

## CHAPTER 11

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION TOOLBOX

This chapter presents the final recommendations that comprise the economic development vision, goals, objectives, and priority action items for the City of Brentwood's *20/20 - Vision for the Future Comprehensive Plan*. While other plan chapters support and substantiate the final recommendations, this chapter represents the strategic action plan for strengthening the City's economic development planning efforts.

The Economic Development Strategic Plan & Implementation Toolbox: **(1)** identifies targeted sectors and commercial uses across retail, restaurant, neighborhood service, and office, sectors; **(2)** provides action items related to business recruitment, retention, and expansion; **(3)** outlines a branding and marketing campaign tailored to municipal economic development programming; and **(4)** frames a City Hall management structure for the ongoing implementation of the City's economic development programming.

### TARGETED SECTORS

Brentwood's competitive position within the St. Louis region, its premiere highway access and central location, and established retail base suggest the ability to position the community for further retail growth. With existing regional retail oversaturation, City should likely need targeted retail investments and business retention strategies to maintain the success of its regional retail centers.

**Retail:** Targeted retail could be captured by local entrepreneurship and small business growth. Local specialty restaurants, general merchandise, ice cream shops, and neighborhood retail away from regional shopping center could demonstrate projected growth with local investment. Brentwood Blvd Town Center Area and Manchester Road corridors should be targeted for additional retail in Brentwood.

**Office:** Brentwood sits in the Mid County submarket of the regional St. Louis regional office market. Vacancy within the Mid County submarket is the second lowest in the St. Louis Metro area. Market activity is concentrated mostly within the Class A office space in suburban markets. With its proximity to Clayton and convenient access to the Central West End and multiple universities, there may be greater potential to expand Brentwood's place within the regional St. Louis Class A office market. Brentwood Blvd and Hanley Industrial Court provide a good opportunity to incorporate the office sector.

**Employment Areas:** Retail jobs have increasingly made up a larger share of the employment base in Brentwood; however, proximity to Metrolink and universities, Brentwood should aim at attracting innovative start-ups and a millennial workforce. Other potential businesses could be cottage industry and Class A office.

## BUSINESS RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND EXPANSION

Although the intent of this chapter is to identify strategic action items and prioritize clear implementation steps, Brentwood has a series of overarching economic development policies and community goals, including:

- Creating more local jobs;
- Adding more daytime population;
- Diversifying the tax base and lessen the burden on homeowners;
- Adding local retail, restaurant, service, and better meet residents' consumer needs;
- Identifying growth and development opportunities;
- Developing as a center for entrepreneurship and innovation in the St. Louis region; and
- Achieving these goals in a manner consistent and respectful of Brentwood's distinctive vision.

These general economic goals have helped informed the near-term strategy and implementation detail. In this section of the chapter, general business recruitment, retention, and expansion strategies are presented followed by a description of five priority actions for the City.

## PROGRAMMING FOR CITYWIDE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Development is an outcome or result of a complex set of economic, physical, and political conditions. The City's infrastructure, housing, residential quality-of-life, and public facilities all contribute to Brentwood's overall competitiveness. There are opportunities for cross-promotion as well as maximizing the colocation of certain businesses and draws in Brentwood and any redevelopment strategies should be placed in a context of the larger community. Ultimately, businesses focus on markets or trade areas, not municipal boundaries. As Brentwood implements a proactive economic development strategy, it must do so in a context that acknowledges local markets function and how trade areas are established.

## RESIDENTIAL DENSITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The classic development axiom states that "retail follows rooftops." Although site selection has become more complex since the Great Recession, the two main drivers of business investment are: **(1)** the concentration of population in a trade area and **(2)** those households' disposable income. Brentwood presents both high incomes and a critical mass of population, and when combined with its transportation network and regional location, it presents itself as a prime commercial or retail destination district.

One of the most impactful approaches to achieving that goal is adding new housing units to the City of Brentwood. New residential development, particularly new units located in mixed-use buildings in Brentwood Boulevard and Manchester Road corridor subareas, would greatly increase the total net density of these areas. Ultimately, new housing construction would benefit existing businesses and likely positively contribute to filling vacancies while helping increase commercial rents. The City should carefully and strategically evaluate any new residential development and factor the positive impact it can have on driving new demand in the market. Once new housing is constructed and occupied, the City should incorporate those updated population and income statistics into their economic development efforts and promote the growing market to potential business investors and developers.

## **PURSuing A DESTINATION RESTAURANT ANCHOR**

A clear community desire is to have a wider range and greater number of restaurants, particularly within the Brentwood Boulevard corridor. Further, anecdotal evidence suggests an untapped demand in Brentwood's local and regional market for new restaurants. Community members have reported driving as far as 30-45 minutes for the types of sit-down restaurants they seek.

The City should begin to work towards pursuing a new, distinctive restaurant in the proposed Town Center area that could act as a destination anchor for Brentwood. Most vibrant, successful downtowns in similar suburban contexts are anchored by signature, landmark businesses. Important to this strategy is an understanding what makes a successful restaurant business model in Brentwood's unique local market. Based on the success of other establishments, it appears restaurants can be viable and profitable. Ultimately, the City will need to partner with subject-matter experts that can help assess the market and development potential for a restaurant in Brentwood to help guide economic development strategies and decision-making. The City of Brentwood should work with existing restaurants as well as groups like the Saint Louis Independent Restaurant Association ("The Saint Louis Originals"), the Greater St. Louis Restaurant Association, and the Missouri Restaurant Association to identify approaches that would place a restaurateur in the best position to succeed in Brentwood. Further, the City should evaluate a formal recruitment and marketing campaign working with educational partners, such as St. Louis Community College, the Culinary Institute of St. Louis at Hickey College, and L'École Culinare to network with emerging chefs and potential restaurateurs.

In the near term, food trucks and outdoor food events may be a more effective strategy, and the City could sponsor, coordinate, and promote such events. As part of more long-range efforts, the City should identify existing commercial property owners interested in restaurant tenants, as well as outline its potential approach to using development incentives to recruit a preferred restaurant concept to Brentwood. A local food truck may ultimately grow into a "brick-and-mortar" location in the Town Center while maintaining its truck, which may travel to other communities. This type of incremental strategy has been successful in a number of similar suburban communities in recent years.

## **PARTNERING WITH THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

The City could easily pursue a host of economic development actions and programs without any collaboration with the business community, but this would most likely be an ineffective approach. For the City and community to achieve its goals, Brentwood businesses, commercial property owners, and the development community must be engaged as partners in achieving new investment.

The Brentwood Chamber of Commerce is a clear partner, and City officials and staff should regularly attend their meetings and participate in their activities. This type of organization offers an effective means to communicate and plan with the business community, and such an approach should be institutionalized as standard operating protocol for the City. This model can be replicated through a series of locally focused business district associations, sometimes called "merchant associations," and the City should promote and encourage their creation. The City should welcome potential collaboration and partnerships with individual businesses and commercial property owners, with contact information and economic development programming material easily accessible on the City's website.

Finally, business leaders will be an important part of establishing business recruitment, retention, and expansion programming, providing private-sector perspectives as part of a "City sales-pitch" to potential new businesses. Existing businesses and commercial associations and networks will also serve as the foundation of entrepreneurial development. The business community will be integral to the City of Brentwood launching proactive economic development efforts, as well as representing and promoting the community to businesses more broadly.

## PRIORITY ACTIONS

Based on the breadth of analysis conducted, particularly balancing: **(1)** the community's goals and desires, **(2)** the economic realities demonstrated through market assessments, and **(3)** the physical limitations and opportunities of specific development sites in Brentwood, five action items have been developed. While the larger strategy envisions Brentwood five to 10 years into the future, these action items are squarely focused on the next 12 to 24 months. They were selected and are designed to produce near-term, tangible results and build sustainable, manageable momentum.

### Action item #1: Establish a formal business recruitment, retention, and expansion program

The most effective foundational approach to establishing municipal economic development activities is creating and managing an ongoing business recruitment, retention, and expansion program. Activities can vary based on a variety of factors, but retention and expansion programs must be more consistent.

Business retention and expansion programs begin with a recognition that a high percentage of new employment and capital investment is generated from existing employers. In many cases, new retail and restaurant activity directly stems from local business expansion. The importance of ongoing, institutionalized retention and expansion programs cannot be understated, and in many cases, they are staffed and led by municipalities in their respective community. Business retention and expansion programs generally aim to manage six core goals:

- Building strong relationships between public officials and business leaders;
- Demonstrating support and commitment of public agencies towards the local business community and establishing active collaboration;
- Identifying community-wide or district-wide problems impacting the business community;
- Identifying specific problems impacting individual businesses or properties;
- Identifying business sectors and specific companies at risk of downsizing or closing entirely; and
- Identifying businesses sectors and specific companies with the need or potential to grow and expand in their existing location.

These goals are achieved through what is known as a "data-to-action" approach anchored by three key functions. These functions must be institutionalized, resourced, and managed as part of regular, ongoing municipal operations. Those functions are: **(1)** regular business site visitation meetings, **(2)** the collection and examination of standardized data and analysis that is fed into an institutionalized business monitoring and tracking system, and **(3)** the use of this information to make strategic decisions. These efforts can also directly inform business recruitment activities, as well as City policy, land-use planning, and capital infrastructure programming more broadly as part of general municipal strategic planning.

### Initiation steps:

- The City should actively participate in the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), and at least one member of municipal staff should be a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD). The City should encourage private partner organizations to pursue training, education, and certification as well, to the extent to contributions to achieving the community's economic development goals.
- The City should identify quarterly business recruitment objectives based on IEDC best practices and local community planning and pursue such investment through strategic partnerships with the development community.
- The City should establish a formal business retention and expansion program that is provided adequate municipal resources and staffed by City personnel, in partnership with elected and appointed officials and business leaders through an Economic Development Task Force.
- The City's business retention and expansion program should directly include the Economic Development Task Force, which should be responsible for coordinating with staff on tracking, monitoring, and evaluating the information collected as part of activities. Teams of community representatives, including staff, elected and appointed officials, and Chamber of Commerce individuals, should develop a routinely structured series of business visitation meetings that utilize a standardized survey tool.
- The City should work with the business community to create a dedicated business and development website.

## Action item #2: Begin to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem

A key community goal is developing more local employment, and directly intertwined with that aspiration is establishing Brentwood as one of the centers of entrepreneurship and business start-ups in the St. Louis region. Due to a variety of physical and economic conditions, Brentwood's most strategic and competitive approach to office and major employment development will be through the nurturing and cultivation of small firms.

Entrepreneurial communities flourish because of a delicate mix of conditions, sometimes called an "entrepreneurial ecosystem," that grows and compounds in impact over time. Incremental progress—trial-and-error—is central to the entrepreneurial and start-up segment of the economy, and that dynamic also applies to local government efforts role in establishing such a community. Not all initial efforts will produce easily measurable returns, and the ultimate success of entrepreneurial economic planning efforts are measured over the long-term.

Brentwood should lead initial efforts to begin to establish a local culture and community that supports entrepreneurs and small, new business start-ups. Many of the critical actors, such as entrepreneurs, committed government agencies, colleges and universities, potential investors, and experienced business mentors, are already present in Brentwood. But they may not be networking and strategically planning for a local business climate that encourages and supports new ventures. Further, Brentwood benefits from its location in the St. Louis region and its entrepreneurial programming efforts should leverage the large employers, major research universities, regional economic development entities, and capital networks in the larger economy.

### Initiation steps:

- The City should establish a sub-committee of the Economic Development Task Force that focuses its programming energies on developing a local entrepreneurship community, while coordinating those efforts with Brentwood's larger economic development activities.
- The City should partner with the Brentwood Chamber of Commerce to develop a local young entrepreneurs' organization. Such a group should organize regular events for entrepreneurs to meet and troubleshoot shared challenges, as well as exchange leads and best practices.
- The City and its business partners in the community should work to organize "entrepreneur office hours" where experienced business and start-up mentors host open-forum events and one-on-one advising opportunities.
- The City should facilitate the creation of a local chapter of the Startup America Partnership model, tailored to local interests, strengths, and resources.
- The City should organize a strategic planning meeting with the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership to identify shared goals and areas where Brentwood's local entrepreneurship and economic development goals coincide with existing regional efforts.
- The City should work with local entrepreneurs and businesses to participate in regional events, such as Startup Weekend St. Louis, Startup Connection, Global Entrepreneurship Week, and through more ongoing monthly trainings and events through groups such as Accelerate St. Louis. When appropriate, the Brentwood community should launch local versions of such regional events in partnership with St. Louis entities.
- As a long-term strategy, the City should partner with local educational institutions, property owners, and developers to evaluate the potential for the construction of incubator spaces in Brentwood. Although a long-term outcome, early discussions and relationships can be formed in the near-term.

### **Action Item #3: Evaluate partnerships for retail development**

Although the local retail market is currently very competitive, and many consumers who live in Brentwood have established behavioral habits, there are some targeted opportunities that may be worth pursuing. The most immediate opportunity appears to be a destination restaurant in the proposed Town Center area.

Projects totaling more than 100,000 square feet comprised of multiple tenants can often take years to materialize. There are many complex steps in the development process, including purchasing land, identifying and pre-leasing tenants, addressing site design, receiving zoning and building permit approvals, initiating construction, and preparing individual stores to build-out and finally open. Project financing, leasing cycles, and internal corporate plans also a factor into how projects at this scale materialize. At this time, Brentwood would benefit from being proactive and beginning to work with the development community to evaluate project opportunities.

#### ***Initiation steps:***

- The City should approach the owners of properties in the three subareas to evaluate their long-term plans and interests in their property. The City should evaluate any opportunity to help coordinate between property owners and issue a request for proposals (RFP) for non-binding concepts from the development community.
- The City should develop a one-page "tear-sheet" to market sites directly to potential developers, which could include the community's position on infrastructure investment and the use of public financing tools.
- The City should both approach St. Louis area retailer developers individually, as well as host a "sales pitch" presentation at City Hall. In doing so, the City should be able to garner industry perspectives on site selection, the regional retail economy, and potential project concepts to better inform potential for redevelopment.
- The City should conduct public meetings, surveys, and other community engagement activities to garner residents' interest in recruiting such retailers to the community, as well as conduct visual preference, urban design, and architectural character charrettes (to determine site design approaches that the community would support and see as a benefit to Brentwood.

**Action Item #5: Leverage the Town Center subarea as a catalyst**

Brentwood draws consumers from throughout the St. Louis metropolitan region, and this market-driven retail growth should be fully leveraged as a catalyst for the Brentwood Boulevard Corridor, and specifically, the Town Center subarea. The Town Center subarea would benefit from further branding itself as a signature destination and an easily identifiable business district, complementing the big-box retail area to its north. Smaller, “Mom-and-Pop” retailers are well-suited for such a district, as they would not be as competitive in a shopping center environment, given the proximity to “category-killer” stores and higher lease rates typical of larger shopping centers. The City should work to develop strategies that reinforce the Town Center subarea’s unique market competitiveness and sense of place, leveraging it as an early catalyst.

**Initiation steps:**

- The City should partner with business and property owners in the district to organize a business association to help organize regular communication and collaboration between the various public and private stakeholders in the area.
- Such a business association should conduct a needs assessment and develop a five-year strategic plan to elevate, enhance, and improve the district as one of the premiere destinations in suburban St. Louis, with the assistance and support of the City.
- The City should participate in such business-led planning and evaluate potential strategic public investments to achieve community and business goals in the district. Such investments could include a dedicated City park or public plaza, special events space, gateways and additional streetscaping, public art, infill redevelopment projects, and be financed through a variety of development district tools.
- The City should collaborate and partner with local businesses to develop and program new special events, promotional days, and community festivals that occur within the district and reinforce its identity and brand.
- The City should conduct public meetings, surveys, and other community engagement activities with the other businesses located through Brentwood to draft a 24-month action agenda to identify strategies to better leverage the foot traffic generated by this district as a benefit to the City more broadly. One such approach would be a “hackathon” session where recurring, monthly meetings would generate actionable ideas that could be tested and revisited through an ongoing, iterative collaboration with and within the business community.
- The City should conduct a detailed evaluation of its zoning code and other regulatory tools to determine if overlay districts or other approaches should be applied to recognize the different built-form, character, and economic conditions of this district in comparison to other parts of the Town Center.

## BRANDING AND MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Throughout community outreach efforts, it has been clear that Brentwood desires an updated community image and reputation in the St. Louis region. Many of the residents, business owners, and community stakeholders have made it clear that they see the next five years as a period of rapid redevelopment and even rebirth in Brentwood. Updating the City's brand is timely. Brentwood is one of the most desirable established suburban communities, featuring high-quality neighborhoods, schools, parks, and other amenities. The story of Brentwood as a community needs to be more complete and well-rounded, as well as updated for the next generation of St. Louisans. The City has already initiated branding concept. The City should carefully evaluate the branding concept against the Vision and take steps to implement branding in the community.

### EXECUTE THE BRAND STRATEGY

In developing the Brentwood community branding and promotional plan, it is critical to identify every point at which a potential user may encounter the brand. Every interaction with the public is an opportunity to enhance or diminish the Brentwood brand. These points of contact may vary widely in form and could include the physical environment, street signage, advertising, brochures, websites, events, and interaction with residents. Much of the execution relies on improving these points of contact to lend credibility to the new brand.

### MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Once Brentwood has identified their brand identity, it will be helpful to market and promote that brand, which supports and reinforces the Brentwood character and how it is represented in the region. There are several programs and activities that can be initiated immediately to build interest and awareness of Brentwood and all that it has to offer.

The purpose of these efforts is to bring about a positive view of the City of Brentwood. The ultimate objective is to make Brentwood a familiar and recognized place in the St. Louis region, and for every citizen to recognize the positive value of the community. While these efforts do not need to be directly linked to the branding strategy, it would be beneficial for the branding and marketing and promotional efforts to link together and maintain a cohesive image and support and reinforce their successes.

### Potential short-term actions

Re-establish a regular and public communication vehicle to the community, outside of the Brentwood email list, such as a column in a City newsletter or social media outlets. While methods of distributing these messages can vary depending on the target audience established in the branding strategy, the communications could include:

- Details of the community planning processes—what is it, why is it being done, its timetable, ongoing progress reports, and opportunities to give input;
- Profiles of new businesses and histories of established businesses; and
- Information for upcoming community events.

The preceding should be considered in the context of what currently exists in the City of Brentwood. The City and its community partners will be essential to the success of these strategies, however, it is important for as many businesses, stakeholders, residents, and elected and appointed officials to know about, participate in, and support the promotional activities.

### Potential long-term actions

In the coming years, as the City of Brentwood is being re-branded, a comprehensive promotional plan could be created and approved annually to reflect changing activity, perceptions, and needs of the community. This could include, but is not limited to:

- Host promotional events occurring throughout the year;
- Promote a "buy-local" campaign that invites customers to consider the benefits of keeping shopping dollars local;
- Directional signage to key areas of the community at entry points, ensuring that all signage is consistent with the City of Brentwood's branding strategy; and
- Ongoing public relations and community involvement outreach.

## Brentwood Boulevard

Most St. Louis area residents are somewhat familiar with Brentwood's residential character, schools, parks, events, and other facets of daily life, but when developing a brand identity for visitors, consumers, and potential businesses, the Brentwood Boulevard corridor remains the prominent feature of the City. Many residents and stakeholders expressed through the outreach process they would like to create a distinct character for the envisioned Town Center segment of the corridor, so visitors know they are in Brentwood. This is a common challenge in many established suburban communities in large metropolitan areas, where motorists traveling along major state highways have few landmarks, and everywhere starts to blur together. Some methods that could elevate a clear, distinct Brentwood identity along Brentwood Boulevard are:

- Installing unique to Brentwood infrastructure such as bicycle racks, street and wayfinding signs, landscaped medians, banners, entryway signs, and benches as part of an urban design treatment to the roadway and right-of-way.
- Coordinating a corridor-wide sales event that invites people of and outside the community to explore and become more familiar with the businesses along this stretch of Brentwood Boulevard. The City could partner with the Brentwood Chamber of Commerce in these efforts.
- Encouraging the development of a dedicated Brentwood Boulevard Business Association that promotes a stronger business community and jointly brands and markets the district. This approach could also include joint advertisement purchasing and coordinated marketing. They could also coordinate business hours and services and discuss ways that the City can improve their process and become more business friendly.

## Community events

Many community outreach participants expressed that they would like to see more community events created that bring Brentwood together throughout the year. This type of event would be a great opportunity to showcase the community's assets and brand identity. Frequent public events and a variety of distinctive activities help establish communities with a sense of vibrancy and energy within the St. Louis region. The City of Brentwood should lead a community-wide planning exercise to evaluate existing events, assess the potential to expand the free concerts and picnics, and launch new potential community events and festivals.

## CITY HALL MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

An effective internal management structure must be in place to ensure successful implementation of the comprehensive plan and economic development initiatives. The City should have a designated individual responsible for overseeing business retention and attraction and is a consistent point of contact for business owners, property owners, brokers and developers.

The Planning and Development staff should be responsible for implementation of the comprehensive plan and continue to function in the role of managing short, mid and long-range planning for the City. This also includes day to day activities related to code enforcement, permitting, zoning and related issues. While economic development falls under the umbrella of Planning and Development and is currently a function of department staff, it will become increasingly important to have separate personnel dedicated to that role. Initially, one individual should be able to function in that capacity with oversight and assistance as needed from Planning and Development staff. As development activity and interest increases, the City may wish to expand support staffing. Depending upon the structure desired by the City, Economic Development personnel could report to the Director of Planning and Development or serve as a separate department reporting directly to the City Administrator. Some municipalities have combined functions under the Department of Planning and Economic Development.

It is important to note that the City of Brentwood is located within a highly competitive market area and having staff available to meet with prospective businesses and developers could make the difference between capturing new investment or losing out to another municipality. Economic development personnel should work closely with Planning staff to identify potential sites for development/redevelopment and promote and implement incentives where appropriate.

To further Brentwood's commitment to formalizing economic development initiatives, the City should also explore the formation of an Economic Development Commission (EDC). The Commission could consist of elected/appointed officials, residents, business owners and key staff. Monthly or bi-monthly meetings to review latest initiatives, plans and actions should be held and open to the public. The EDC would provide direction to Economic Development Personnel.