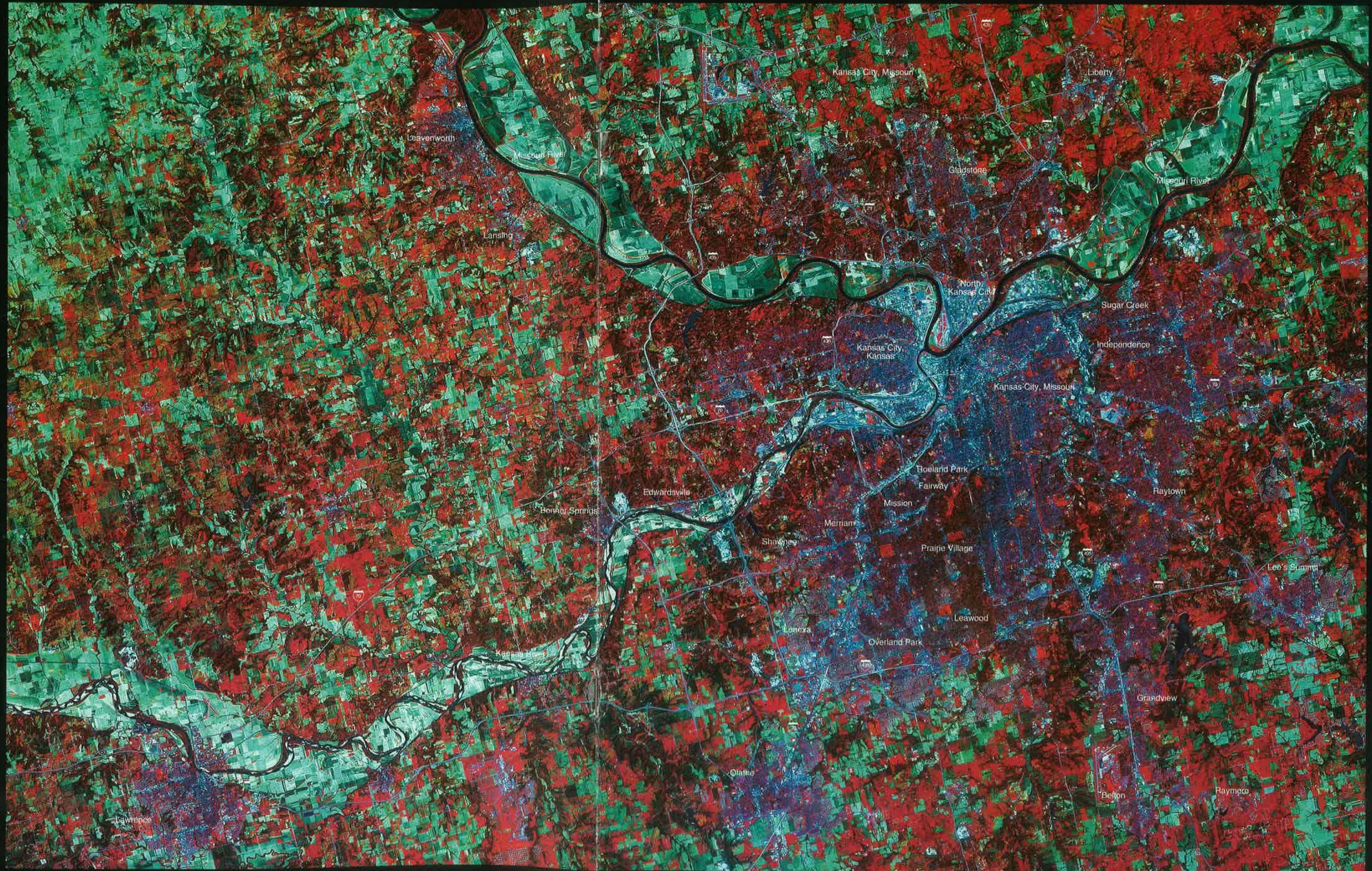


METROPOLITAN KANSAS CITY'S URBAN CORE



MID-AMERICA
REGIONAL
COUNCIL

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WHAT'S OCCURRING, WHY IT'S IMPORTANT AND WHAT WE CAN DO
A Report of the Urban Core Growth Strategies Committee

METROPOLITAN KANSAS CITY'S URBAN CORE

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The Urban Core Growth Strategies Committee met throughout 1991 and early 1992.
This report was published in 1993.

MID-AMERICA REGIONAL COUNCIL
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About the Cover

The satellite image on the cover, taken from an altitude of 438 miles, visually demonstrates that the Kansas City area — with governmental responsibilities split among two states, eight counties and 114 municipalities — is, in reality, one immense metropolitan city. With urban areas colored light blue and vegetation in various hues of red and orange, the image portrays a region whose development has been shaped more by rivers and highways than by political boundaries. Today this metropolitan city of 1.5 million people functions as a single social and economic system. The urban core lies at its heart.

Landsat Satellite Image supplied by TerraNOVA, Los Altos, California, (415) 948-1256.

Cities labeled on the image are those with 1990 population greater than 3,975.

PARABLE OF THE BOILED FROG

If you put a frog into a pot of boiling water, he will immediately try to scramble out. If, however, you put the frog into room-temperature water and then gradually turn up the heat, the frog will sit there and boil.

MORAL:

Today, the primary threats to survival come not from sudden events but from slow gradual processes.

(Adapted from Senge, 1990)

To the Board of Directors of the Mid-America Regional Council, Local Government Leaders and Members of the Regional Community:

Metropolitan Kansas City faces a daunting yet inescapable challenge: its urban core has declined steadily in recent decades and continues to suffer from population loss, disinvestment and deterioration. Urban decline is costly. It is spreading. And it affects everyone in the region.

As a metropolitan community, we stand at a crossroads. On the one hand, we have forged a strong metropolitan area with an outstanding quality of life: affordable housing, award-winning schools, clean air, a favorable business climate, an exceptionally productive labor force and world-class cultural and recreational amenities.

On the other hand, spreading urban decline threatens the very qualities that make our region great. Every decade, larger and larger portions of our metropolitan community must contend with the symptoms of urban deterioration: crumbling infrastructure, poorly maintained housing stock, rising unemployment rates, social instability and excessive crime.

Our collective response to this problem over the next decade will significantly determine the quality of life metropolitan Kansas City will enjoy in the 21st century. We can act decisively in confronting the issues of the core while we still have the time and resources to reverse the decline. Or, we can defer action until metropolitan Kansas City begins to experience the economic and social crises that have already brought other cities with ailing urban cores to their knees.

Metropolitan Kansas City is not alone in facing this problem — throughout America, urban cores are locked in self-perpetuating cycles of decline that drain the ability of their regions to move forward. As the holes in the centers of metropolitan areas grow wider and deeper, increasing amounts of human and capital resources are either wasted or diverted to deal with the consequences of decline rather than invested to create growth.

Economic growth is essential to our region. Much of our governmental and civic energy is appropriately focused on achieving the necessary human and capital investments that allow the region's economy to provide expanded opportunities to its residents. But regional economic growth cannot be calculated without balancing the disinvestment occurring in some parts of the region against the new facilities constructed in others. The reality is that our urban core is not contributing fully to metropolitan growth, and in fact, some of what we regard as new economic growth is simply a redistribution of resources fueled by continuing decline in the core.

A growing regional economy depends upon *net* increases in regional investment. With deterioration spreading outward from urban centers nearly as fast as new development sprouts along suburban edges, net increases in metropolitan investment have become more and more difficult to achieve across the country. Those areas that most successfully reverse the disinvestment in their cores stand the best chance of achieving significant, long-term regional economic growth.

The implications for the region of continued core decline are clear: slower overall progress and escalating tensions within and among communities as the growth of some areas increasingly depends upon the decline of others. The implications for the core are even harsher: an ever-widening circle of disinvestment and decreased opportunity that leaves in its wake a climate of hopelessness and despair. We need only to consider the recent riots in Los Angeles to remind ourselves of the eventual consequences of the hopelessness created by unrelenting neglect.

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the impact of spreading urban decline on the entire region and to define ways that metropolitan leaders can work together to solve the problems of the core. The report **1)** describes the multiple problems of the core, **2)** outlines their causes, **3)** explains why a healthy core is vital to the region and **4)** offers a series of strategies that can serve as a starting point for formal discussion about how to reverse the decline of the core. In essence, the report argues that restoring safety, jobs and hope to the core requires first committing to deal with the issue and second, implementing well-focused, mutually reinforcing policies and investments that together can reconnect the core to opportunity and ensure the core contributes to metropolitan growth rather than limits its potential.

The report directs a number of its recommendations to individual local governments, federal and state authorities, the business community and organizations dedicated to the progress of greater Kansas City. Concerted, long-term action throughout the community will be essential to reversing the problems facing the core. In addition, the committee believes that a critical element of our efforts will be to enhance regional coordination and planning, and as a result, many of the suggestions in this report are directed toward the Mid-America Regional Council.

We recognize that MARC is neither a governmental nor a regulatory agency and that its role in planning must fully respect local decision-making processes. Yet because of its unique position in the community, we have suggested several strategies aimed at strengthening MARC's role in the regional planning process, including **1)** helping create an on-going regional forum for keeping metropolitan attention focused on the needs of the urban core, **2)** improving MARC's ability to collect, analyze and communicate economic and demographic information about the region, **3)** strengthening transportation and infrastructure planning processes, **4)** coordinating the development of a metropolitan housing strategy, **5)** increasing efforts to secure metropolitan funding for metropolitan needs and **6)** increasing efforts to secure state and federal resources to meet the needs of the core and the entire region.

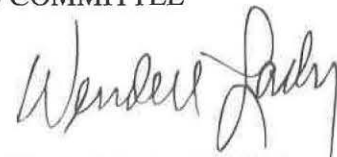
We applaud the leadership of the Mid-America Regional Council in creating a forum to address the needs of the core. Our challenge now is to move forward — to begin concrete work toward implementing appropriate strategies to reverse costly and spreading decline that ultimately will extend well beyond the core. While specific strategies offered in this report can be debated, we must accept metropolitan responsibility to find and implement proper solutions. We hope this report will stimulate continued public discussion and provide the basis for specific actions that build a healthy and growing urban core for the Kansas City region.

Sincerely,

THE URBAN CORE GROWTH STRATEGIES COMMITTEE



Jerry Riffel, Co-Chair



Wendell Lady, Co-Chair

URBAN CORE STRATEGY SUMMARY

The major recommendations of the Urban Core Growth Strategies Committee are summarized below.

The strategies highlighted in color represent those directed primarily to MARC.

Planning Strategies

I. Increase the Region-Wide Commitment to a Healthy Core

- Create an on-going regional forum responsible for continually focusing metropolitan attention on core issues and for helping develop appropriate regional responses.
- Encourage urban core governments to adopt and follow clear and comprehensive center city strategies of their own, and in so doing, provide the leadership needed to foster metropolitan participation in urban core revitalization efforts.

II. Improve Public Decision Making

- Enhance the system for collecting, analyzing and communicating economic and demographic information concerning the region's health to help public officials and community leaders make the best use of the region's limited resources.

III. Adopt a Region-Wide Framework for Achieving Sustainable Metropolitan Growth

- Strengthen regional transportation and infrastructure planning processes to consider such regional goals as maintaining existing infrastructure, improving environmental quality and efficiently delivering public services.
- Evaluate carefully the impact of major public infrastructure investments that open vast expanses of land for development, such as new belt highways and major sewer extensions, for their impact on the core and existing development and their long-term maintenance costs.
- Examine growth policies that, by focusing growth and influencing its location, timing and character, help achieve such community objectives as minimizing public subsidies, encouraging full use of existing facilities and promoting contiguous, orderly extension of new infrastructure and public services.
- Focus economic development efforts on improving the core's business environment rather than simply reducing business tax liability.
- Develop a metropolitan-wide housing strategy that both attracts middle- and upper-income households to the core and improves the availability of affordable housing throughout the region.

IV. Increase Shared Responsibility for the Health of the Entire Region

- Improve efforts to secure metropolitan funding for metropolitan needs, such as regional cultural amenities.
- Increase efforts to establish an urban action agenda designed to secure increased state and federal resources for the core and the entire region.

Investment Strategies

I. Human Investment

- Implement programs that will reduce the high concentration of poverty in the urban core, particularly those that address basic human needs, such as health care and affordable housing.
- Provide the kind of life-long, quality education that will prepare students of all economic and ethnic backgrounds to succeed in a business environment that increasingly demands complex thinking skills.
- Improve race relations to reduce discrimination, enhance metropolitan perceptions of the core and increase the breadth of participation in solutions to its decline.

II. Economic Investment

- Focus on retaining and expanding existing core businesses as the best strategy for creating more job opportunities.
- Use tax incentives more strategically to attract business to the core.
- Develop world-class educational and research facilities within the core.
- Develop comprehensive urban design policies that capitalize on the core's existing assets and create additional distinctive physical environments that will make the core a more attractive place to live, work and operate a business.

- 1) Provide greater incentives for the historic preservation of buildings as well as districts that are unique to the core such as Southwest Boulevard, Strawberry Hill and 18th & Vine.
- 2) Support the development of additional special business, neighborhood and entertainment districts in the core.
- 3) Strategically place new cultural amenities, parking and other public facilities so they complement existing resources in the core.

III. Neighborhood Investment

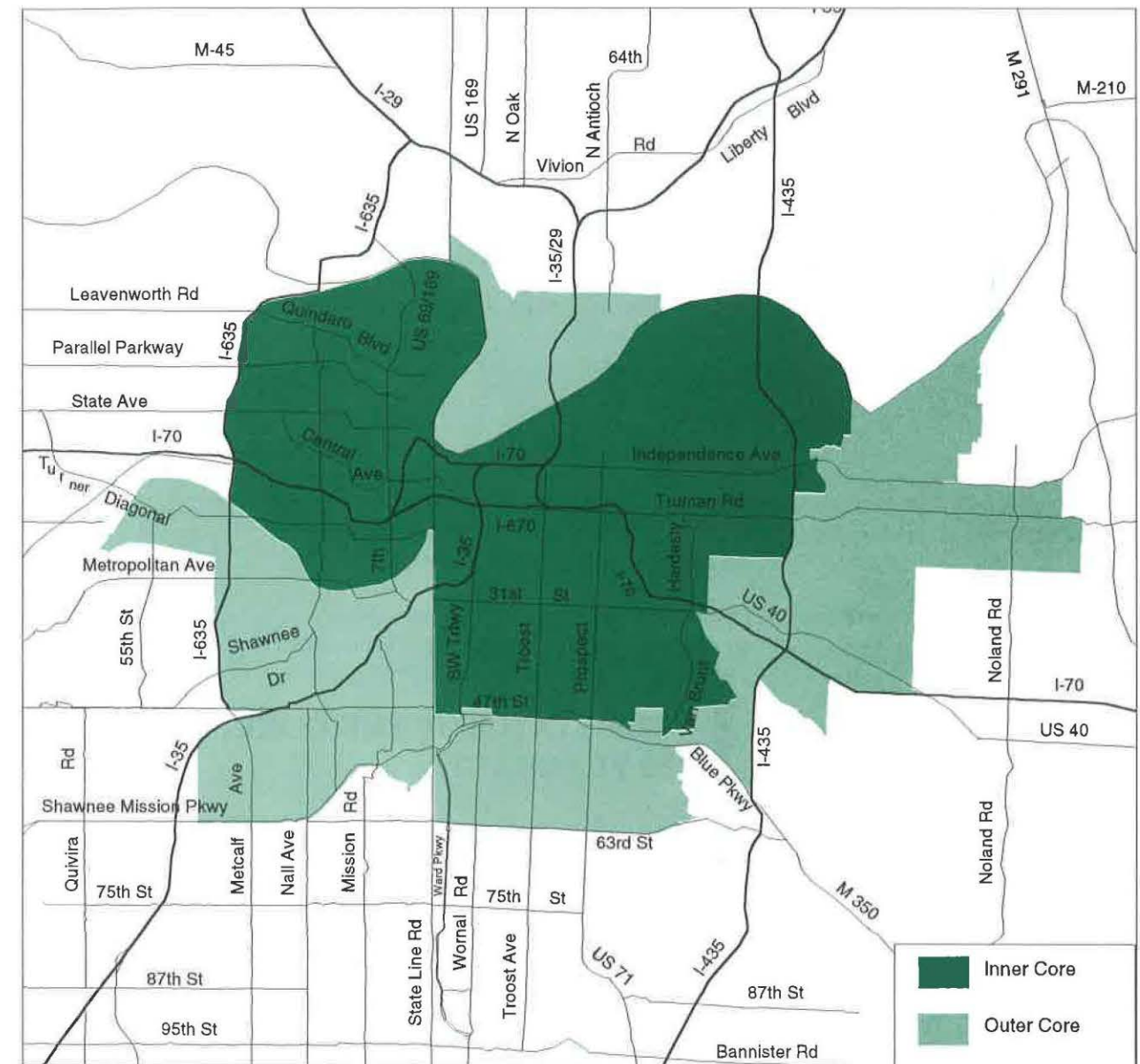
- Target limited resources in ways that most effectively curb the spread of urban decline, such as revitalizing one neighborhood at a time.
- Maintain and implement housing and neighborhood development policies that make the core an attractive place to live. This includes providing dependable police protection, trash removal and other basic services as well as vigorously enforcing housing codes.
- Expand programs designed to increase and support homeownership.

IV. Transportation Investment

- Target road and transit projects in the core along corridors that will better connect key business and activity centers within the core.
 - 1) Make transportation improvements in the Grand/Main and Broadway/Main corridors a top priority.
 - 2) Pursue a light rail system connecting core activity centers that is supported by complementary land use and investment policies.

MAP 1

METROPOLITAN KANSAS CITY'S URBAN CORE



Source: MARC

The urban core covers the wide expanse of the Kansas City metropolitan area where housing and infrastructure are generally more than 30 years old. For this report, the urban core has been defined to include Kansas City, Missouri, in Jackson County north of 63rd Street; Kansas City, Kansas, east of I-635; North Kansas City; Independence north of I-70 and west of Noland Road; Sugar Creek; and Johnson County north of 63rd and east of Metcalf. The inner core, which represents an area where the problems of decline are most evident, is composed primarily of the inner cities of the two Kansas Cities. The outer core represents many older suburban areas which, although currently stable and thriving, either have or are projected to experience the initial signs of decline in the form of population loss or economic stagnation.

THE STATUS OF THE URBAN CORE

HIGHLIGHTS

- In 1960, half of metropolitan Kansas City lived in the urban core.
- Since then, the core has lost more than 200,000 people — 40 percent of its population.
- In the absence of concerted, effective policy, the core is expected to lose another 35,000 people over 20 years.
- The core has declined not only in size but in opportunity, with three times the poverty rate, twice the unemployment rate and half the median housing value of the suburbs.
- Loss of opportunity disproportionately isolates minorities — more than 70 percent of the region's poor African-Americans live in concentrated poverty areas of the core, compared to 15 percent of poor whites.

Population

- In 1940, two-thirds of metropolitan Kansas City's residents lived in the urban core. By 1960, this proportion had shrunk to one-half. Today, fewer than one-quarter of the region's residents live in the urban core. (Chart 1)
- The population of the core fell 217,000 or 40 percent to 343,000 between 1960 and 1990. (Table 1) Eighty-five percent of this loss was in inner-core communities. (Map 2) During the same period, the region's suburbs grew 571,000 or 96 percent.

THE STATUS OF THE CORE 50 YEARS AGO

“The loss of population in the older central portions of the city is very marked. Gains in population in the twenty year period took place largely in the southern and southwestern portions of Kansas City.... The dispersion of population is often viewed with alarm by central cities in a metropolitan area. It has generally accompanied the gradual depreciation of the older central areas of the city.”

Source: A 1947 report of the Kansas City, Missouri, Plan Commission, discussing growth trends between 1920 and 1940.

CHART 1

Core/Suburb Population 1940-1990

In 1940, the core was essentially the region, with two-thirds of the area's population. Today, it is smaller than Johnson County.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

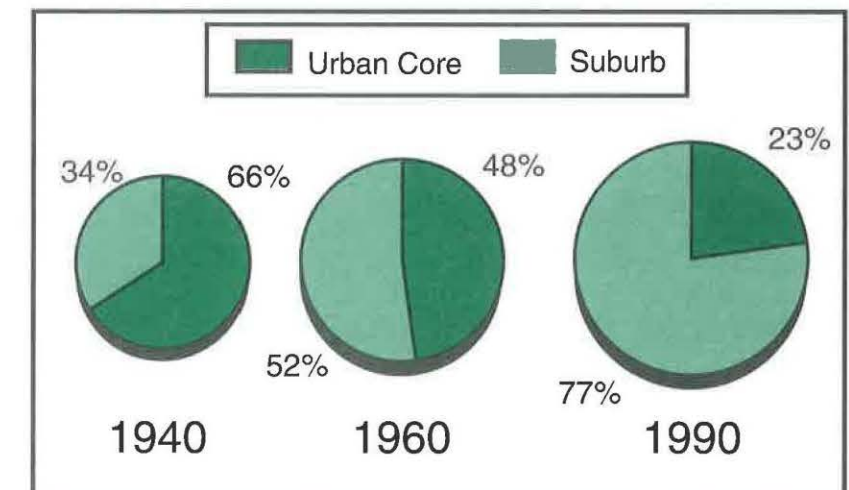


TABLE 1

Core/Suburb/Metropolitan Trends

Population, Households and Employment, 1940-1990

		1940	1960	1970	1980	1990
Core	Population	516,209	559,945	480,273	385,364	343,291
	Households	-	187,670	177,241	158,974	144,142
	Employment	-	-	357,192	352,938	341,784
Suburbs	Population	263,526	597,199	846,993	996,551	1,168,449
	Households	-	173,882	252,868	351,541	438,082
	Employment	-	-	255,811	374,348	487,954
Metro (8 County)	Population	779,735	1,157,144	1,327,266	1,381,915	1,511,740
	Households	-	361,552	430,109	510,515	582,224
	Employment	-	-	613,003	727,286	829,738

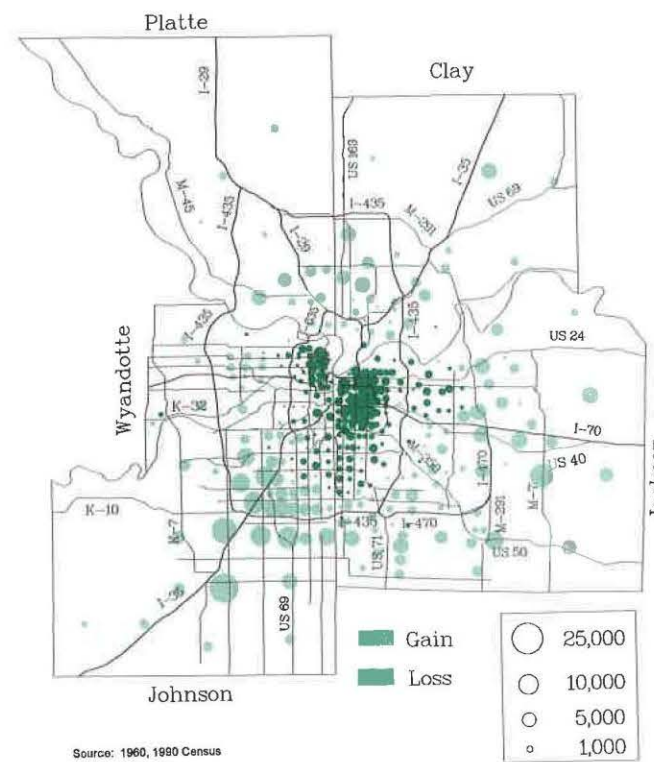
" - " means data not available

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Bureau of Economic Analysis, MARC

MAP 2

Population Change 1960-1990

Though the region has grown moderately since 1960, with a 30 percent increase in population over 30 years, the suburbs nearly doubled in size during that time while the urban core's population declined 40 percent.



Source: 1960, 1990 Census

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Employment/Unemployment

- The core contains the highest concentration of jobs in the region, although its share is declining. In 1970, nearly three out of five regional jobs were in the core. Today, only two out of five are there. (Chart 2)
- Over the past two decades, the core lost 15,000 or 4 percent of its jobs. During the same period, the suburbs gained 232,000 or 91 percent more jobs.
- The unemployment rate in the core, at 9.6 percent, is more than twice as high as the 4.4 percent rate found elsewhere in the region. The inner core's unemployment rate is 12.1 percent.

Income

- The urban core is home to 48 percent of the region's households earning less than \$10,000 a year but only 11 percent of area households earning more than \$50,000. (Chart 3)
- Twenty-one percent of the households in the core have poverty-level incomes (\$12,674 or less for a family of four), compared to 6 percent in the suburbs. Children in the inner core are five times more likely to live in poverty than children in the suburbs; 41 percent of children in the inner core live in poverty compared with 8 percent in the suburbs. (Map 3)

Households

- In 1960, one out of two households lived in the urban core. Today, less than one in four households lives there.
- The number of households in the core dropped 44,000 or 23 percent to 144,000 between 1960 and 1990. During the same period, the suburbs added 264,000 or 152 percent more households. In the inner core, where household loss is the greatest, household totals declined 38 percent over the last three decades.

Median Value of Homes

- The median value of a home in the core is approximately \$38,000, 47 percent below the \$72,000 median value of a suburban home. (Chart 4) The median value of an inner-core home (\$29,000) is 60 percent below the median value in the suburbs. In fact, only 7 percent of inner-core homes are valued at or exceed the median value of a suburban home.

CHART 2

Core/Suburb Employment 1970-1990

The core and suburbs have switched positions as the location of the region's greatest employment opportunities.

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, MARC

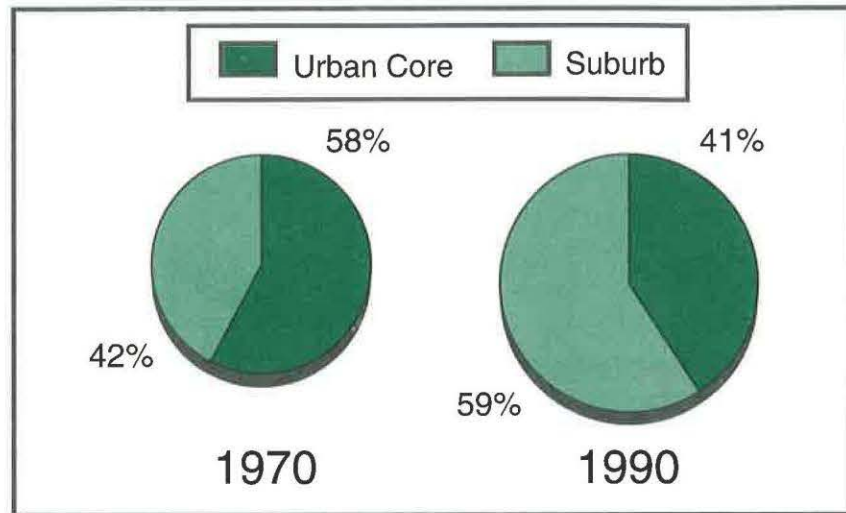


CHART 3

Core/Suburb Income Households by Income, 1989

The middle class is largely absent from the core while suburban households are concentrated in the middle-income categories.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

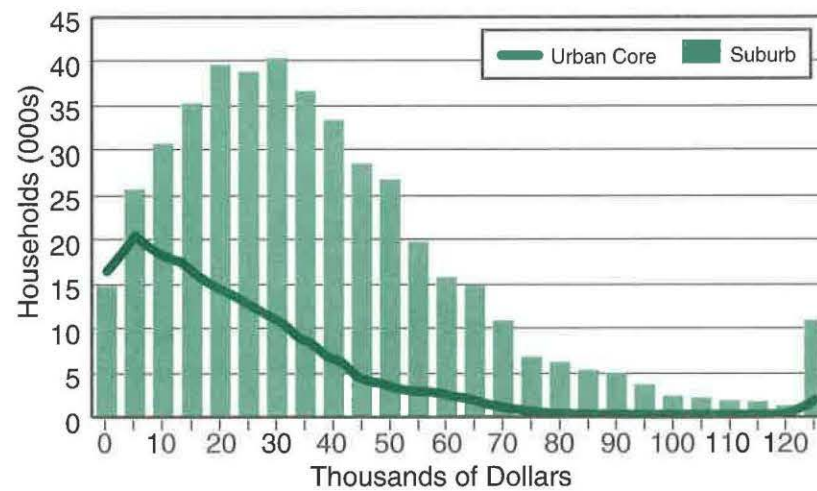
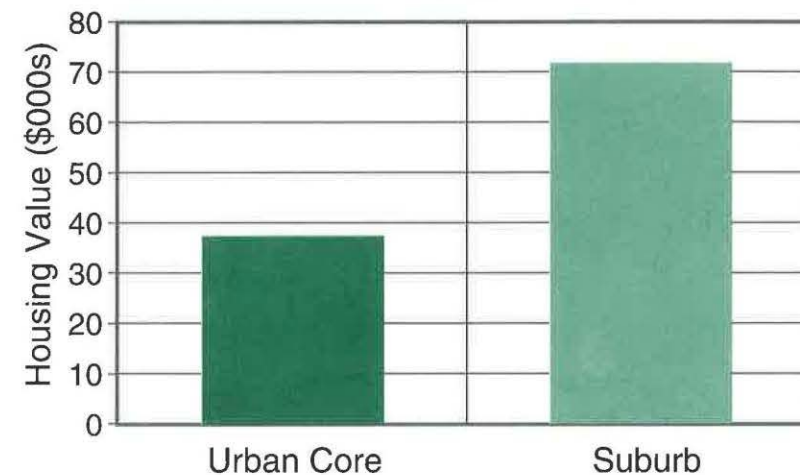


CHART 4

Core/Suburb Housing Value Median Value, 1990

The median value of housing in the core is half that of the suburbs.

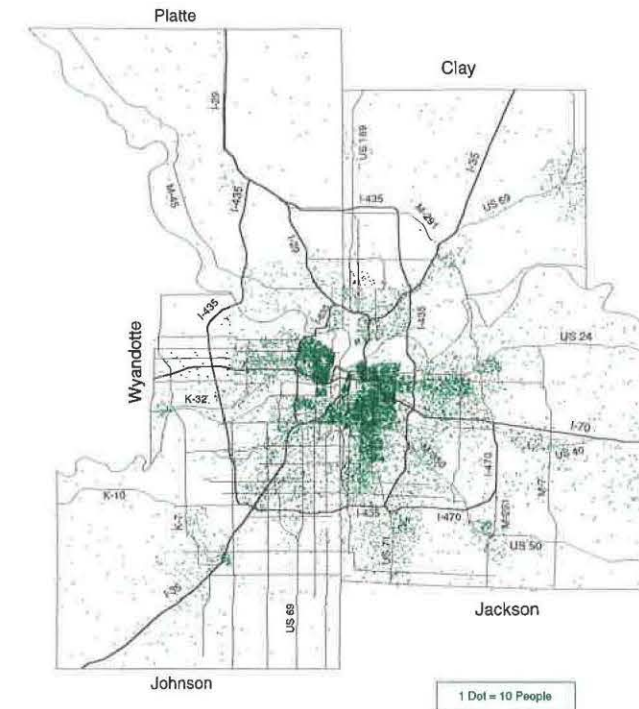
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census



MAP 3

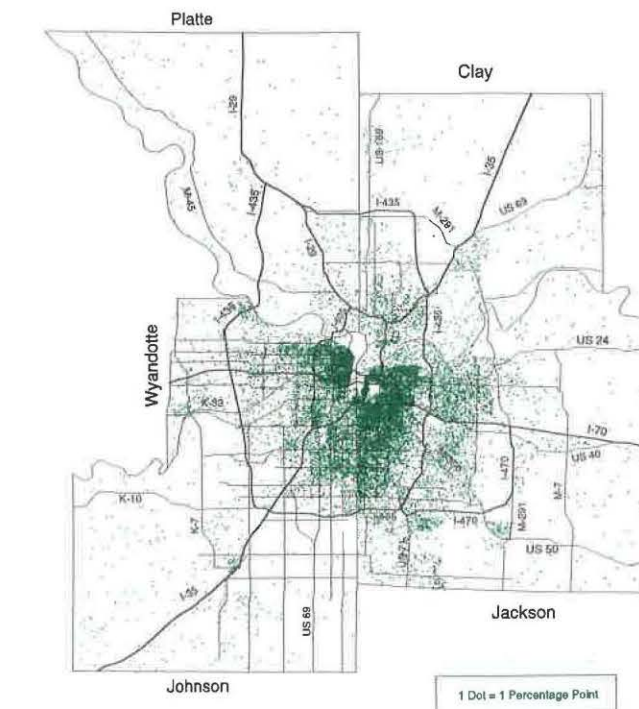
The Poorest People Live...

Persons Below Poverty 1990



In The Oldest Housing

Percentage of Housing Units Over 30 Years Old, 1990



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Homeownership

- Homeownership rates are 40 percent higher in the suburbs than in the core, with seven out of 10 suburban households owning their homes compared to five out of 10 in the urban core.

Housing Vacancy

- The core's housing vacancy rate grew 41 percent over the last decade to 14.5 percent, more than twice that of the suburbs, which is 6.3 percent. One out of six inner-core housing units is vacant, compared with about one in 16 suburban units.

Single-Parent Households

- More than one in five core households represents single-parent families, which typically earn substantially less than households with two parents. Only about one in 10 suburban households represents single-parent families.

Racial Isolation

- Although many racial minorities are fairly well distributed throughout the region, African-Americans are disproportionately concentrated in the core. For example, the core, with less than one-quarter of the region's population, is home to over 60 percent of the region's African-Americans. Nearly four out of every 10 core residents are black compared with considerably less than one in 10 in the suburbs.
- Social isolation produces greatly intensified economic isolation as well. More than 70 percent of the region's poor African-Americans live in poor areas of the core — areas where at least 20 percent of the population live in poverty. Poor whites are much more likely to live in economically viable neighborhoods throughout the region, with only 15 percent living in poor areas of the core. (Map 4)

Future of the Core

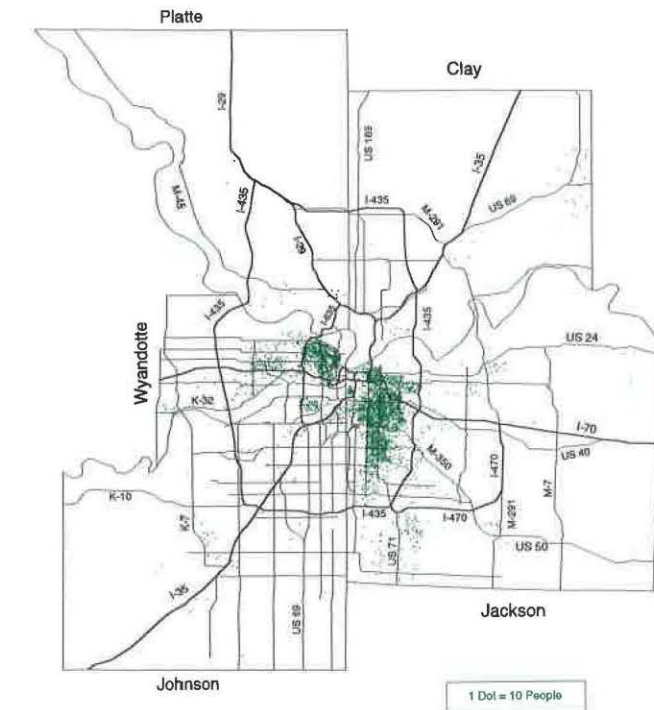
- Current projections are for the core to lose another 35,000 people by 2010. Economic development efforts, such as Bartle Hall, 18th and Vine, the River Market and the Country Club Plaza, are expected to stabilize employment levels within the core.

The information in this section has been prepared by the Mid-America Regional Council, based in large part on data from the decennial censuses of the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Not all data were available for all counties in the metropolitan area for all time periods. Every effort was made to maintain a consistent geographic area for each statistic calculated. However, some statistics reference a five-county metropolitan area (Johnson and Wyandotte Counties in Kansas and Clay, Jackson and Platte Counties in Missouri), some an eight-county area (adding Leavenworth County in Kansas and Cass and Ray Counties in Missouri) and some a 10-county area (adding Miami County in Kansas and Lafayette County in Missouri).

MAP 4

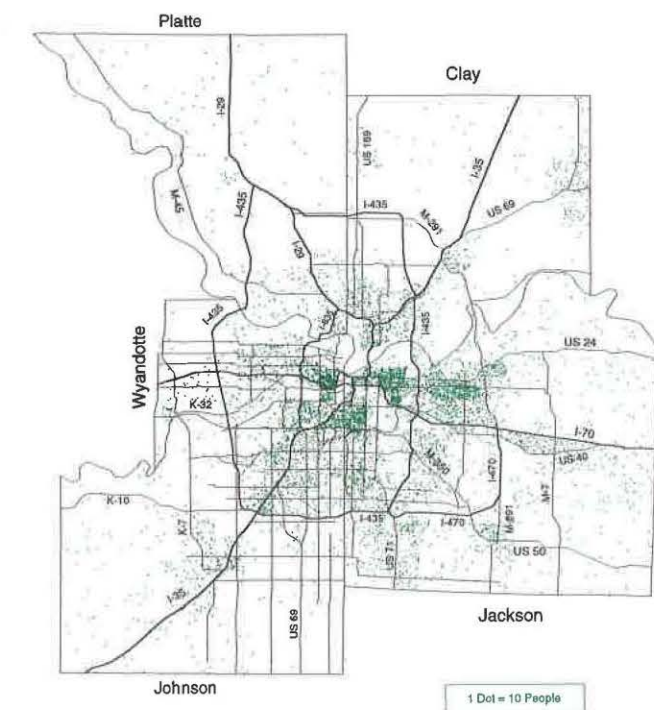
Poor Blacks Live In Concentrated Poverty...

Black Persons Below Poverty, 1990



While Poor Whites Do Not

White Persons Below Poverty, 1990



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF URBAN DECLINE?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Urban core decline is a very old problem, dating back to at least the 1920s.
- Decline in the core and suburban growth are more or less natural consequences of the way U.S. cities develop.
- Unintended consequences of otherwise useful policies, such as interstate highway construction and school desegregation, have exacerbated core decline.
- Racial prejudice has been a significant factor in the flight of households from the core.
- Massive disinvestment in the core has led to a self-perpetuating cycle of deepening decline.

A complex web of social, political and economic forces caused the decline of the urban core. No viable solutions can be developed and implemented without first thoroughly understanding the causes that continue to fuel urban decline.

A Dense Urban Lifestyle

Kansas City began in the mid-1800s as a trading post along the south side of the Missouri River for the pioneers heading west. This trading post was transformed into a modern city by the combination of new technology — railroads and the industrial revolution — and far-sighted civic leadership, which worked cooperatively to make Kansas City the first place to bridge the Missouri River. New and expanding manufacturing industries sprang up along the south bank of the river and provided the jobs that allowed the region to grow. With the river forming a northern boundary and public transit providing the quickest mode of transportation, most people chose to live south of the industrial areas in densely developed housing near work.

By 1920, however, housing densities in some parts of the city had become a liability. These areas had gross densities exceeding 40 people per acre, six times greater than the region's current average density of 6 ½ people per acre and more than twice as dense as the densest parts of the core today. (Chart 5) That the poorest and most disadvantaged segments of society generally lived in the densest parts of the city added to the perception of blight there. Faced with a choice to grow upward or outward to accommodate increasing levels of population, the region chose to expand outward.

The First Signs of Suburbanization

In the early 1900s, the seeds of future suburban growth were already sown. The Kansas City, Missouri, parks and boulevard system started to have an impact on development patterns, shifting the focus to corridors instead of a more traditional downtown orientation. At the same time, J. C. Nichols began creating Mission Hills. This high-income residential alternative was followed in the 1920s by the Plaza as well as by numerous other housing developments in Johnson County and what was then considered south Kansas City.

PARABLE OF THE RUG MERCHANT

A rug merchant saw that his most beautiful rug had a large bump in the center, so he stepped on it to flatten it out. The bump vanished, only to reappear in a new spot not far away. He jumped on the bump again and once more it disappeared, then reemerged in a new place. Again and again he jumped, scuffing and mangling the rug in the process. Exhausted, the rug merchant rolled up the now worthless carpet, and out slithered an angry snake.

MORAL:

Today's problems are often the unintended consequences of yesterday's solutions.

(Adapted from Senge, 1990)

CHART 5

**Core Population Density
Ten Densest Tracts
1920-1990**

In 1920, portions of the core were considered too dense to be healthy. Faced with a choice of growing upward or outward to accommodate increasing population levels, the region chose to expand outward.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Kansas City, Missouri, Plan Commission*

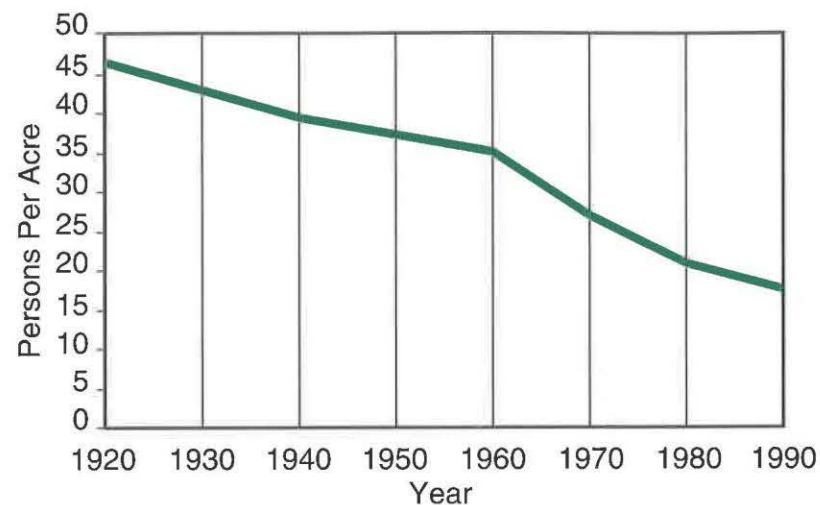
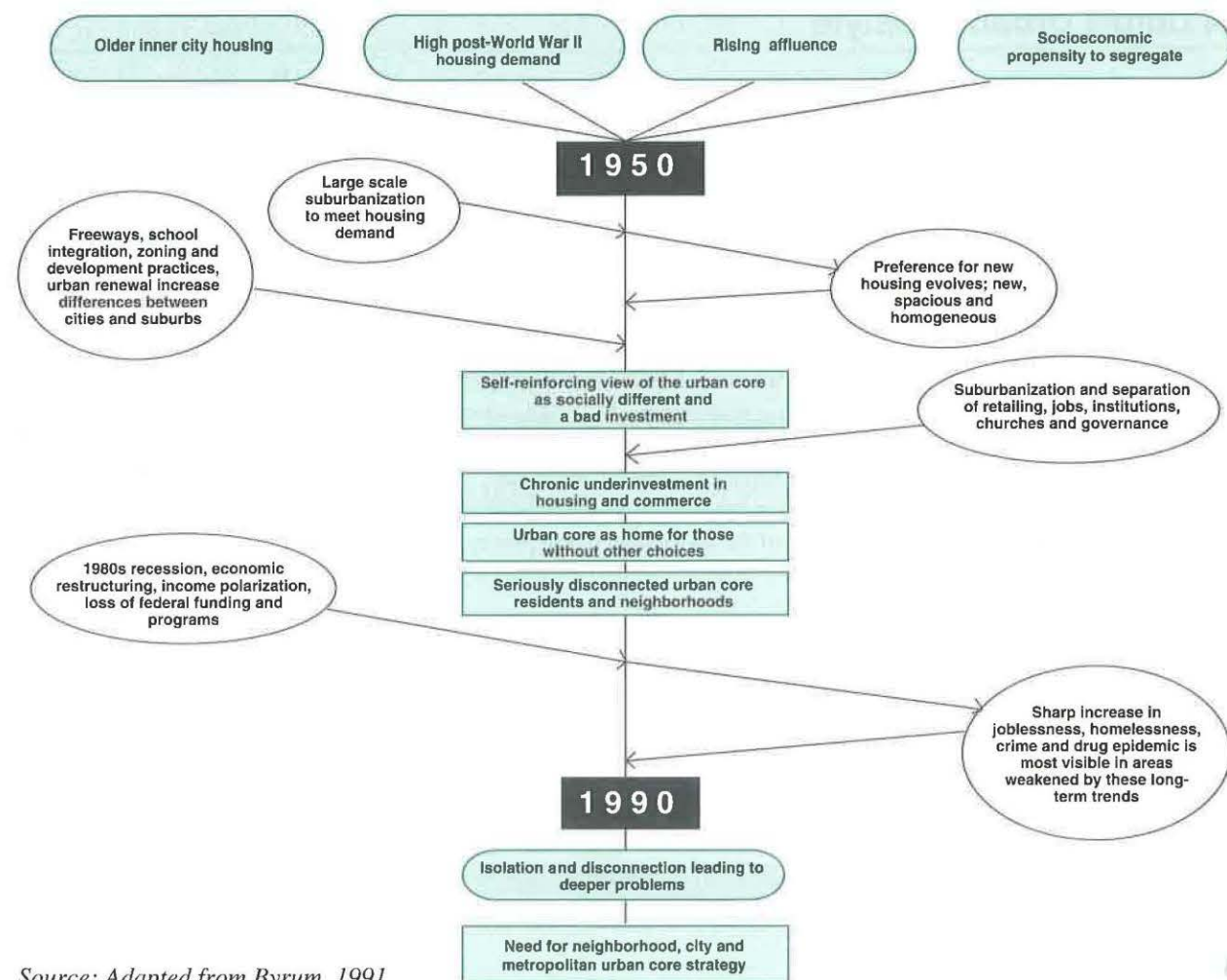


FIGURE 1

How The Development Process Created Decline, 1950 - 1990



The gradual adoption of another new technology, the automobile, improved the accessibility of these highly desirable housing and retail options to workplaces in the city center. Consequently, more and more people with substantial resources moved to the southern edge of the city. By the 1940s, the southward pattern of development was firmly established. It continues today in conjunction with significant northward and eastward development.

Perception That the Suburbs Were Better Than the Core

A key factor behind the exodus from the core to the suburbs was human nature. People migrating to the suburbs generally found that the housing and other facilities in emerging communities were more modern and more spacious than those in the core. In addition, their new suburban neighbors were often wealthier and more homogeneous than the core residents left behind. Together, these characteristics translated into a perception that the suburbs were better than the core. Marketplace demand for suburban homes increased and builders and developers responded accordingly. As more and more resources were shifted from the core to the suburbs, the perception that the suburbs offered a better place to live and raise a family would eventually become a reality.

Postwar Prosperity: Jobs, Money and Automobiles

Following World War II, several factors converged to make the suburbs more attractive than the core to many families. (Figure 1) Both the nation and metropolitan Kansas City became more affluent as American industry thrived. With plenty of well-paying jobs, more families than ever were able to purchase homes, cars and other amenities. The post-World War II baby boom increased the demand for new housing. Most of the new homes needed to meet the postwar demand were built in the suburbs as well-intentioned state and federal policies facilitated suburban development.

For example, the federal government provided funds for suburban infrastructure and offered low-interest, FHA- and VA- guaranteed loans with lending requirements favoring new housing. At the same time, the federally funded interstate highway system dramatically improved travel between the core and the suburbs, allowing people to commute 20 miles to work in 30 minutes or less. (Map 5) Almost overnight, it became convenient to work in the city and live in the suburbs. Later, as the circumferential interstate highways were completed, they allowed much of the region's population to bypass the core completely while creating enormous growth opportunities in the suburbs.

Racial Prejudice Fuels White Flight to the Suburbs

Changes in social policies also had unintended consequences that increased the migration to the suburbs during the last several decades.

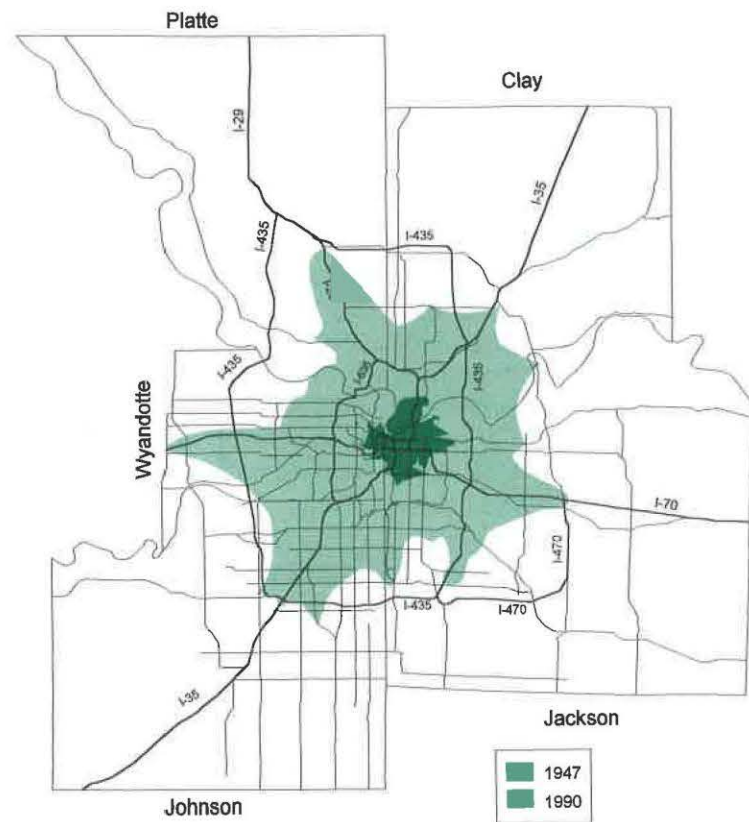
Until the mid-1950s, racial segregation legally existed across the nation in schools, housing and even some public facilities, the effects of which can still be seen in local development patterns. (Map 6) But the sweeping civil rights legislation of the 1960s, following on the heels of the 1954 landmark Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools, forced whites to face integration. Many white families with school-aged children responded by selling their homes in the core and moving to the suburbs. (Chart 6) Many middle- and working-class black families took advantage of the new legislation and moved to the suburbs as well.

MAP 5

**Travel Distance From Downtown in 20 Minutes
1947 vs 1990**

Improvements to the highway system vastly increased the amount of land accessible to jobs and available for development.

Source: Kansas City, Missouri, Plan Commission, MARC



MAP 6

**Black Population Percentage of Total
1990**

The concentrated areas of African-American residents reflect the effects of past discrimination. The densest portions of these areas are often poor and tend to be avoided by those with other choices.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

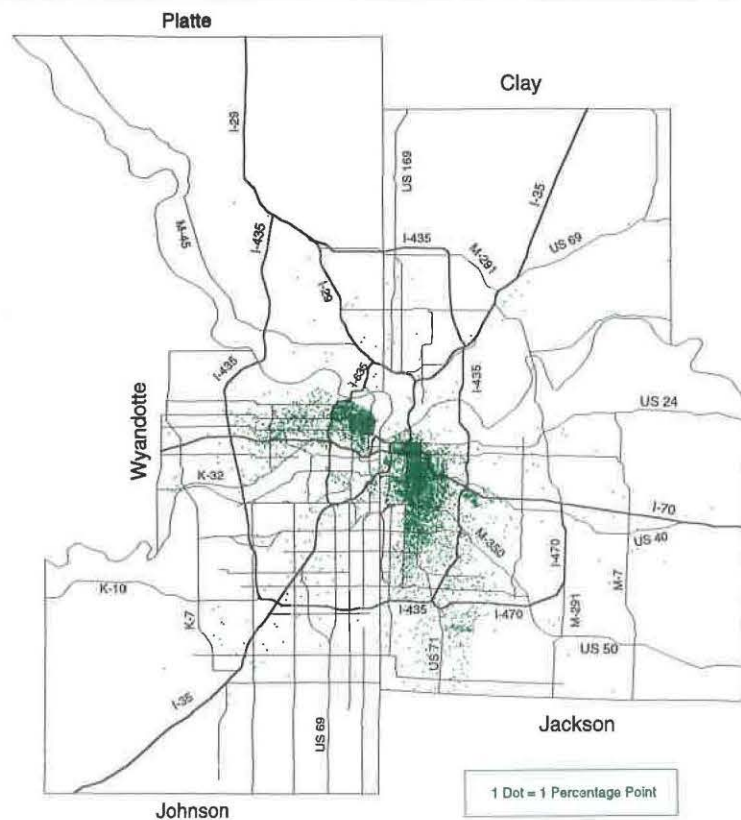
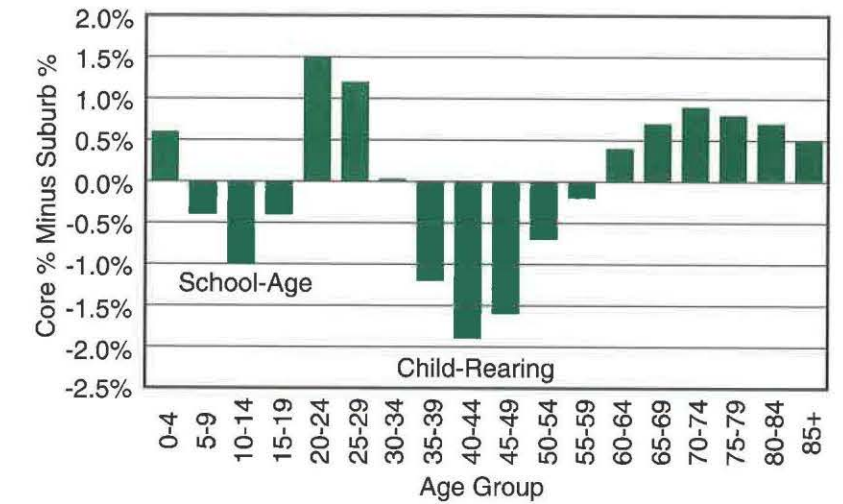


CHART 6

**Core Age Distribution
Relative to Suburbs, 1990**

School integration in the 1950s led many families with children to leave the core. Today, the core still attracts a significantly lower percentage of school-aged children and people in their child-rearing years than the suburbs.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census



MAP 7

**1989 Median Household Income
Difference From Metro Median**

1989 Metro Median Household Income = \$32,138

Most of the region's income is concentrated in the suburbs, enabling them to support quality schools and infrastructure, while the loss of income from core communities diminishes their ability to maintain an acceptable level of basic services.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

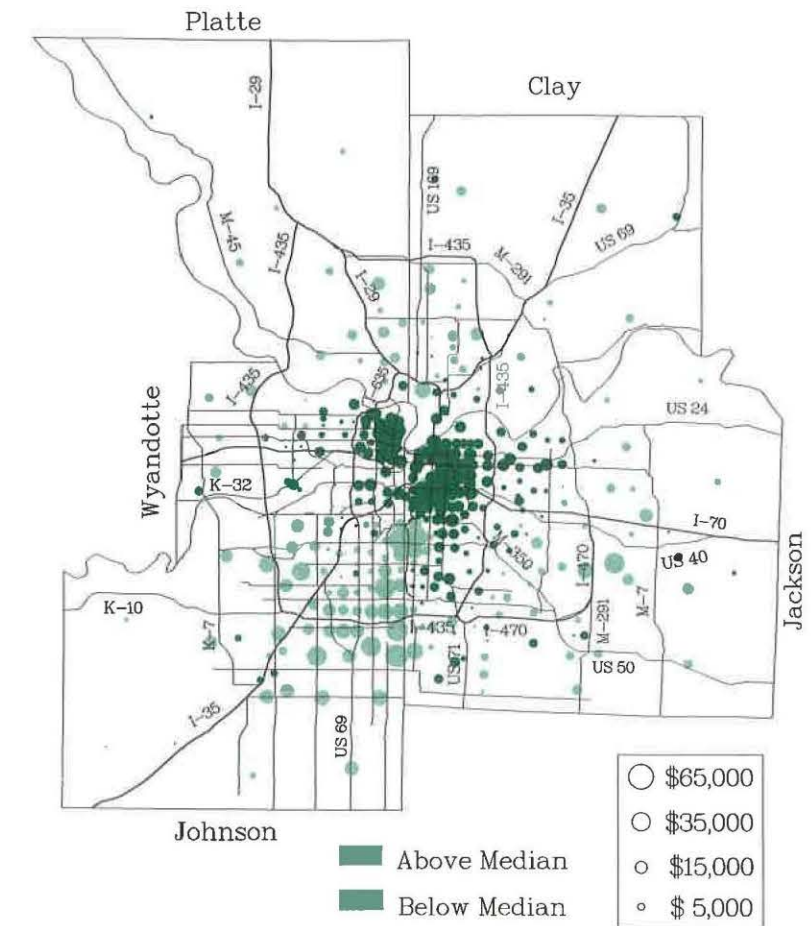
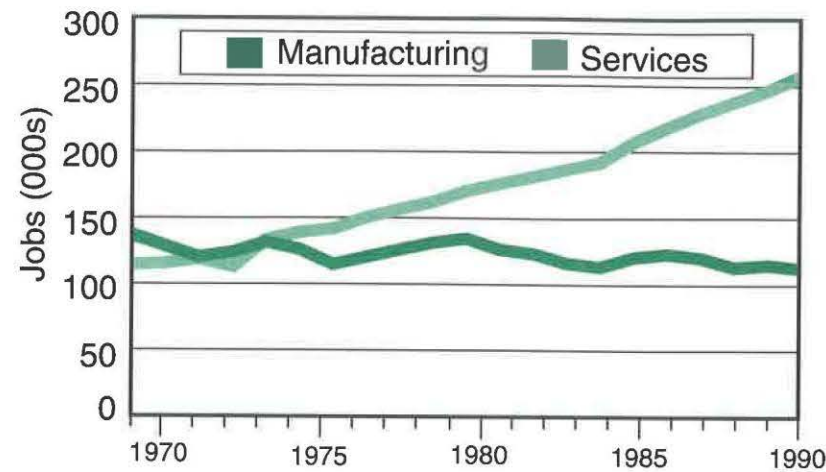


CHART 7

**Service/
Manufacturing
Employment
Kansas City
Metropolitan Area, 1969-1990**

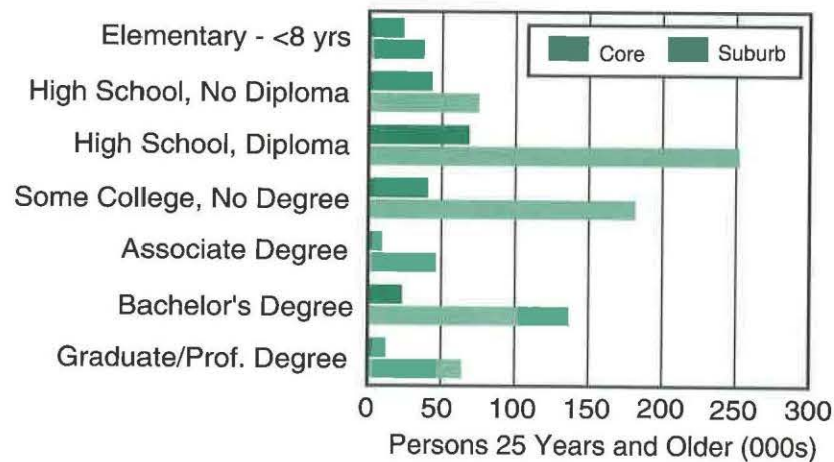


The decline of the manufacturing industry and concurrent rise of services over the past 20 years have disproportionately affected employment opportunities in the core.

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

CHART 8

**Core/Suburb
Education Levels
Persons 25 Years & Older
1990**



Suburban residents, who hold 85 percent of the region's four-year college degrees, are generally much better prepared to join an information-based economy than core residents.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Pattern of Massive Disinvestment

White flight, combined with the exodus of growing numbers of financially stable African-Americans and other minorities from the inner-city neighborhoods, further accelerated the deterioration of the core's economic base.

Once a major portion of the middle class abandoned the urban core — taking with them their examples of productive behavior and considerable resources — those left behind became more socially and economically isolated. Without the social buffer of middle-income families to keep alive the perception that “education is meaningful, that steady employment is a viable alternative to welfare, and that family stability is the norm, not the exception...communities of the underclass are plagued by massive joblessness, flagrant and open lawlessness, and low achieving schools, and therefore tend to be avoided by outsiders.” (Wilson, 1987) As the core became more isolated, its diminished tax base was not sufficient to provide the escalating level of education, job training, economic development, infrastructure improvements and human service programs needed to combat the decline.

Redistribution of Resources to the Suburbs

While the core was suffering from human and economic disinvestment, the suburbs grew in numbers and income. (Map 7) As a result, most communities outside the core enjoyed a sizable tax base capable of supporting quality schools, new infrastructure and a broad range of community services and amenities.

The chasm between the core and suburbs grew during the 1970s when changing technology and increased international competition forced the regional economy to focus its resources more on producing services rather than goods. (Chart 7) Many well-paying manufacturing jobs — the economic base of the core — began disappearing as manufacturers lost their ability to compete with overseas producers and either moved their production facilities to lower-cost sites or increased the pace of automation. People with advanced degrees, primarily suburban residents (Chart 8), could more easily find jobs in the higher-paying portion of the burgeoning service sector. Those with more limited education and skills, primarily core residents, were relegated to increasing unemployment and low-paying service jobs.

As the area outside the core grew more prosperous, service employers — seeking ready markets and educated employees — began to follow retail employers to the suburbs. Eventually even manufacturers began constructing modern facilities on the plentiful and affordable land in the suburbs. The core lost even more jobs and the quality of life there continued to decline.

Abandonment of the Core Continues Today

The complex web of social, economic and political forces that shaped the growth of metropolitan Kansas City has created both the region's declining urban core and its expanding suburbs. **They form two halves of the same development process.** Many of these same forces continue today, resulting in an escalating pattern of abandonment and disinvestment, excessive crime and rising hopelessness in the center of the region.

WHY A HEALTHY CORE IS IMPORTANT TO THE ENTIRE REGION

HIGHLIGHTS

- The region's ability to attract investment and tourism depends on the quality of the core.
- Everybody pays for a deteriorating core in terms of higher taxes, increased crime and lost human potential.
- Urban decline is spreading to previously stable and thriving neighborhoods, causing premature abandonment of older housing.
- Decline in the urban core slows the progress of the entire metropolitan area by either wasting its human and capital resources or diverting them to deal with the consequences of decline rather than investing them to create growth.

The Region's Image and Ability to Attract Investment are Tied to the Quality of the Core

Out-of-town business developers and other visitors judge the region by the caliber of amenities and other assets in the core, as well as by the perceived quality of life among core residents.

The core has many nationally recognized amenities, such as the Nelson-Atkins Museum, the Country Club Plaza and the Truman Sports Complex, in addition to numerous significant historic assets and region-serving institutions, including the University of Missouri-Kansas City, the University of Kansas Medical Center and many other major medical centers. It also has many fine neighborhoods that enhance the image of the region.

At the same time, those traveling in the core will likely see some areas where the housing stock is in decline and be exposed to news stories about crime, drugs or problems in public schools.

A core with a shrinking tax base has fewer and fewer resources to support regional amenities or upgrade the quality of declining neighborhoods. However, if the core's image is tarnished nationally, the entire metropolitan area pays in the form of reduced tourism and outside investment.

Everybody Pays for a Deteriorating Core

Long-term urban deterioration extracts a huge price in terms of lost human potential, eroding infrastructure, dying neighborhoods and anti-social behavior.

Everyone in the region pays for some of the problems of the urban core in the form of ever-increasing taxes to support welfare, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, law enforcement and incarceration of criminals, a huge variety of social and job training services and subsidized housing and medical care.

PARABLE OF THE LILY PADS

One day, a lily pad appeared on a pond used by a nearby town. Every day, the number of lily pads doubled. No one noticed until, after 28 days, the lily pads covered one-quarter of the pond and began fouling the water. Two days later, the entire pond was covered by the lilies.

MORAL:

Sometimes, even isolated problems can quickly spread and endanger healthy areas.

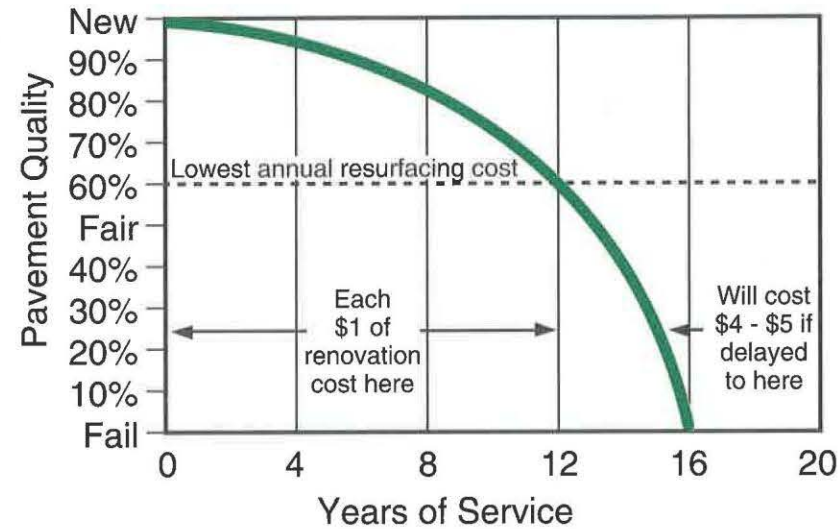
(Adapted from Senge, 1990)

The region can pay now, before the crisis of a declining core worsens. Or, it can pay later, when the costs of rehabilitating the region are overwhelming. For example, infrastructure reconstruction costs four to five times as much as performing properly scheduled maintenance. (Figure 2) Additionally, each functionally illiterate person — generally an individual who did not receive an adequate primary and secondary education — costs the community \$7,000 in lost taxes, job incompetency and remedial training. Every dollar invested today in helping children succeed in school saves the community \$4.74 in direct services in the future.

FIGURE 2

High Cost of Deferred Maintenance

Repair costs skyrocket once a road reaches "fair" condition. Assuming a 16-year life, repairs at year 14 cost five times as much as those at year 12.



Source: Adapted from American Public Works Association, 1988

Urban Decline Is Spreading

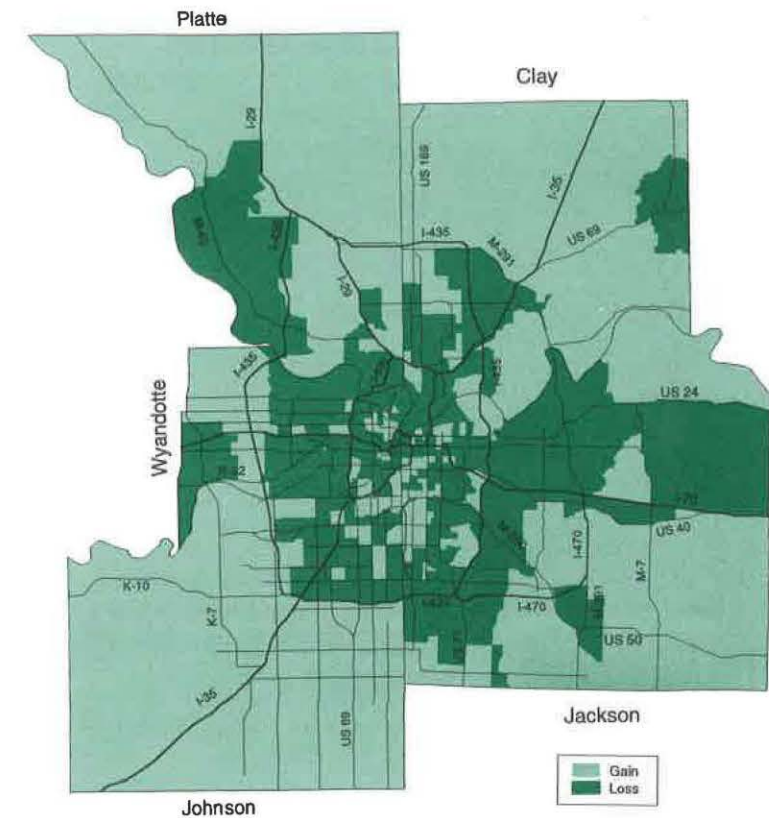
As urban decline continues unhampered, many older suburban areas are showing the initial signs of distress: inadequately maintained housing and infrastructure, rising housing vacancy rates, falling property values and increasing concentrations of lower-income households. And core communities that only a few decades ago were on the edge of decline are now experiencing the advanced symptoms of urban decay: underemployment or unemployment, unstable families and increasing crime.

Even in thriving suburban areas, the signs of spreading decline are unmistakable. For example, while the population of the suburbs increased 17 percent over the last decade, the number of households with incomes below the metropolitan median (\$32,000) expanded 34 percent. During the same period, the number of suburban residents living in poverty rose 36 percent and the number of vacant suburban housing units jumped 48 percent. The median household income in most inner-ring suburban areas declined during the 1980s, after adjusting for inflation. (Map 8)

MAP 8

Increase/Decrease In Real Median Income 1979-1989

Older suburbs find it increasingly difficult to maintain their quality of life. For example, median household income declined in most inner-ring suburban areas during the 1980s, after adjusting for inflation.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, MARC

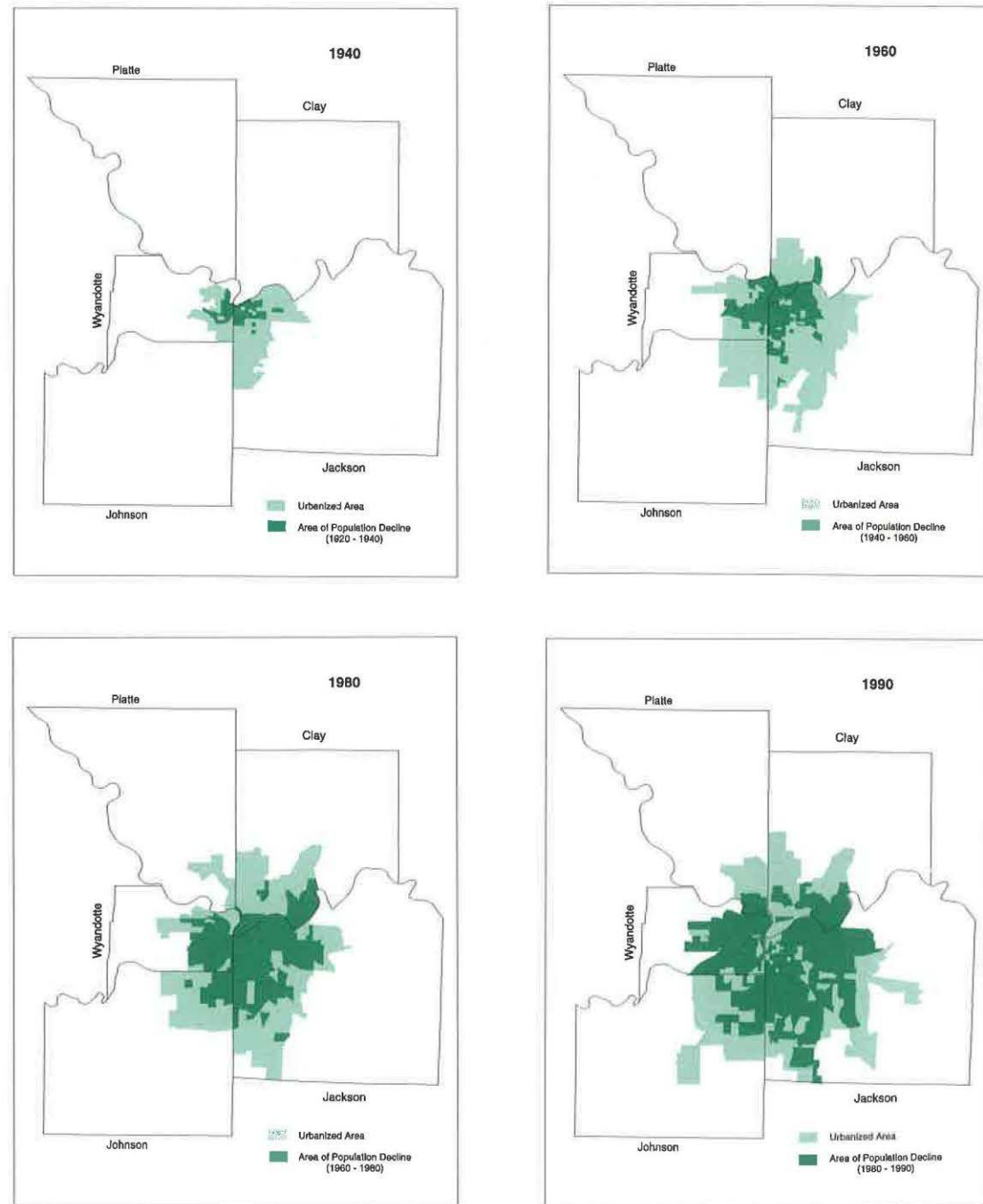
During the year-long study of the urban core, events continually reaffirmed the difficulty of containing economic, physical and social deterioration: Gang activity and gun shots in Shawnee Mission schools, a drive-by shooting in Lenexa, daylight armed robberies in Waldo, assaults in Brookside, vacant storefronts in older suburban malls and code enforcement problems in north Overland Park.

One key indicator of neighborhood distress is population loss. While some loss of population is natural, such as children growing up and leaving home, declining population is often an early warning sign of neighborhood weakness. As more prosperous residents begin to leave an area in large numbers, they often leave behind a neighborhood with many of the symptoms of decline: older people living alone in older housing which they cannot adequately maintain, diminished ability to attract and hold families with children and shifts in occupancy from owners to renters. Such changes in housing quality and resident composition slowly sap a neighborhood's strength and, if sustained long enough, can eventually lead to outright vacancy and abandonment.

The maps on the following page (Map 9) show how metropolitan Kansas City has expanded over the past 50 years, a period during which its urbanized land area grew three times faster than its population. (Table 2) The ever-widening pattern of population decline can be clearly seen, even in suburban areas.

This pattern of population loss is caused, in part, by the process of decline itself. As decline spreads outward, people tend to move in advance of the deterioration to avoid a loss of property value. As older neighborhoods are abandoned, then rebuilt anew on the suburban fringe, urban decline spreads outward almost as fast as suburban growth.

Expansion of Metropolitan Kansas City Population Loss Follows Population Gain, 1940-1990



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, MARC

The maps above illustrate the extent to which population loss accompanied urban expansion over the last 50 years. In 1940, population loss was contained in a relatively small portion of the metropolitan area (16 1/2 square miles) inhabited by 140,000 people. By 1990, symptoms of urban deterioration involved 654,000 people living in 282 square miles. In general, population loss is the result of at least one of four factors: conversion of residential to commercial development, redevelopment at a lower density, declining household size or loss of households.

TABLE 2

Population and Urbanized Area 1920-1990

Year	Metropolitan Population (8-County)	Urbanized Land Area (Square Miles)	Population In Urbanized Area
1920	623,275	49.19	413,446
1940	779,735	90.52	534,076
1960	1,157,144	253.79	884,327
1970	1,327,266	336.81	1,027,776
1980	1,381,915	397.09	988,124
1990	1,511,740	533.27	1,144,976

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, MARC

The urbanized area is generally considered the contiguous mass of land developed at urban densities but also includes pockets of undeveloped land, such as parks and flood plains, that have been surrounded by urban activity. The figures above differ from official Census Bureau estimates in order to maintain a consistent definition based on whole census tracts from 1920 to the present.

Decline in the Core Slows the Progress of the Entire Metropolitan Region

Metropolitan areas with the greatest decline in their cores — relative to their more prosperous suburbs — generally have the slowest growing regional economies. A recent National League of Cities study (Ledebur, Barnes, 1992) found that those metropolitan areas with larger disparities in per capita income between their central cities and suburbs also tended to experience slower rates of employment growth. (Chart 9) In metropolitan Kansas City, the core currently has two-thirds the per capita income of the suburbs and the disparity continues to grow.

Similarly, a recent study of metropolitan areas in the Northeast and Midwest by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia (Voith, 1992) found a significant correlation between city and suburban growth over the past two decades. (Chart 10) Examining population, employment and per capita income growth, the study concludes that “metropolitan areas not plagued with the problems associated with declining cities appear to have had more robust suburban growth in the 1970s and 1980s.” In metropolitan areas where urban decline has been substantial, “the city is but a fraction of its former size, and the suburbs, though larger, are smaller than they would have been.”

The reason why core decline lowers metropolitan-wide growth is clear: **Decline discourages productive investment.** It reduces outside investment, increases government expenditures to combat the crises caused by distress and encourages suburban duplication of abandoned core services. Each decade that urban decline progresses unchecked, a metro area has fewer and fewer dollars available to invest in activities that make the entire region more productive — education, research, innovation and modernization. These are the very things needed by local companies to efficiently meet the global demand for higher-quality goods and services.

CHART 9

City/Suburb Income Disparities vs. Metropolitan Employment Growth

Larger income disparities between central cities and suburbs are associated with slower rates of metropolitan employment growth. Data are for the 85 largest MSAs with central cities.

Source: Ledebur and Barnes, 1992.

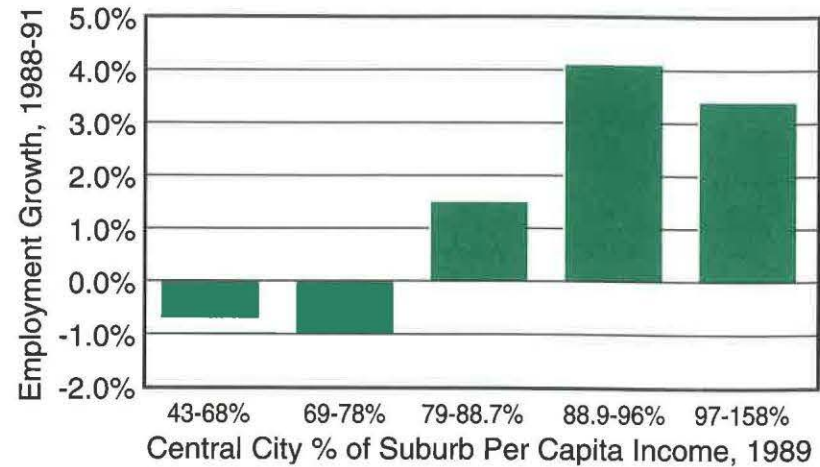


CHART 10

City/Suburb Population Growth Rates

1980-1990

Higher rates of central city growth are correlated with higher rates of suburban growth whether examining population, employment or per capita income. Data are for 28 large Northeast and Midwest MSAs.

Source: Voith, 1992.

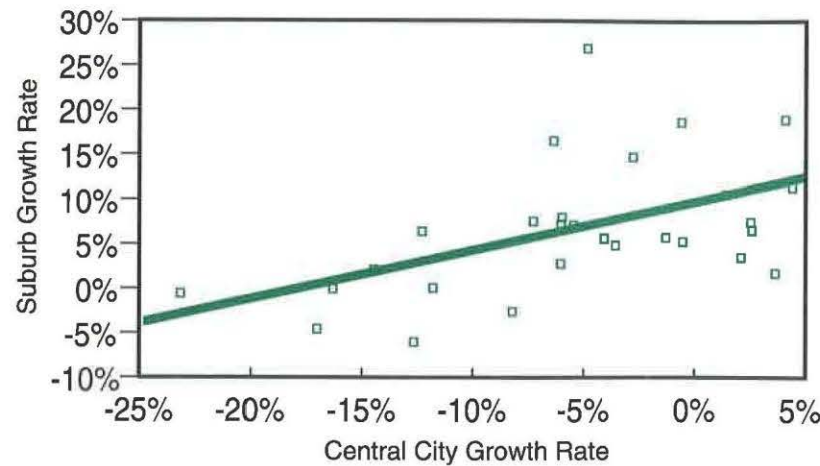


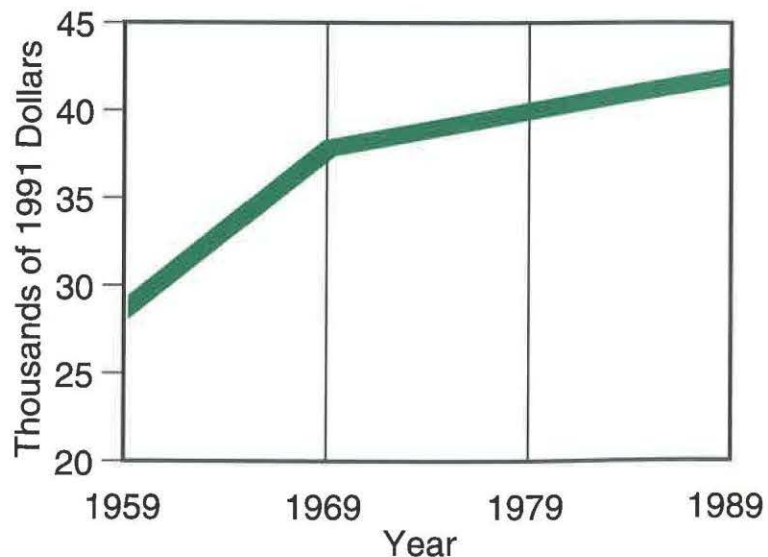
CHART 11

Kansas City Metropolitan Income

Real Median Family Income 1959-1989

After adjusting for inflation, area incomes have been relatively stagnant over the past 20 years, reflecting a more competitive global economy and slower productivity growth.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census



Without sufficient productive investment, economic growth slows and living standards stagnate, an affliction suffered by metropolitan Kansas City for the past two decades. The region's median household income (after adjusting for inflation) increased about 2 percent per decade during the 1970s and 1980s, compared to some 30 percent during the 1960s. (Chart 11) Even the area's wealthiest county — Johnson County — experienced a scant 3 percent increase in real median household income during the 1980s, despite a 31 percent increase in population and a 71 percent increase in employment.

With its stagnant standard of living, metropolitan Kansas City cannot afford to waste any of its scarce capital. Yet the wider and deeper the hole in the region's center, the more metropolitan resources will be spent dealing with decline rather than creating growth.

PARABLE OF THE THREE BLIND MEN

Three blind men encounter an elephant.
"It's wide and broad like a rug," the first says,
grasping an ear. The second, holding the trunk,
says, "No, it's a straight and hollow pipe."
"You're both wrong," replies the third.
"It's mighty and firm, like a pillar," he says
while hugging a front leg.

MORAL:

Complex systems must be seen and dealt with
as a whole. The key to successful solutions lies
in understanding how the parts are connected.

(Adapted from Senge, 1990)

WHAT WE CAN DO: STRATEGIES FOR REVERSING THE PROCESS OF URBAN DECLINE

HIGHLIGHTS

- The various counties and municipalities that make up metropolitan Kansas City form a single, interconnected social and economic system.
- Reversing trends in the region's urban core first requires a community-wide commitment to solve the problem.
- Constructively expressing that commitment depends upon cooperative regional planning.
- Ongoing region-wide planning underlies the intelligent public investment decisions needed to permanently reverse the core's trends.

After more than a year of research, the Urban Core Growth Strategies Committee has defined a series of strategies that, when implemented in concert, can *begin to reverse* the process of urban decline.

Begin to reverse are the operative words here. There are no quick fixes or easy answers. The symptoms of urban decline — population loss, deteriorating housing and infrastructure, economic disinvestment, escalating social problems and growing concentrations of undereducated and underemployed people — took decades to occur. Therefore, they cannot be eradicated in a few months or even a few years.

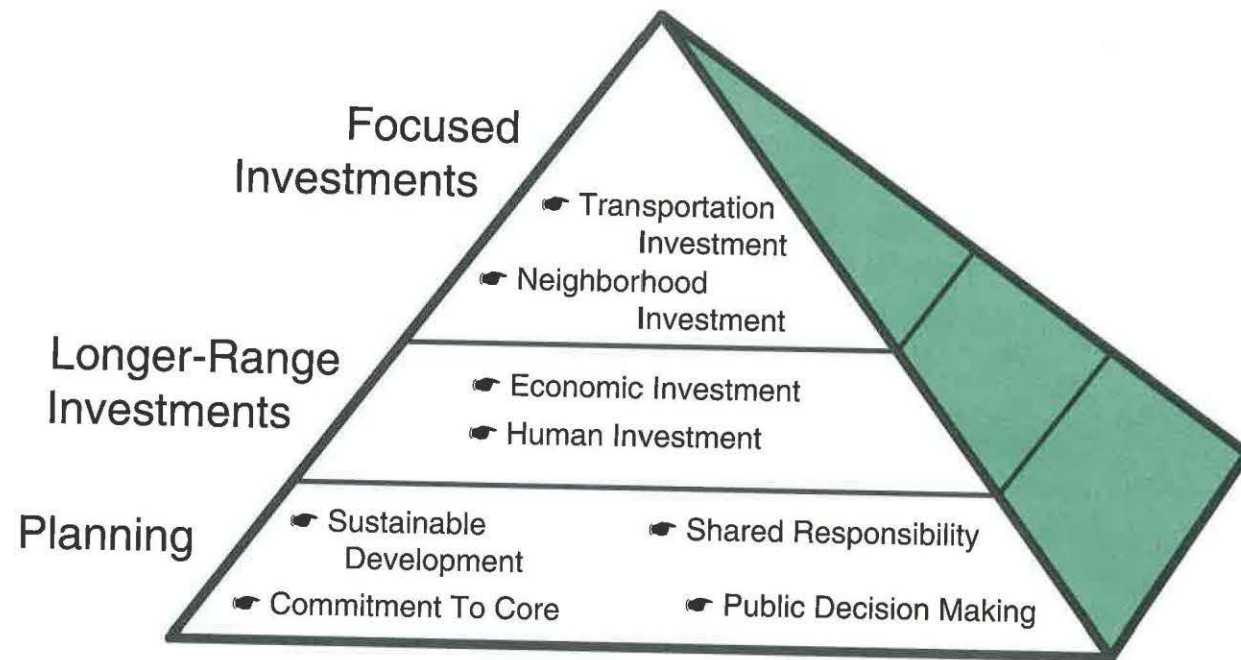
The premise behind the urban core strategies is that the various counties and municipalities that make up metropolitan Kansas City form a single, interconnected social and economic system. Right now this system isn't working as well as it could because one part of it — the urban core — is increasingly isolated from the region's opportunities, and the spreading deterioration that results slows the progress of the entire metropolitan area. Therefore, the urban core strategies are designed to involve the whole community in physically, economically and socially reconnecting the core to the region's fortunes.

Two types of strategies are needed to achieve this goal: planning policies and investment policies. Planning policies seek to break down the barriers that prevent local governments, businesses and civic leaders from working together to stop the spread of urban decline. These policies aim to increase commitment to the core, improve public decision-making, emphasize sustainable development and build a sense of shared responsibility for the health of the entire region.

Out of this comprehensive planning process comes specific investment policies directed at removing the impediments to living and working in the core. The investment policies include both longer-term strategies, such as human and economic investment, that generally improve the economic opportunities in the core and strategies with more focused impact, such as neighborhood and transportation investment, that improve the core's physical condition.

FIGURE 3

The Urban Core Strategy Pyramid



This approach produces a kind of pyramid (Figure 3), with quality planning underlying intelligent investments and longer-term investments creating the environment needed for the more focused investments to make a permanent difference.

Though not a step-by-step blueprint for reviving the core, the strategies that follow represent the best thinking of the Urban Core Growth Strategies Committee as it evolved from research, extensive community discussions and consultations with urban core experts. The committee recognizes that its recommendations address some problem areas more fully than others.

These strategies illustrate the kinds of responses a metropolitan area could and should make if it is truly committed to solving the problems of urban decline. Such a commitment cannot proceed without understanding, and understanding cannot occur without discussion. The committee hopes that these strategies stimulate further public dialogue and serve as a basis for an action plan that will put reversing the decline of the urban core at the top of the regional agenda.

THE URBAN CORE STRATEGY MAP

To be effective, the urban core strategies must be mutually supportive. The Urban Core Strategy Map (Figure 4) outlines a two-pronged approach to reverse the trend of spreading urban decline. The top half of the strategy map describes the planning policies needed to involve the whole metropolitan community in the effort to find solutions to urban core decline. The bottom half of the strategy map describes the specific investments needed in the core to restore its ability to contribute to the region's quality of life.

Creating metropolitan support of urban core initiatives begins by increasing the region-wide commitment to a healthy core. Planning plays a key role in this effort, providing the forum for determining both community goals and how to achieve them. Such discussions require an enhanced capacity to generate quality information and policy analysis concerning the costs and benefits of proposed policies and actions, resulting in improved public decisions. As these decisions begin to shape the region, they create a framework for achieving efficient, sustainable metropolitan growth. Area residents begin to see themselves as part of a larger region and to recognize that they share the responsibility for its health.

Restoring the core's ability to contribute to the region begins with human investment so that core residents have a better chance for a productive life. As the skills and knowledge of core residents improve, economic investments targeted at retaining the core's existing businesses and capitalizing on its unique assets will more successfully enhance the core's ability to create wealth. With opportunities in the core improving, the extent of crime, drugs and welfare dependency will diminish. Then neighborhood investments can more easily create quality urban living places that attract middle- and upper-income households to the core. As the core gradually becomes more socially and economically connected to the rest of the region, transportation investments in priority corridors are then able to create a synergy and energy in the core that is found nowhere else.

To reverse the trends in the core from slow, incremental decline to slow, incremental progress requires both halves of the strategy map. The top half produces broadly supported and well-conceived planning policies designed to encourage productive investment both region wide and in the core. The bottom half produces targeted investments in the core whose effectiveness must be evaluated in succeeding rounds of planning.

In sum, the region must plan as intently for its inward health as it does for its outward development. The Committee believes progress in any of the areas outlined on the strategy map is useful and important, but progress in all areas is ultimately required to reverse the fortunes of the core.

FIGURE 4

Urban Core Strategy Map



<p>I. INCREASE THE REGION-WIDE COMMITMENT TO A HEALTHY CORE</p>	<p>GOALS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and continue a process to address urban core issues • Create greater region-wide commitment to developing and implementing coherent plans
<p>II. IMPROVE PUBLIC DECISION MAKING</p>	<p>GOAL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the region's capacity to plan
<p>III. ADOPT A REGION-WIDE FRAMEWORK FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE METROPOLITAN GROWTH</p>	<p>GOALS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage efficient development and balanced growth • Provide quality living environments for all the region's residents • Improve the urban core's ability to create wealth for the region
<p>IV. INCREASE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH OF ENTIRE METROPOLITAN REGION</p>	<p>GOALS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure metropolitan funding for metropolitan needs • Establish federal and state urban agendas
<p>REVERSE TREND OF SPREADING DECLINE</p>	
<p>IV. TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT</p>	<p>GOAL: <i>To develop linkages to create synergy within the core and between the core and the rest of the region...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus public investment in priority corridors
<p>III. NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT</p>	<p>GOAL: <i>To create a quality urban living alternative for all income levels...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop the spread of urban decline and make older neighborhoods more attractive to middle- and upper-income residents by removing major disincentives to urban living
<p>II. ECONOMIC INVESTMENT</p>	<p>GOALS: <i>To improve the core's ability to create wealth for the region...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain and expand the job base provided by existing businesses • Capitalize on the core's unique assets using effective urban design
<p>I. HUMAN INVESTMENT</p>	<p>GOALS: <i>To provide all residents access to the resources they need to be productive...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen individuals and families by better providing basic human needs of health, nutrition and shelter • Provide education sufficient to produce equal outcomes regardless of income or race • Improve access of core residents to jobs through increased transportation and training opportunities • Improve race relations

THE URBAN CORE STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

PLANNING STRATEGIES

HIGHLIGHTS

- To gain metropolitan support, core communities must first be clear about what they intend to do themselves.
- Create a regional body to focus attention on metropolitan issues arising from decline in the urban core.
- Develop better information and more thorough policy analysis to support quality public decisions.
- Prepare a framework for sustainable development that encourages full use of existing facilities, promotes orderly extension of high-quality new development and minimizes public subsidies for expansion.
- Improve sense of shared responsibility for health of entire metropolitan area.

I. Increase the Region-Wide Commitment to a Healthy Core

GOAL 1: Create and continue a process to address urban core issues.

PROBLEM: To permanently change the core from an area experiencing slow, incremental decline to one enjoying slow, incremental progress will require constant effort for a long period of time. Without an organization responsible for addressing core issues, there will be no ongoing, coordinated effort and the crisis in the core will deepen.

ACTION:

- MARC must help create an on-going regional forum responsible for continually focusing metropolitan attention on core issues and for helping develop appropriate regional responses.

GOAL 2: Create greater region-wide commitment to developing and implementing coherent plans.

PROBLEM: In other metropolitan areas, a relatively high quality of life has been achieved when communities worked together to develop local and regional plans that comprehensively addressed regional issues such as housing, transportation and jobs. In metropolitan Kansas City, such a planning ethic is largely absent on a regional level as well as within some individual jurisdictions.

“A strategy is more than a list of things to do. It is about what needs to be done first, or even doing several mutually supportive things at once, rather than a panacea of the year approach. It requires responses that are at the scale of the problem and continue long enough to make a difference.”

Oliver Byrum

ACTION:

- MARC must commit to a new kind of planning, oriented to satisfying regional goals — such as maintaining existing infrastructure, improving environmental quality and efficiently delivering public services — that go beyond the single dimension of accommodating new development. As part of this planning process, MARC must engage in extensive public discussion concerning regional objectives and the connections between the core's health and the region's ability to achieve those objectives.
- The local governments that make up the urban core must bear foremost responsibility for addressing core issues. They must adopt and follow clear and comprehensive center city strategies of their own, and in so doing, provide the leadership needed to foster metropolitan participation in urban core revitalization efforts. Core communities should also encourage the formation and continuation of strong core advocacy groups and public/private planning and development partnerships.

“To persuade metropolitan leadership and others to contribute to an overall inner city strategy, the city must be clear about what it intends to do itself.”

Oliver Byrum

- To significantly impact major issues, local governments and economic development agencies must 1) determine community goals and evaluate budgets and programs based on ability to achieve those goals and 2) transcend jurisdictional boundaries and work together to focus public investment. In particular, new region-serving assets must be positioned to complement existing facilities and services.
- The media must hold local governments accountable for making and implementing plans. This includes discussing and analyzing the impact of decisions that may take months or years to unfold. To promote a sense of shared community involvement, The Kansas City Star must report the region's major investments and decisions in all of its zoned editions.

II. Improve Public Decision Making

GOAL : Enhance the region's capacity to plan

PROBLEM: Public officials and community leaders often lack the information to thoroughly understand the local and regional implications of proposed capital and human investments. Without such understanding, decision makers often overlook the key long-term connections between the fortunes of the core and the rest of the region.

ACTION:

- Building on its existing strengths in data research and analysis, MARC must enhance its urban information system to provide more comprehensive and more timely indicators of metropolitan health and performance.
- Drawing upon the region's existing intellectual resources — technical experts in both the private and public sectors — MARC must conduct improved economic, public and municipal policy analysis on behalf of both the region and area local governments.
- Local governments must place a high priority on undertaking, funding, staffing and following local planning processes.

III. Adopt a Region-Wide Framework for Achieving Sustainable Metropolitan Growth

GOAL 1: Encourage efficient development and balanced growth.

PROBLEM: When outward expansion is the primary means of dealing with inner-city decay, decline deepens in the core and spreads outward as fast as growth. Spreading decline

- 1) discourages the productive investment needed to generate regional economic growth,
- 2) encourages suburban duplication of underused core facilities and infrastructure and
- 3) increasingly isolates the disadvantaged in the core.

As a result, income growth slows at the same time local government revenue needs and social tensions increase.

This situation — where outward expansion occurs primarily at the expense of the central core — is not sustainable. In the long-run, the entire region suffers, especially if the expansion is unfocused and not contiguous. The region becomes increasingly uncompetitive with areas where development patterns are more logical and social tensions are less intense. The Committee recognizes that suburban expansion will occur and suburban governments have a responsibility to plan for this inevitable growth. The Committee simply believes it is imperative that the region plan as intently for maintenance and reinvestment in existing facilities as it does for outward expansion, or the growth of both the urban core and the suburbs will be stunted.

“We are throwing away neighborhoods and rebuilding them on the fringes at a loss to the environment, to transportation systems, to existing infrastructure, to shopping areas, farm land and more.... We are abandoning existing housing and overspending on the construction of new housing, using resources and national savings that could better be used for economic growth.”

Oliver Byrum

ACTION:

- MARC, working with local governments, must begin developing regional infrastructure plans that are consistent with regional goals. Such goals should include minimizing the total cost of public infrastructure — construction plus maintenance — over the expected life of the facility, improving the quality and utilization of existing infrastructure and enhancing the region’s environmental quality. In particular, MARC must adopt a long-range transportation plan that, unlike past efforts, includes all modes of transportation, emphasizes mobility of people over mobility of vehicles and establishes impact on the core as one of the factors considered when evaluating projects for inclusion in the plan.
- Local governments, MARC and the American Public Works Association must work together to develop model minimum design standards for new infrastructure in the region to assure quality and orderly development. In addition, local planning policies must emphasize better jobs/housing balance, increased transit use, open space preservation and environmental protection. Allowing pockets of relatively dense housing and in-fill development should be evaluated as means to these ends.

- MARC and local governments must carefully evaluate major public infrastructure investments that encourage outward development for their impact on the core and existing development, their long-term maintenance costs and their impact on the contiguous and orderly extension of regional development. As part of this evaluation, MARC and local governments should develop regional planning processes that provide a formal mechanism for assessing the full costs of such investments, especially those projects that open up large expanses of new land to development. The Committee has particular concerns about the construction of new belt highways and major sewer extensions and many members of the Committee believe their construction should be discouraged.

“Continued suburban growth has become increasingly dependent on the overall desirability of the region, rather than simply the lower cost associated with moving into undeveloped and uncongested areas.”

Richard Voith

- With MARC assistance, local governments must continue to evaluate and improve the policies by which they focus growth and influence its location, timing and character. These policies should be examined for their potential to achieve such community objectives as minimizing public subsidies, encouraging full use of existing facilities and promoting contiguous, orderly extension of new infrastructure and public services.

While the Committee has not fully examined and does not categorically recommend specific growth policies, there are a number of approaches already used by local governments in our region and elsewhere throughout the country that attempt to focus growth in ways that promote the health of both core and suburb. Those that merit particular consideration include, but are not limited to

- 1) **Capital improvements programming**, which ties infrastructure to land use development priorities,
 - 2) **Impact fees**, which allocate the increased public costs generated by new development to the new development itself,
 - 3) **Public facilities ordinances**, which ensure minimum public infrastructure is in place before development occurs,
 - 4) **Facility benefit assessments**, which charge properties creating the demand for new public facilities,
 - 5) **Development tiers**, which define the limits to public investment in various geographic areas,
 - 6) **Municipal acquisition of zoning and development easements** to avoid premature growth in agricultural areas,
 - 7) **Annexation standards** to distinguish between urban and rural areas,
 - 8) **Heightened planning and development guidelines along transportation corridors** most likely to spur non-contiguous growth,
 - 9) **Metropolitan tax base sharing** to minimize costly competition between jurisdictions for new growth and
 - 10) **Metropolitan review of developments of regional significance** to better assess the total impact of major new projects on the region’s infrastructure.
- Local governments must make more strategic use of incentives to encourage reinvestment in older parts of the region. Encouraging reinvestment in older parts of the region should include priority consideration for the restoration and reuse of older, historically and architecturally significant buildings.

GOAL 2: Provide quality living environments for all the region's residents.

PROBLEM: The housing market tends to concentrate the poorest people in the oldest housing in the core and the wealthiest people in the newest housing on the fringe of development. As growth spreads outward, decline moves into previously stable neighborhoods. Jobs follow the wealth and poorer residents of older neighborhoods find it increasingly difficult to obtain access to jobs.

ACTION:

- MARC, working with local governments, must develop a metropolitan housing strategy that aims to 1) stop the spread of housing deterioration, 2) retain and attract middle- and upper-income households to the core, 3) improve the amount and quality of affordable housing throughout the metropolitan area, 4) increase the rate of homeownership and 5) improve the jobs/housing balance across the region.

GOAL 3: Improve the urban core's ability to create wealth for the region.

PROBLEM: The regional economy is shifting from manufacturing to services and the best-paying jobs demand higher levels of education. After many of the region's well-educated, middle- and upper-income residents moved to the suburbs, the core's role in the regional economy lessened. In an attempt to stop this trend, core officials created economic development programs that offered investors increasing levels of tax incentives for core development. In the long-term, such incentives can decrease the value of existing properties, diminish city tax coffers and focus resources on intra-regional competition for development rather than on increasing the region's overall economic base.

ACTION:

- Working together, area economic development agencies, local governments and MARC must analyze the core's ability to serve the regional and national economy. In addition, they should examine the goods, services and labor imported into the region and evaluate the potential for satisfying the needs locally. The result of these analyses must be programs designed to improve the fundamentals of the business environment rather than relying primarily on development driven by tax incentives.

IV. Increase Shared Responsibility for the Health of the Entire Region

GOAL 1: Secure metropolitan funding for metropolitan needs.

PROBLEM: Growth in the suburbs and decline in the core have proceeded more or less naturally from a single economic and social system that creates metropolitan areas. This pattern of metropolitan development serves to isolate the core from the resources needed to adequately perform many of the functions it is called upon to fulfill, such as supporting a large fraction of the region's amenities and providing a home to a disproportionate share of the region's disadvantaged.

ACTION:

- MARC must continue efforts to form a bi-state cultural district that would fund regional cultural amenities through a metro-wide sales tax.

GOAL 2: Establish federal and state urban agendas.

PROBLEM: State and federal resources are critical to the core's vitality. Those metropolitan areas that have been most successful in preserving and revitalizing their cores have done so as part of state mandates to reduce expected environmental and infrastructure costs. The rural-dominated legislatures in Kansas and Missouri are unlikely to be responsive to urban needs unless the urban areas in the two states unite around a common agenda.

ACTION:

- MARC, local governments and business leaders must work together to build a political consensus around a clearly defined state and federal urban action agenda. Consensus should be developed on such issues as funding for transit, infrastructure maintenance and education.

INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

HIGHLIGHTS

- Improve the productivity of core residents through increased human investment.
- Enhance the core's capacity to participate in a global, information-based economy through more effective economic investment.
- Provide more high-quality urban living areas in the core through better focused neighborhood investment.
- Improve the opportunities for urban core synergy through increased transportation investment along major connecting corridors.

I. Human Investment: Provide All Residents Access to the Resources They Need to be Productive.

Reducing concentrated poverty is necessary for long-term improvement in the core's ability to attract all income groups. Since poverty is created by a social and economic system larger than any particular metropolitan area or state, federal responsibility is critical. "The problem is not so much not knowing what works, as knowing how to deploy what works at the scale needed." (Byrum, 1991)

GOAL 1: Strengthen individuals and families by better providing the basic human needs of health, nutrition and shelter.

"Perhaps the most telling questions about a neighborhood ... are these: Are the children living here as likely as those living elsewhere to have successful lives? Are neighborhood conditions improving or decreasing that likelihood? Why or why not?"

Oliver Byrum

PROBLEM: Isolated from many of the region's resources, a growing number of people in the core must contend with inadequate housing, health care, education and nurturing. Such long-term deprivation stunts growth and learning and ultimately inhibits self-sufficiency. Over time, many low-income neighborhoods in the core become breeding grounds for poverty and hopelessness.

ACTION:

- Local public officials and business organizations must continue to pressure state and federal governments to increase the nation's capacity to meet the basic needs of all people. The agenda should include adequately funding the HOPE and HOME affordable housing programs, extending the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program and altering the policies of the Missouri Housing Development Commission so that the Commission works more in partnership with local officials.

"Small, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements, if they're in the right place."

Peter Senge

"A clear distinction should be made (though it seldom is) between public housing investments for low-income shelter and those intended for neighborhood revitalization.... [Marketplace revitalization] won't be achievable until deficiencies in education, public safety, public health and general public conditions are dealt with."

Oliver Byrum

- Health care and family services for the poor must be comprehensively provided. Possible approaches include **1)** increasing metropolitan support of region-serving health institutions such as Children's Mercy Hospital, KU Medical Center and Truman Medical Center, **2)** working through the Maternal and Child Health Coalition to expand the availability of prenatal and pediatric health services and **3)** evaluating existing social service programs for their ability to gradually help people achieve self-sufficiency.
- Core governments must provide the same quality basic services — such as infrastructure maintenance, police and fire protection and building code enforcement — to low-income areas as are provided to higher-income areas.

GOAL 2: Provide education sufficient to produce equal outcomes regardless of income or race.

PROBLEM: A quality basic education is a key to achieving self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, educational programs in urban core school districts have historically been under funded relative to the needs of their students. Despite educational improvements mandated by the courts and state legislatures, core schools still face funding challenges. For example, in the near future, local sales tax revenue for Kansas City, Missouri, schools will be eliminated. It is unclear whether schools in the core will succeed in teaching students in the core the skills they need to compete equally with suburban students for economic opportunities.

ACTION:

- Local governments, the business community and civic leaders must support the efforts of the Partnership For Children to focus community attention and resources on the needs of children in the metropolitan area and to measure regional progress in improving their lives.
- Local public officials and business organizations must continue to pressure federal and state governments for full funding of programs like Head Start and Parents as Teachers so that all eligible children can enjoy the benefits of quality, affordable early childhood education.

"Headstart will prevent more crime than crime prevention programs."

Oliver Byrum

- MARC and the community must continue to support the efforts of the Metropolitan Council on Child Care to develop a system for the delivery of high quality early childhood and school-age care and education services in the region.

- The community, including area media, must recognize and support the efforts of urban core public schools to improve the quality of education. Successful initiatives include the following: Schools of the 21st Century in Independence; the recommendations of the Kansas City, Missouri, School Dropout Task Force; the Learning Exchange's IDEA (InterDistrict Educational Alliance) program; and alternative schools for at-risk children, such as DeLaSalle and Genesis.

"Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

H.G. Wells

- Businesses, educators and families must develop new partnerships to create and support educational programs that meet the real needs of businesses competing in a global economy.

GOAL 3: Improve access of core residents to jobs through increased transportation and training opportunities.

PROBLEM: New jobs are most often created in the suburbs and good jobs most often demand relatively high educational requirements. These trends combine to further isolate many core residents from economic opportunity.

"As the prospects for employment diminish, other alternatives such as welfare and the underground economy are not only increasingly relied on, they come to be seen as a way of life."

William Julius Wilson

ACTION:

- The Kansas City Area Transportation Authority and Johnson County Transit must continue to work with MARC, area chambers and private industry councils to improve the access of core residents to suburban jobs.
- Businesses must strengthen their existing partnerships with area school districts, community colleges and job training programs to ensure students graduate with needed skills. The community must lobby the states of Missouri and Kansas for increased financial support for programs such as Futures and KANWORK to allow core residents to attain self-sufficiency.

GOAL 4: Improve race relations.

PROBLEM: Racial prejudice and discrimination contribute to decline in the core by
1) blocking access to jobs and preventing equal payment for equal work for many core residents,
2) diminishing metropolitan perceptions of the core as a good place to live and work and
3) thwarting open-minded consideration of certain strategies designed to reverse urban decline,
such as providing more housing for low-income families in suburban areas.

“There is a tendency for those who can move to move away from those who can’t. Race and economic class are deeply involved in this tendency.... It is the premise here that reducing racism will reduce poverty, that reducing poverty will reduce racism, and that reducing both is necessary for lasting improvement in inner city conditions.”

Oliver Byrum

ACTION:

- Strengthen and increase efforts, such as Harmony in a World of Difference, to promote open discussion and resolution of race problems in all aspects of community life, including housing and employment opportunities. This must be a broad-based effort involving schools, lenders, business organizations, the real estate community, churches, synagogues and community organizations.

II. Economic Investment: Improve the Core’s Ability to Create Wealth for the Region by Capitalizing on Its Unique Features.

The region needs productive investment to stimulate the kind of expanding economic pie necessary to solve complicated metropolitan problems. Often, the most productive investment is that which builds upon existing capabilities rather than forging new ones from scratch. The core has the highest concentration of the region’s productive assets, but its share is declining as the core becomes more disconnected from — and less able to contribute to — the regional economy.

GOAL 1: Retain and expand the job base provided by existing businesses.

PROBLEM: Economic development energies are often focused on external recruitment. However, most of the region’s future jobs will be created by existing businesses or new business start-ups. Therefore, regional economic development efforts should concentrate on local business creation, retention and expansion, rather than competition for external relocations. To compete effectively in an information-based global economy, improvements in such business fundamentals as labor force quality, product innovation and plant modernization are more important than lower business taxes.

ACTION:

- Local governments, together with area economic development agencies and local chambers, must strengthen their efforts to retain businesses. This includes making infrastructure improvements at existing business centers a top priority and augmenting industry analysis with increased personal contact with individual businesses. Special assessment districts to provide the kind of business services that malls enjoy but that governments can’t afford should also be examined in cities with older downtowns.
- The Kansas City Area Development Council should take the lead in working with area development agencies in drafting a mutually adopted statement of economic development principles that seeks to minimize intra-regional competition and maximize cooperative external marketing.
- Business and government leaders should work with educators to develop world-class higher educational and research facilities in areas critical to the region’s economy, as identified in the Batelle study commissioned by the Kansas City Area Development Council. In addition, they should consider expanding collaborative efforts, such as providing easily accessible telecommunications links between area educational facilities and existing world-class institutions, to broaden the opportunity for excellent advanced education and research. Entrepreneurial activities to turn research and innovation into useful products must be encouraged, such as MRI Ventures at the Midwest Research Institute and the University Research Park.
- State and local governments, as well as economic development agencies, must be more discriminating in their use of tax breaks and other development incentives in order to avoid adverse impacts on existing businesses and development. Rather than only lowering costs, which often results simply in shifting the location of jobs, incentives must be better targeted to meet established community goals, such as creating new jobs, raising property values and helping existing businesses become more effective and productive in the global marketplace.

GOAL 2: Capitalize on the core's unique assets using effective urban design.

PROBLEM: The core's many outstanding assets — including historic areas and buildings, parks and boulevards, employment centers, cultural activities and comprehensive transit service — combine to create unique residential and work environments that cannot be duplicated elsewhere. These must serve as the foundation of future development efforts.

“The ability of closer-in areas to attract market and investment depends upon high quality design that either achieves in a higher density urban setting the pleasantness that households seek on the semi-pristine development fringe, or shows them something even more attractive in the form of exciting urbanity.”

Oliver Byrum

ACTION:

- Core business and government leaders must work together to position major new amenities in areas where they will complement existing region-serving assets rather than dissipate resources. The location of publicly funded facilities, such as a performing arts center, a new science museum and a new public library, should be carefully evaluated to maximize the impact of public expenditures.
- Core advocacy groups should lobby federal and state governments to focus jobs and facilities in the core. Particular emphasis should be placed on the federal government which, in recent years, has relinquished much of its stated commitment to the core.
- Core city governments and economic development agencies must better promote the unique assets of historic areas and special districts to regional residents and businesses. Such districts include Southwest Boulevard, Quality Hill, 18th and Vine, Brush Creek corridor, Historic Independence Square/Truman Home area, Strawberry Hill and the River Market.
- Core cities must adopt improved urban design policies as well as parking policies which ensure that parking lots and structures enhance rather than detract from the urban environment. Priority consideration must be given to preserving aesthetic landscapes and significant buildings; taxes on important, unused older buildings should be reduced or eliminated. One noteworthy urban design effort is “A City Plan for Urban Design” currently under review by Kansas City, Missouri.

III. Neighborhood Investment: Create a Quality Urban Living Alternative for All Income Levels.

As housing ages, it often deteriorates and slowly loses value. When sold, such housing tends to attract new owners with less income than the previous owners. Needed maintenance is deferred and nearby businesses begin to fail. Deteriorating older neighborhoods gradually become more disconnected from the region's general prosperity.

GOAL: Stop the spread of urban decline and make older neighborhoods more attractive to middle- and upper-income residents by removing major disincentives to urban living.

PROBLEM: In many older areas, neighborhood conditions discourage those who have a choice from living in the core. Unless immediate attention is given to improving urban living conditions — including homeownership rates, infrastructure quality and personal and property safety — succeeding generations of older neighborhoods will degenerate beyond the ability of neighborhood investment to make a meaningful difference. Local governments can have the most immediate impact on a neighborhood's quality of life by improving the maintenance of local infrastructure.

ACTION:

- Local governments must establish capital improvement investment policies that give preference to maintaining existing infrastructure over new facilities. Resources should be targeted to those neighborhoods that will respond best to reinvestment as well as to those efforts that capitalize on other public expenditures, such as the \$1 billion investment in schools in the Kansas City, Missouri, School District.
- Residents of core neighborhoods must be allowed more direct involvement in crime prevention, including community policing, positioning of public lighting and removal of blighted structures.
- Local governments must vigorously enforce their building and property maintenance codes through systematic inspection programs coupled with companion resources to assist lower-income property owners. Inspections must be implemented block-by-block and neighborhood-by-neighborhood to be effective.
- Local governments must consider providing housing purchase and maintenance subsidies independent of home buyer income to encourage reinvestment in older homes. For example, a multi-city “greenlining” program could furnish low-cost financing to targeted portions of the core.

Housing incentives “should not be tied to income because the goal is not to reduce the income profile of the neighborhood, but to strengthen a neighborhood in the metropolitan marketplace before self-fulfilling prophecies of decline begin, and serious investment gaps begin to feed the downward spiral.”

Oliver Byrum

- Programs must be developed to help moderate-income families buy a home. This includes programs to build credit worthiness. Area lenders must assist the community in discovering why relatively few home loans are made in the core, especially to minority households, and finding loan products that can better meet the needs of potential core home buyers while satisfying lender requirements.
- Neighborhood associations and community development corporations must be strengthened so they can help local governments more effectively reinvest in neighborhoods.
- Core school districts must address negative perceptions about school programs by aggressively promoting district successes. The media must provide more balanced coverage of progress in urban core schools.

IV. Transportation Investment: Develop Linkages to Create Synergy Within the Core as well as Between the Core and the Rest of the Region.

Suburban areas have been the chief beneficiaries of post-World War II transportation investments. New roads and highways made vast expanses of previously undeveloped land accessible. People, jobs, shopping centers and major public facilities, like the airport and sports complex, were moved to locations along the new highways, diminishing the concentration of elements needed to maintain a vibrant urban living environment.

Compounding the problem is the linear nature of the region's main commercial center, which stretches over a five-mile long corridor from the Missouri River to the Plaza and includes downtown and Crown Center. Without the convergence of activity found in the main commercial centers of other regions, metropolitan Kansas City's urban core grows gradually weaker.

GOAL: Focus public investment in priority corridors.

PROBLEM: The core has become physically disconnected both from itself and from the rest of the region. Without high-quality, connecting transportation corridors, the core's decentralized activities cannot complement one another in ways that make the central city stronger and more attractive.

ACTION:

- Kansas City, Missouri, must give the highest priority to infrastructure investment along the Grand/Main and Broadway/Main corridors in order to increase the attractiveness of existing redevelopment projects, including Barney Allis Plaza, the Town Pavilion, Quality Hill, Crown Center, the River Market, 18th and Vine and Bartle Hall.
- Kansas City, Missouri, the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority and MARC must pursue light rail in the Bruce R. Watkins and Country Club right-of-ways, not only for the problems it solves but for the opportunities it creates. To maximize the potential for core reinvestment, light rail must be closely tied to land use, economic development and housing policies. Local governments and MARC should support efforts to provide a dedicated source of funding for transit.
- MARC and area local governments must work to create region-connecting and region-defining facilities that break down physical and political boundaries and reinforce the notion that the entire metropolitan area is part of a single system. Possible projects include the following: **1)** joint recreational and tourism development along the Missouri River by the two Kansas Cities, **2)** Metro Green, which will create a regional sense of community through concentric bands of green space, and **3)** Centennial Boulevard, which is intended to link all of Kansas City, Missouri, through an expansion of the city's parks and boulevard system.

CONCLUSION

These strategies represent what a thinking, committed community can do to reverse the trend of spreading urban decline. Some may disagree with the emphasis given particular strategies and others may find significant omissions in the list above. Unanimous agreement is not nearly so important as making a commitment to develop and follow a strategic plan of action. This report is the beginning, not the end, of that effort.

PARABLE OF THE LOST KEYS

One night, a man is on his hands and knees under a street light. A woman passes by and asks why. "I'm looking for my keys," the man replies. "Where did you lose them?" asks the woman. "Over there, in that dark alley," says the man. "Then why look here?" the woman asks. "Because the light's better."

MORAL:

Sometimes the keys to complex problems are found "under the light," where solutions are safe and familiar. But when pushing harder and harder on familiar problems yields only temporary progress, the keys often lie in the darkness, requiring courage, commitment and patience to find them.

(Adapted from Senge, 1990)

COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

The Mid-America Regional Council is a voluntary association of local governments which functions as a planning and coordinating agency serving the bi-state Kansas City region. In 1990, MARC developed a long-range regional transportation plan based on demographic forecasts that projected continued population gains in the suburbs and losses in the core. In response to public concern that its planning process did not address the problems of urban decline, the MARC Board of Directors created the Urban Core Growth Strategies Committee, an independent forum consisting of business, civic and government leaders from throughout the region. This report is the culmination of the committee's year-long efforts, which included input and assistance from diverse sectors of the community.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS*

- Wendell Lady, Co-chairman:** Project Manager, Black and Veatch; former Speaker of the House in Kansas
- Jerry Riffel, Co-chairman:** Attorney, Lathrop & Miller; KCATA legal representative; former Kansas City, Missouri, city council member
- Aasim Baheyadeen:** Board of Education, Kansas City, Missouri, School District
- Jack Cotton:** Senior Partner, HNTB; vice chair, Greater Kansas City Chamber Transportation Committee
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- Dan Cofran:** Kansas City, Missouri, city council member
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*Titles as of December 1992

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