked best. Students then saved the comments to be tallied and used later in the process of developing illustrative ideas for re-purposing the depot and the surrounding site.

You're Invited

Union Depot Community Roundtable

February 10



What

Please join us to be part of a community input session regarding the future of the Joplin Union Depot.

Small groups session will be led by Kansas State University to provide input and ideas for the future of this landmark building.

Refreshments provided.

Where & When

Chaos Brewing Event Center

112 S Main
Joplin, Missouri

February 10, 2023

7pm to approx 8:30pm

More Info

Downtown Joplin Alliance
417.501.9649
info@downtownjoplin.com



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Promotional flyer announcing community meeting.



Student listened in round table discussion.



Large paper sheets maintained transparency of communication



Community members sharing top priorities generated from their table.



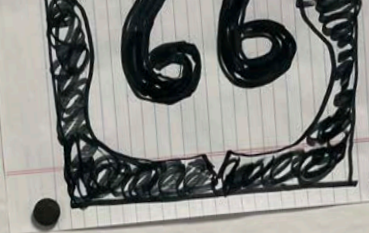
Tables took pride in their ideas



Large sheets are on display, ready for the community to vote

Discussions during the round table, community meeting resulted in generating many ideas for re-purposing the depot and surrounding property. Suggestions ranged from family-related, outdoor activities, economic uses like office space, a boutique hotel, or a brewery, and a celebration of the past through historic museums.

- ulti-Use
- Coffee Shop
 - Art Studio
 - Restaurant
 - Retail Space
 - Open Kitchen



- distillery
- High-end Restaurant
- 2) Whole F

Boutique Hotel

Children Muesm - Interactive

Route 66 Bar/Restaurant
District

Residential Space

- Co
- Sp
- Wel
- Foo
- ↳
- Post

3) Multi-Use - Family

- Joplin History - Mining, rail
- Indoor/Outdoor - dining/bars/M
- Fun Space - dog park / trails
- Adding Tourism - train rides/ferris
- Trails for - Model railroad

* create generational around

- 2) Family
 - A.) Essen
 - B.) Tech
- 3) Even
 - A.) You
 - B.) Gal
- 4) Mus

winery
with garden / Lunch cafe /
foods / Trader Joe's

Community Center
Sports Complex
Home Center
and Court
Local Vendors
Office add-on.

up 7
wealth -
ing land use
the depot

ly Adventure
Room
/ Science Center
Hall
Area
thering (Place to research)

um

Indoor/Outdoor market w
local farmers & restaurant
with play area, splash pads
Indoor rec area / multi
trailhead
Amplitheater / entertainment
Botanical gardens, rooftop
garden, co-working Air
Space

Food Hall - micro restaurants
around it, outdoor Dining (Food C
Boutique Hotel, Shops, Restaurants
Import Market / International
Market

Grocery Store, Deli, Wine

Art Colony, Studios Spaces
Galleries

5

Farmers Market Public Opinion Survey

Students set up a booth at the weekly Farmers Market. This was for the purpose of meeting local people and asking their opinions regarding redevelopment of the Historic Union Depot as well as their overall sense of place in the City of Joplin. One hundred twenty-three people took part in completing two short opinion survey forms. The first asked people to share their vision for the train depot by filling in the blanks, “I want our train depot to become [fill in blank], because [fill in blank].” The second asked for a tagline to promote the city. It read, “Welcome to Joplin, Missouri [fill in a catchy or memorable tagline to be posted on a billboard at the entry to Joplin]. Many people who chose not to complete the written surveys shared their visions of the Historic Union Depot’s redevelopment with the students in casual conversations. At the end of the Farmer’s Market, written comments were secured and coded upon return to the SoD design studio.



The SoD students were excited to meet with more community members



SoD students learned from varied community members at the Farmers Market



Asking for survey participation at the weekly Farmers Market



**I imagine our
train depot
becoming**

a wedding hall, a music venue, a farmers market?

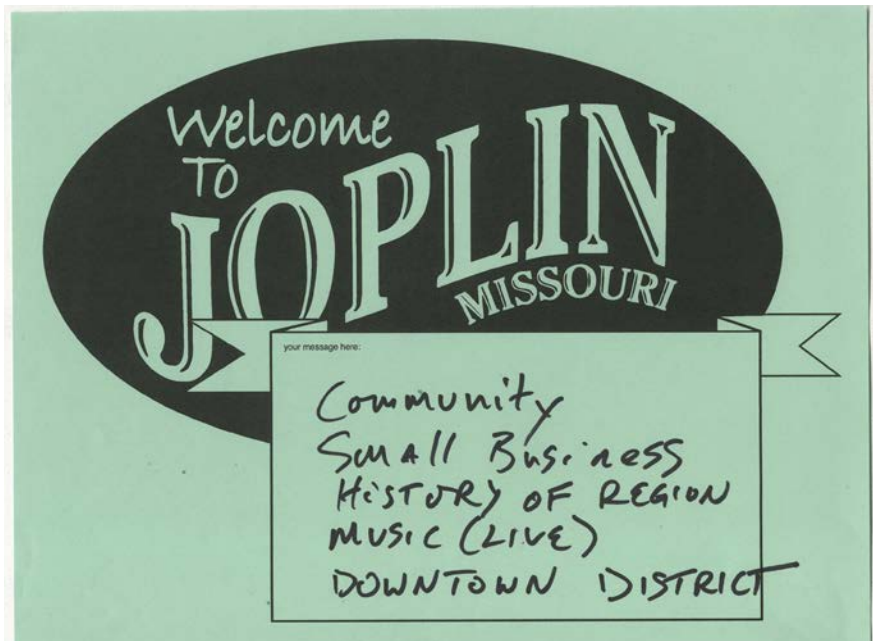
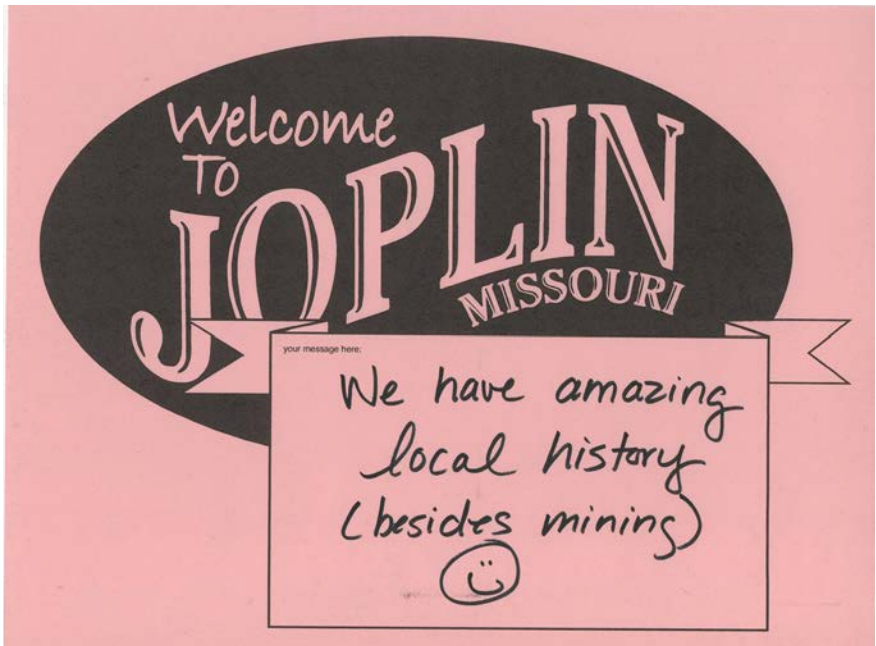
Small
Shops

because,

^{why?} I love the
architecture
of
this old bldg.

Don't enclose it Keep
the "bones" and let it be
an anchor in a "green
necklace" connecting
the downtown arts &
entertainment ~~and~~
with parks, pocket parks,
trails, historic trails,
etc. Sculptures, plein
air activities, etc and/or
pop up events, markets,
etc.

Sample results from the Farmer's Market participation



Sample results from the Farmer's Market City Tagline

6

Initial Idea Sketches

Students presented their initial, idea sketches for possible adaptive uses of the Historic Union Depot on March 1, 2023. For art education and graphic design students, this type of assignment—sketches for the three-dimensional space—required a new skill set that they learned specifically for this project. It is interesting to observe that students in each of the different disciplines (architecture, art education, graphic design, interior design, and landscape architecture) revealed their own disciplinary traits even in sketch work. In graphic forms, the team explored options for restoring the building's facade, looked at options for expanding recreation along the trail, considered wayfinding strategies for linking adjacent uses, and studied limiting site factors like the high-water table and noise from working trains.



Preliminary schematic of office space



Conveying to the team the idea of hotel, gathering space



Finding inspiration in a theme, specifically for children and families



An upper level dining area proposal

7

Mid Report Zoom Meeting

Dr. Martin, Students and faculty reported preliminary results from the February site visit, public meetings, and Farmers Market, to interested stakeholders and city officials, including: Lori Haun, Executive Director of Downtown Joplin Alliance.

Several types of proposed development featured prominently on the list included connectivity, outdoor site use, multi-use, hospitality, business, active train station, revenue generation, and family oriented recreation.



Zoom allowed a geographic breadth of attendees



SDSU SoD met in their Director's office as a team

Results of the community ideas for the Historic Union Depot grouped by the team into similar clusters:

Connectivity

Bike trails
Signage
Visual/connectivity
Graffiti Walls
Lights on tower

Outdoor Site Use

Wedding venue
Dog park
Water park
Outdoor seating and dining
Skateboard Park
Amphitheater
Gardens
Ferris Wheel
Open air Market
Sculpture play space
Trails Green-roof
Public green

Multi-Use

Food
Beer garden
Brewery/bar
Miro restaurants
Coffee shop
Grocery store\international/
local restaurants
Food trucks
Dinner theater
Dinner Trails

Hospitality

Air B&B
Homeless shelter
Hotel (boutique)
Residential lofts
Wedding venue

Businesses

Office space
Art studio
Boutique
Gift shop
Welcoming center
Music venue
Entertainment venue
Concert venue
Post office
Co-working space
Arcade
Movie theatre
Screening room
Toy store

Active Train Station

Trip to K.C., Tulsa,
Branson, etc.
Diner Trains
Train Museum
Transportation Hub
Amtrak
Route 66 Attraction

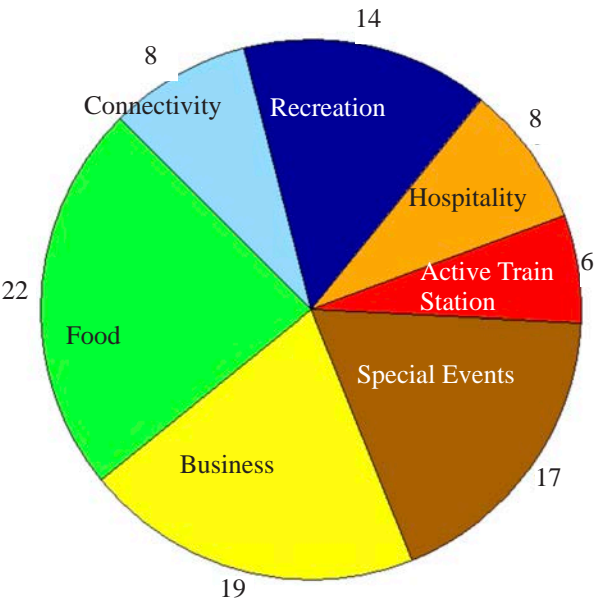
Revenue Generation

Wedding Venue
Diner trains (parked)
Office rental space
Market/Grocery
Post Office addition
Arcade
Toy store
Dinner Theatre
Movie Theater

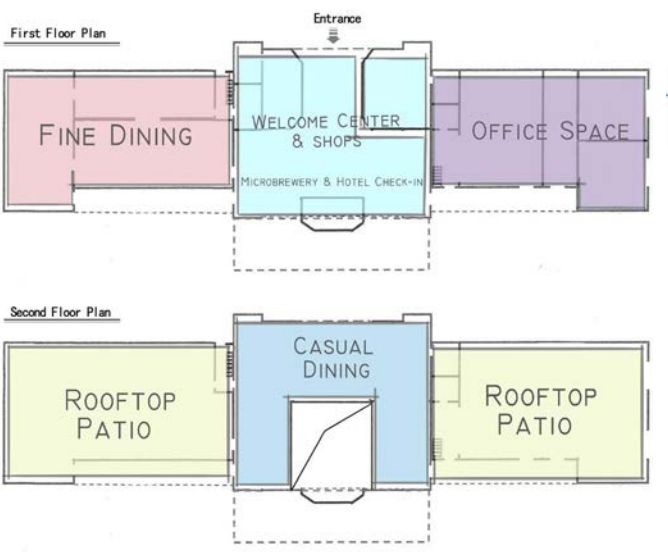
Family Center

Science Center
Botanical Garden
Escape Room
Tech/Science Center
Daycare
Museum
Community Center
Rock Climbing
Mining Tunnel
Indoor Recreation
Zoo
Aquarium
Arcade

Farmers Market Survey Results



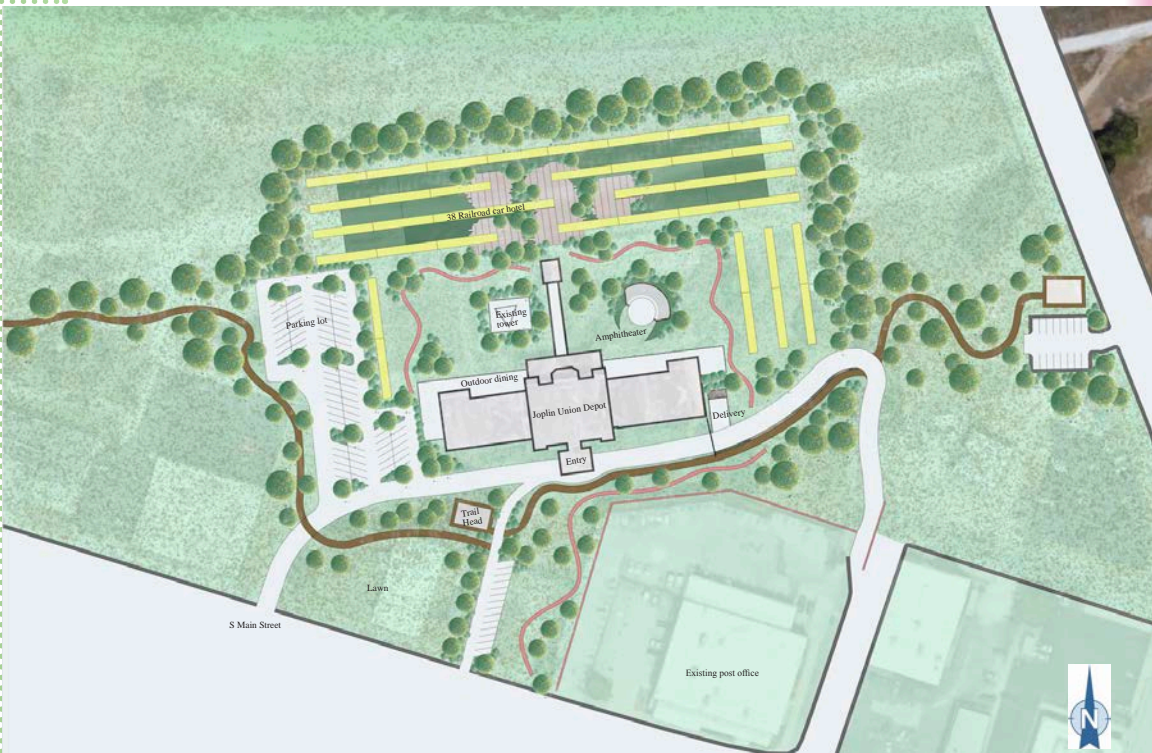
Use Diagram



After discussing the list of potential uses with interested stakeholders and Joplin city officials, students were directed to focus their attention on providing illustrative renderings of the Historic Union Depot re-purposed as a mixed-use development accommodating a variety of restaurants, flexible office spaces and connectivity to trails with family-oriented activities.

Proposed Designs

Showing ways to save the historic fabric of the site as well as the integrity of the building and its facade will be important as the city anticipates applying for historic preservation tax credits. Further conversation sparked the idea of building a railroad themed hotel made of re-purposed rail cars on the north side of the depot. The train car idea is fun and family oriented, and might well serve as a unique destination for special events such as small conferences, family reunions, weddings, birthdays, holiday celebrations, and graduations.



Visitor Information Center

The Historic Union Depot entry area creates an opportunity to build a welcoming environment for visitors and the businesses housed in the structure. A potential use in this area is a Joplin visitor and information center.



Office Space 1

Creating multi-purpose spaces, such as office rental, creates opportunities for people to connect and strengthen the community.



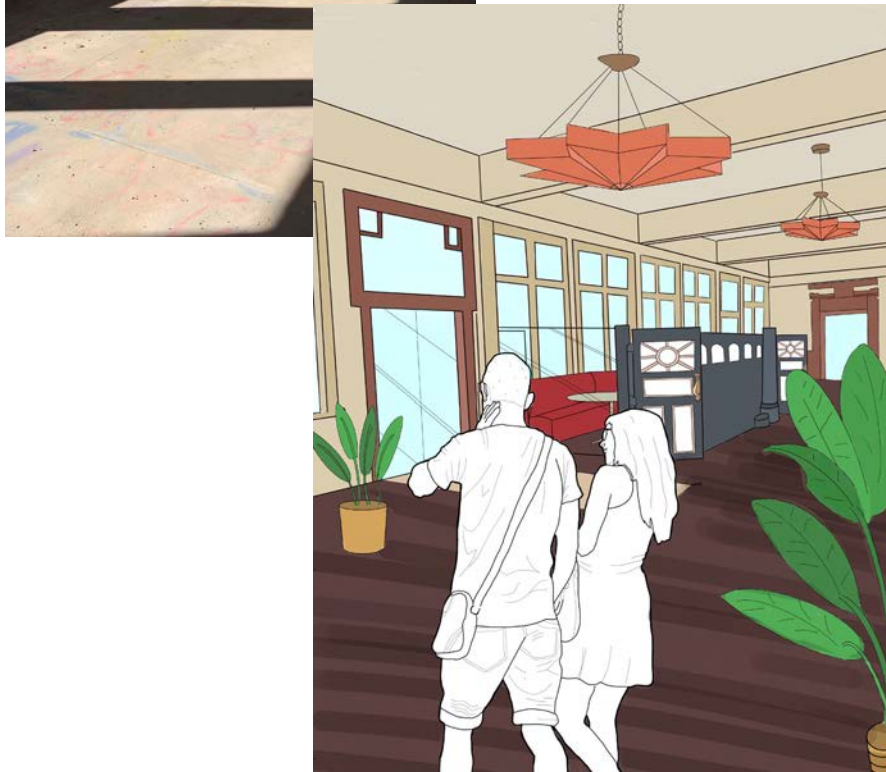
Micro Brewery

An alternative use for the entry area is a micro brewery. The historic, Palladian windows flood the area with light, creating a welcoming atmosphere for social gatherings at large tables. Nightlife can spill out to the north patio and amphitheater.



East Wing Restaurant

A formal restaurant on the lower floor expands the use of the Historic Union Depot with alternative economic activities.



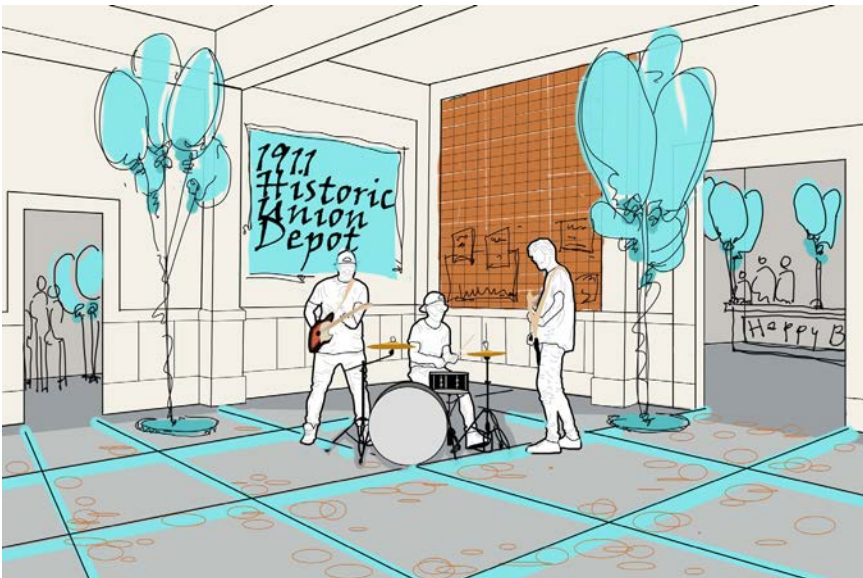
Bakery

A public bakery may locate on the ground floor. Cakes and pastries are available for special events such as weddings, family reunions and birthday parties, which also supports the adjoining restaurant.



Flexible Space Use

There are several opportunities in the Historic Union Depot that can be used as flexible space. One example is a music venue and private party area, supporting the restaurant and town events alike.



Route 66 Lounge

A lounge space can provide support for the train car hotel, a break space for office employees, a public meeting place. A theme of Route 66 ties back to Joplin's key role in our nation's transportation development.



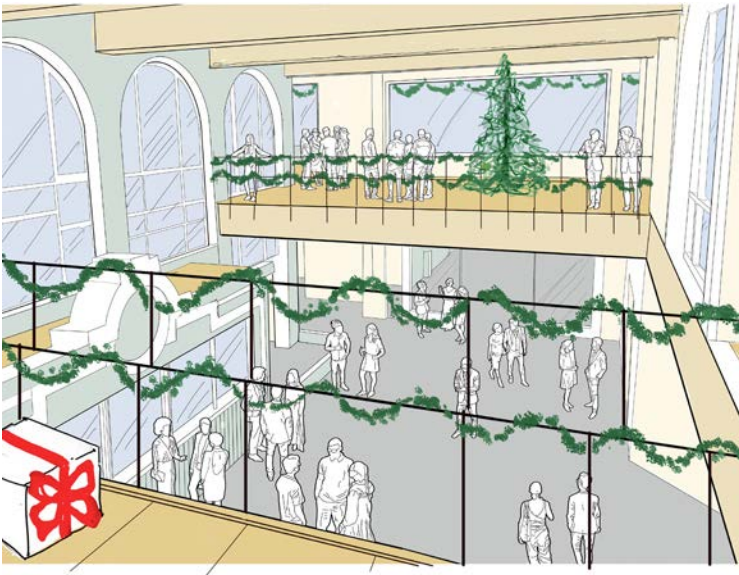
Staircases and Hallways

Transition areas, such as staircases and hallways, can be designed to showcase the historic themes of the building.



Gallery Views

The views from the upper floor highlight the architectural character and activities throughout the building. Seasonal displays can keep this unique area engaged with the community throughout the year.



Rooftop Patio

Rooftop patios provide unique experiences to view the community and watch the passing trains. This may be attached to idea of a lounge space, office space, train car hotel, or restaurant. An outdoor space, paired with flexible internal spaces, ensure lively activity in all weather.



Outdoor Patio

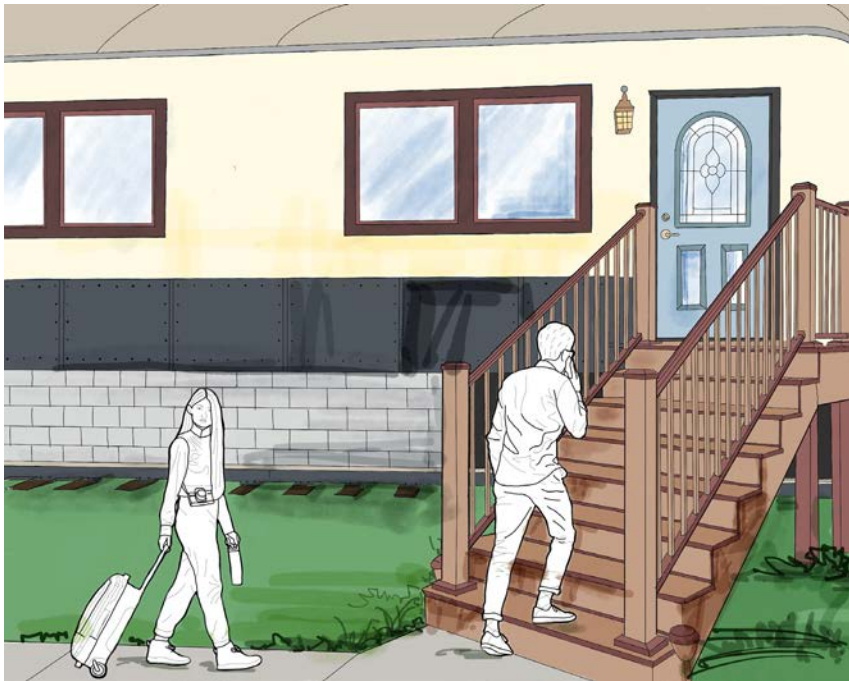
Family friendly, outdoor patios provide flexible use for dining and recreation. Children may use the patio for drawing with friends, while adults may enjoy the sun or shaded tables for socializing.



Train Car Hotel

Refurbished train cars are placed on site to create the new “Train Car Hotel.” The hotel can accommodate individual room (car) rentals and support group events. The hotel train cars are located between the existing depot and the active train rails north of the site. Early design exploration suggest room for 82 train cars.. Guests can check in at the entry to the Historic Union Depot and enjoy activities and spaces within the building.

Train Car Hotel (Cars in Yellow)



Historic Train Car Retrofit

Bunk-bed sleeper cars can make a unique experience for people with children. Such a draw can bring in tourists to enjoy Joplin's historic atmosphere in a contemporary setting.



Deluxe Retrofit

Each train car is its own unique hotel suite themed with vintage, modern or futuristic details. The train cars share a common green area and have direct access to the Historic Union Depot amenities and amphitheater.



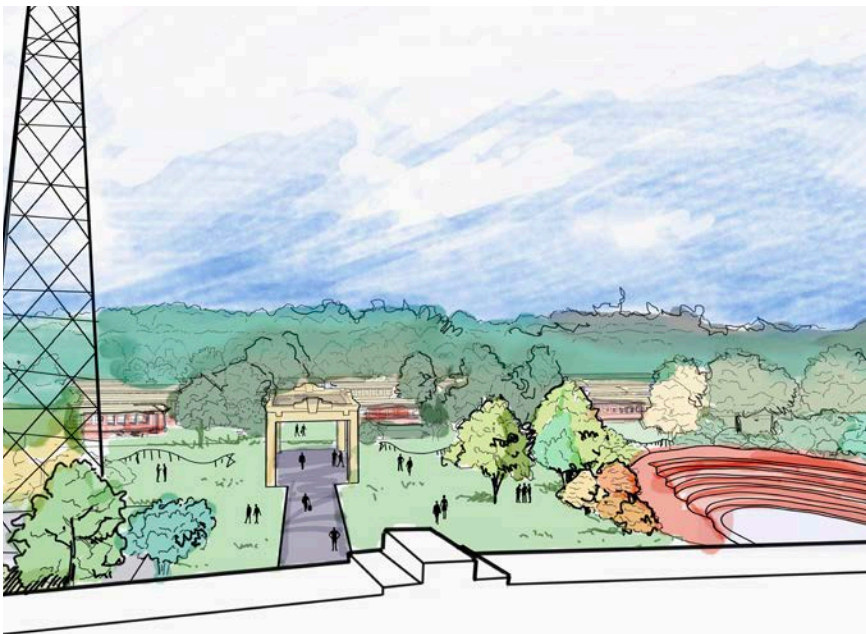
Trail Head

Bicycle rental can be available at the Historic Union Depot trail head on site. This connects to Cunningham Park, McClellan Park and others. Bikes are stored and repaired in a traditional switchman hut, and informational signage can be available to visitors year round.



Aerial View

The lands north of the Historic Union Depot building provides space for the train car hotel, amphitheater, and other outdoor uses. The amphitheater can be used for outdoor gatherings, including concerts, plays, sun rise services. The switch tower provides a visual landmark that can be lit in evenings for the town to enjoy.



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