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‘DESIGN DOWNTOWN STL’ DRAFT COMPLETE, SEEKING ADDITIONAL PUBLIC INPUT ON PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN AND DOWNTOWN WEST’S NEXT DECADE

Collaborative, community-driven plan will connect, strengthen the fabric of Downtown neighborhoods

ST. LOUIS — Design Downtown STL, the community-driven planning process to develop an official 10-year comprehensive plan for the Downtown and Downtown West (“Downtown”) neighborhoods, is making its proposed plan available for feedback from the public. Following this additional round of input, the plan will be submitted for formal consideration and adoption by the St. Louis Planning Commission.

“This plan aligns and empowers Downtown residents and businesses with a unified, diverse vision for change for our common future,” said LaShana Lewis, Board Chair of the Downtown Neighborhood Association and member of the Design Downtown STL Advisory Committee. “Design Downtown STL was developed over the past year through a community-driven process, and represents the hopes, dreams, and vision of all who participated. It also reflects their input and hard work.”

Design Downtown STL establishes five goals for Downtown St. Louis:

- Realize Downtown’s potential to be the region’s premier walkable, diverse urban neighborhood.
- Expand the Downtown economy to support startups, entrepreneurs, existing and growing businesses.
- Redesign and activate Downtown’s streets for a dynamic bike, pedestrian, and transit network.
- Invest in an open space network to provide vibrant public spaces and green infrastructure throughout Downtown.
- Uncover the stories, people, and places that make Downtown unique.

The Design Downtown STL planning process was led by a diverse, 30-member Advisory Committee and was informed by the feedback of people throughout the St. Louis region who live, work, and visit Downtown St. Louis. This feedback was drawn from:

- Nearly 100 stakeholder interviews and focus group meetings
- 1,000+ collaborative map comments
- 1,100+ community survey responses
- Over 700 people who attended in-person and virtual open houses
- Over 500 people who participated in additional events

Nationally recognized and Philadelphia-based, Interface Studio, served as the lead urban planning firm on the project with support from Cambridge-based Mass

Economics, Boston-based STOSS Landscape Urbanism, and St. Louis-based transportation engineering and planning firm CBB.

Said Scott Page, Principal at Interface Studio: “We’ve worked in a lot of downtowns around the country and the level of engagement from this community throughout the planning process has been one of the highest we’ve experienced. There is an overwhelming positive outlook on the potential for the next generation of Downtown St. Louis.”

In addition, the Design Downtown STL planning process was conducted in alignment with other economic and community development plans already underway, including the Downtown St. Louis Transportation Study, GeoFutures Strategic Roadmap, the City’s Equitable Economic Development Framework, the Brickline Greenway, and Northside-Southside Light Rail Transit Study.

“Downtown has not had a robust and comprehensive planning process take place in over two decades, which is far too long,” said Jason Hall, CEO of Arch to Park and member of the Design Downtown STL Advisory Committee. Hall noted that Downtown’s last official plan -- *Downtown Now!* – led to the development of several key anchor assets for Downtown, including the new Arch Grounds, Central Library, the Washington Avenue Loft District, and the Old Post Office Plaza revitalization, which included the Old Post Office and the Schnucks Culinaria grocery store, as well as a doubling of the residential population.

“Downtown St. Louis has challenges to be solved and unique opportunities on which we can capitalize to help St. Louis reach its full potential. To move forward, our community will need to work together around shared priorities and take collective action. Following robust engagement and terrific community leadership, Design Downtown STL will help us all do that together.”

Design Downtown STL comes at a time of unprecedented development across the City, with more than \$8 billion in both small and large projects announced, underway, or recently completed.

To achieve its goals, Design Downtown STL includes dozens of recommendations and strategies to be implemented over the next 10 years. To jumpstart implementation of new catalytic projects, several of these recommended strategies were identified as early actions that, together, can have an enormous impact on the character of Downtown. These initiatives and early actions include:

- **Inclusive Entrepreneurship**. Initiatives include offering working capital loans and grants for post-COVID-19 recovery, creating “white box” space on targeted blocks to help fill vacancies, and changing Downtown zoning to allow for a wider range of business activity.
- **Activated Streets & Parks**. This would include developing a targeted list of mobile programs to reinforce Downtown amenities and events, creating a Downtown design competition with implementation dollars, and creating regular “open street” events where the street is temporarily closed to make space for programming, food trucks, and other activities.

- **Invest in Housing to Help Downtown Grow as a Neighborhood.** Establishing a goal of 25 percent of housing units priced below market rates to maintain housing for a wide range of residents and capitalizing a downtown housing fund to fill the financing gap for new construction.
- **Create a Greener and More Sustainable Downtown.** Expand the City’s urban canopy by implementing a tree planting campaign that will help reduce the impact of urban heat island effect, filter pollution, dampen the noise of city streets, and create a more attractive and welcoming location to live and work. Coordinating planting guidelines, piloting a tree nursery installation on two key lots, and establishing a volunteer corps to plant and maintain trees are included in this initiative.
- **Reimagine Downtown’s Streets and Upgrade Infrastructure.** Infrastructure upgrades that have the potential to help transform how Downtown is perceived and used include: coordinating with Brickline Greenway to create a Market-Chestnut Loop (a continuous 2-mile walking and recreational path) and redesigning Aloe Plaza and Tucker Boulevard.
- **Connect to the River.** Build on recent investments in the Gateway Arch grounds to continue efforts to connect Downtown to the Mississippi River by establishing new riverfront garden and park space and bicycle connections.
- **Strengthen the Downtown Community.** Broaden the role of residents and the Downtown Neighborhood Association in civic activities; consider restoring the Ambassador program; celebrate public art and use art to improve infrastructure challenges (i.e. highway overpasses); and program intentionally for diversity and inclusion.

Impact of COVID-19

Downtown St. Louis has experienced an incredible streak of momentum in the past few years, including a Stanley Cup Championship; the 2020 NHL All-Star Game; the announcement of a new MLS franchise with a stadium under construction; the expansion of America’s Center; and the opening of new attractions like the St. Louis Wheel and Aquarium, Ballpark Village Phase II, and the redeveloped museum at the Gateway Arch. Yet, like many cities across the globe, Downtown St. Louis is facing recent challenges brought about by COVID-19.

Due to the concentration of sports, entertainment and hospitality venues, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted Downtown. This compounded the economic impact of the pandemic for Downtown residents and businesses.

“Despite the immediate and unforeseen challenges that have altered this process, it has never been more important to plan, coordinate resources and work together for a more resilient, just, and inclusive Downtown,” said Melissa Kelley, President and CEO of Downtown STL, Inc., which will oversee implementation of the plan once finalized and approved by the City of St. Louis. “St. Louis has faced and overcome other challenging times throughout our history. St. Louisans are fiercely loyal, gritty, and resilient; we will emerge even stronger. Design Downtown STL will set the stage for Downtown’s economic recovery, business and residential growth.”

At the time of writing this document, the pandemic continues to necessitate social distancing for some time to come. Downtown will need to work deliberately in the immediate stages of recovery to support and grow businesses and welcome back

residents, workers, and visitors. Design Downtown STL includes a “First 100 Days” plan with specific actions to help in the COVID-19 short-term recovery; it also puts forward strategies that serve to connect the recovery to our collective vision for Downtown.

Public Comment Sought

The community is invited to view the plan and offer their comments from September 10 through October 4. Design Downtown STL can be viewed online at <http://designdowntownstl.com/>. Input from this phase will be integrated into Design Downtown STL before it is officially submitted to the City adoption process.

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