


# CHAPTER 7 – COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

Joplin has extensive roadside commercial development that has grown and changed dramatically since the beginning of the automobile era in the early twentieth century. Joplin's commercial corridors remain an important part of the city's economy, community life, and community character.

Jasper County's growth as part of the Tri-State Mining District led to the early development of paved roads within the county. By 1900, the area was already well connected with an extensive network of national railroads and regional trolley lines. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a system of all-weather roads was constructed throughout Jasper County, in large part because of the ready availability of inexpensive mining chat for use in paving. This construction of local paved roads is much earlier than occurred in most other places. By 1906, the county had 380 miles of macadamized roads (Schwenk 2008:E-24).

Beginning in the second decade of the twentieth century, the Joplin Special Road District began construction of a network of eight concrete roads outside of Joplin proper. The National Highway Act, passed by Congress in 1925, called for an interstate highway from Chicago to Los Angles. Designated as Route 66, construction began in 1928, and Missouri's portion, passing through Joplin, was completed in 1932 (Schwenk 2008:E-25; Simpson 2011:88).

With the increased use of the automobile in the 1920s and 1930s, roadside architecture began to develop along the corridors leading into town. Joplin's illustrated histories feature postcards of tourist courts and small motels along East 7th Street and South Main Street. Gas stations, restaurants, automobile

dealerships, and other commercial businesses developed as well creating a unique set of period architectural resources.

As federal spending on highways continued during the New Deal, Joplin became the junction of two major national highways, Routes 66 and 71. With its local network of paved roads, highway connections, and intersection of railroads, Joplin became a transportation center with twenty major truck freight lines (Renner 1985:65). Warehousing and trucking continue to be important sectors of the local economy today.



**East Broadway Street, the original Route 66, in Joplin's historic East Town neighborhood.**

Eastmoreland Plaza, Joplin's first suburban shopping center—sixteen acres in area, was constructed on East 7th Street in 1956. Other neighborhood shopping centers soon followed on West 7th, 20th, and 32nd Streets. In the late 1950s, the construction of Interstate 44 began south of the city, connecting Route 71 (Range Line Road) with a turnpike constructed by the state of Oklahoma from the Missouri/Oklahoma state line to Tulsa. Interstate 44 was completed through Missouri and Oklahoma by the late 1960s and became a cornerstone of Joplin's continued prosperity. In anticipation of the interstate, Range Line Road was reconstructed as a four-lane thoroughfare in the late 1950s and attracted motels, restaurants, shopping centers, and other businesses (Renner 1985:78,85).

Joplin's commercial corridors are an important part of the city's history, yet this history has not yet been well studied. Over the decades, retail sites along Joplin's key commercial streets have been continuously redeveloped in response to changing economic forces such that their physical evolution is difficult to discern. Given the importance of the retail corridors to Joplin's economy, a vision for their continuing evolution, enhancing Joplin's regional market position, needs to be a key component of the city's economic strategy. Recognition of the commercial corridors' history and significance can be a part of that vision.

## Remaining Resources and Approach

Joplin's older commercial corridors include East 7th Street and South Main Street, together designated today as Business Route 44. Both date in historical significance from the late 1920s into the mid- 1950s and were part of historic Route 66.

East 7th Street has continued to evolve over the years with a significant amount of new development. Few historic roadside commercial structures from the 1920s to 1950 era appear to remain, though an analysis and survey needs to be undertaken. Those that do remain have been dramatically altered. The presence and significance of commercial building and landscape resources from the mid-1950s to the present along East 7th Street needs to be assessed.

South Main Street between 10th and 20th Streets has a significant amount of historic building fabric remaining, including historic buildings from all of Joplin's roadside commercial periods. Most of these buildings have a high degree of historic integrity, even though some have been poorly treated and maintained. Many of the buildings are small in scale, widely spaced apart, close to the road, and may be difficult to reuse—lacking the size and density generally desired for contemporary businesses. However, this corridor is a significant future growth corridor with great character and great potential. Several significant historic buildings along South Main Street have been rehabilitated and reused and serve as models for future investment.

Below 20th Street, buildings along South Main Street were destroyed during the 2011 tornado. As an element of Joplin's tornado recovery, South Main Street within the tornado recovery area (north to 15th Street—the area's official northern edge) has been designated as a Mixed-Use Development Overlay District to be developed with new construction in accordance with design standards outlined in the 2012 Comprehensive Plan.



**Historic commercial building along East Broadway Street.**

Range Line Road is the king of Joplin's commercial corridors. Redesigned and rebuilt in the late 1950s and dramatically developed with the construction of U.S. I-44, Range Line Road is a regional commercial attraction, drawing shoppers from throughout the four-state area of southwest Missouri. Range Line Road's retail commercial infrastructure is much larger than could be supported economically solely by the local market. Its vibrancy is critical to the city's tax base as well as being a major employer.

New commercial development continues to be introduced along the corridor. The design quality of the streetscape experience, however, could be improved. South Range Line Road has been designated as a Planned Development Corridor for multi-use commercial development in the 2012 Comprehensive Plan as part of the tornado recovery program. The corridor's historical development since the late 1950s should be reviewed and assessed, and its vibrancy and diversity could be celebrated as part of a vision for the corridor's future.

The 2012 Comprehensive Plan is outlined in Chapter 1. The plan also designates 20th Street, 26th Street, and Connecticut Avenue as Planned Development Corridors for multi-use residential-commercial-office/institutional development.

Other roadside commercial areas are prominent in Joplin as well, such as West 7th Street and connected areas. The Comprehensive Plan designates some of these areas as Future Infill Corridors, where future development is expected to occur. Future Infill Corridors for multi-use residential-commercial-office/institutional projects have been designated along North Main Street and West 32nd Street. Future Infill Corridors for multi-use commercial projects along Range Line Road North, Schifferdecker Avenue, Maiden Lane, and East 20th Street (east of Range Line Road).

This Historic Preservation Plan embraces the concepts of mixed-use development and connectivity outlined in Joplin's 2012 Comprehensive Plan. However, the Comprehensive Plan addresses itself primarily to the tornado recovery area and does not speak adequately to earlier, more central and historic portions of the community.

This Historic Preservation Plan recommends that commercial corridors *throughout* Joplin be assessed for historical significance, current function, and potential character and that long-term design improvements be planned to improve their character and appeal. The preservation plan recommends that older commercial and residential portions of the community be revitalized and enhanced as a fundamental strategy for future growth, building on concepts of the 2012 Comprehensive Plan and filling out its recommendations beyond its focus on the tornado recovery area. The City of Joplin should focus on strengthening existing commercial corridors and neighborhoods rather than promoting new development and construction in yet undeveloped areas around the community's edges.

In outlining recommendations related to this strategy, Chapter 7 emphasizes the goals 1-Community Identity, 3-Economy and Quality of Life, and 8-Commercial Corridors presented in *Chapter 3, Preservation Approach*. Recommendations for Joplin's commercial corridors are organized under three topical headings:

- Joplin's Commercial Corridors;
- Survey and Preservation; and
- Transportation and Corridor Enhancement.



**Early commercial building along East Broadway Street.**

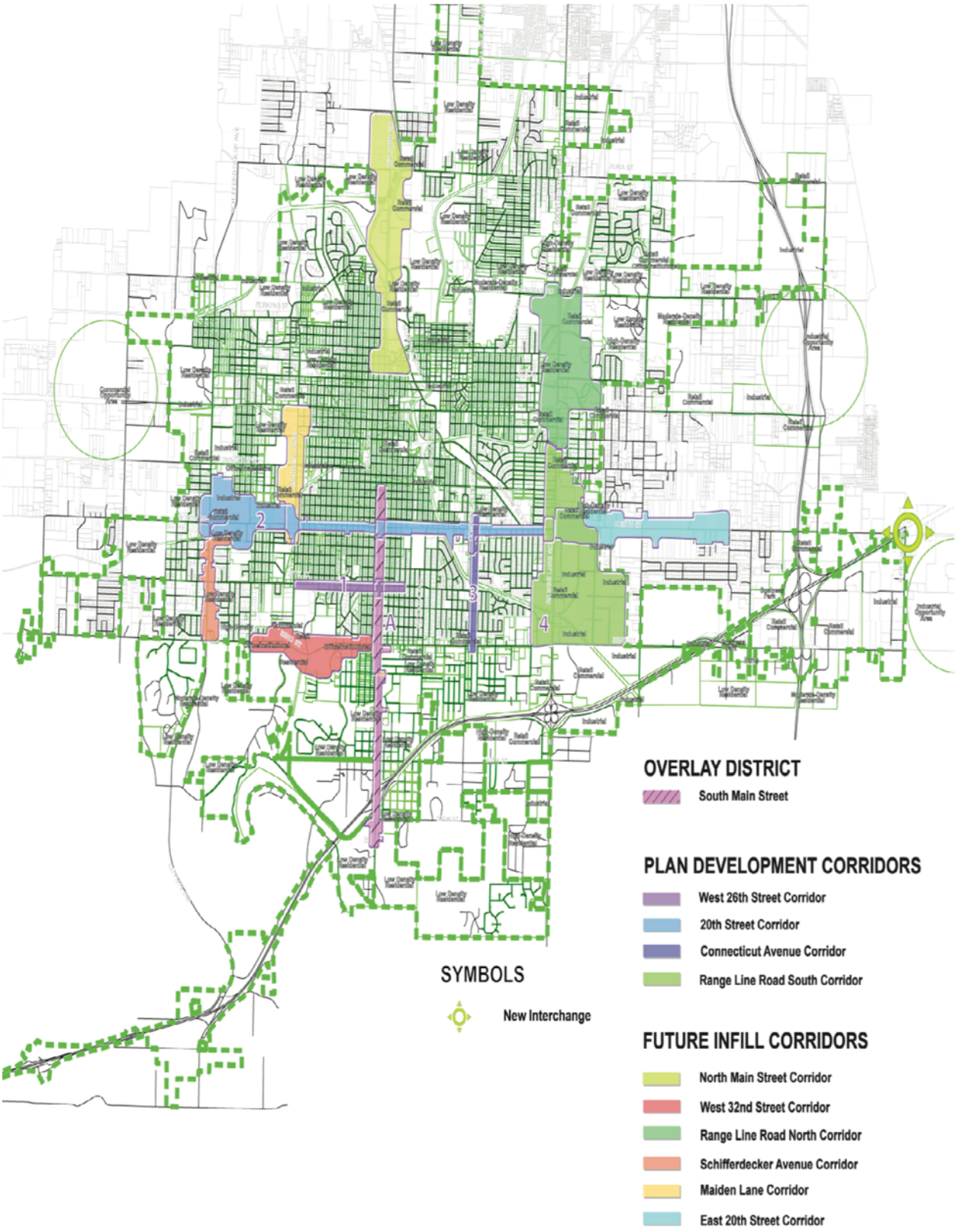
## 7.1 JOPLIN'S COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

This Historic Preservation Plan embraces the mixed-use development and connectivity concepts of Joplin's 2012 Comprehensive Plan but recommends that these concepts be applied to older, historic commercial corridors within the city as well, not just to new development within the tornado recovery area and/or new growth around the city's edges.

The city's commercial corridors should be analyzed and planned with respect to their roles in the city's life and economy. These roles can be thought of as being of regional, city-wide, and neighborhood significance. Different long-term approaches should be developed for each in terms of markets to be served, businesses to be attracted, streetscape improvements, and experience. The 2012 Comprehensive Plan takes this general approach but limits its scope and vision, not embracing all of the city's commercial corridors and limiting its recommendations.

### Regional Commercial Corridors

Regional commercial corridors are those that primarily serve the larger regional market and are key to the city's long-term economic strategy. They include Range Line Road for its retail commercial activity and the Hearnes Boulevard (southern extension of South Main Street) and West 32nd Street area in the vicinity of Mercy and Freeman Hospital for their regional healthcare services. Both areas are key to Joplin's economic health.




**Development Corridors within the 2012 Comprehensive Plan.**

Range Line Road has a long history of commercial development going back to the late 1950s. The corridor has continued to develop and change as retail formats have evolved. Because of its critical role in funding the city's administration and services, Range Line Road needs to be vibrant and competitive as a regional draw—it needs to be the regional leader in retail shopping.

This requires a long-term plan and strategic investment. Competing commercial areas are developing in other communities within the four-state region. Over time, these commercial areas could grow to the extent that they threaten Joplin's regional dominance. Range Line Road needs to stay at the top of its game to maintain its leadership over the long term.

While beyond the scope of a typical historic preservation plan, this discussion relates to historic preservation in Joplin because of Range Line Road's historic role in the city's commercial life dating back to the late 1950s. While much of the historic building and landscape fabric developed in the 1950s and 1960s is gone, the overall pattern of commercial activity has had consistency in character and use, and Range Line Road is of historical significance to Joplin's modern development.




**Today's Range Line Road lacks appealing streetscape character.**

A vision for the future of Range Line Road should celebrate its historical significance and highlight its continuing role. From a historic preservation perspective, the corridor's dynamic visual character should be emphasized. Historic patterns and any remaining historic commercial building resources that might remain should be identified. Continuing dynamic change should be embraced.

The physical design of the streetscape should be vibrant, dynamic, attractive, fun, and easy to understand from an automobile. While the historic character of the strip development from the 1950s to the present in general might be visually unattractive and unappealing, future planning should seek to create a more

appealing streetscape, making Joplin's primary commercial corridor more attractive.

The future of the Range Line Road streetscape should include an abundance of street trees, colorful and creative signage, landscape buffer areas, and an easy-to-navigate street system. Well thought-out design guidelines implemented as new development occurs could achieve this over time in combination with well designed public infrastructure improvements.

The Hearnes Boulevard and West 32nd Street area in the vicinity of Mercy and Freeman Hospital is in an ongoing process of redevelopment in the wake of reconstruction following the 2011 tornado. Mercy Hospital was destroyed in the tornado, while Freeman Hospital and other healthcare facilities were heavily damaged. All have been redeveloped as state-of-the–art facilities. This area focuses upon providing healthcare and related services to the regional market. While the two hospitals are the anchors, an array of supporting healthcare businesses and services are developing along Hearnes Boulevard and 32nd Street.

The character of this area is more business-like than retail oriented. While retail businesses are present, the streetscape character is more restrained than that along Range Line Road. Design guidelines for the corridor, outlined in the 2012 Comprehensive Plan, should be of the highest quality and should emphasize landscaping.

Range Line Road and Hearnes Boulevard should be fully connected by 32nd Street from a design perspective. Both interchanges with I-44 should serve as primary gateways to the city, with well-designed entrance landscapes and clear wayfinding signage that connects with all areas of the city.



**Hearnes Boulevard within the tornado recovery area lacks trees and landscape buffers despite recent redevelopment.**

## City-wide Commercial Corridors

Other streets within Joplin serve as city-wide commercial corridors that provide service primarily to city-wide residents. Most prominent among these historically are East 7th Street and South Main Street, historic Route 66 and currently Business Route 44. As noted above, East 7th Street has been largely redeveloped over the decades, and few historic resources dating before the mid-1950s appear to remain. The character of the streetscape has not been of primary concern as this corridor has been redeveloped, and going forward the implementation of design guidelines as new development occurs would improve its character over time.

South Main Street between 10th and 20th Streets retains a significant number of historic resources, as noted above, and redevelopment over time can create an area of very interesting character, incorporating historic buildings and adjacent neighborhoods into new mixed-use development. While this area appears vacant and struggling today, as the city grows it will develop, and the corridor's historic resources should be preserved to be part of that new development.

West 7th Street, Schifferdecker Avenue, and other streets with commercial development also serve a city-wide market. Most of the development along these streets is recent, and few historic resources are present. Nonetheless, the implementation of high quality design guidelines along these corridors over time will improve their character and help integrate the corridors into the historic fabric of surrounding neighborhoods, enhancing overall quality of life.



**South Main Street has many historic buildings of great character awaiting redevelopment and reuse.**

## Neighborhood Commercial Corridors

Localized areas of commercial development within the city can be identified as neighborhood commercial corridors, small areas that are closely tied within or adjacent to existing neighborhoods. In preparing this plan, we have not identified

such areas, which is closely related to the priorities and approaches outlined in Chapter 6, Joplin's Historic Neighborhoods.

The delineation of neighborhoods and neighborhood planning areas as outlined in Chapter 6 should include the identification of neighborhood commercial corridors. These areas are neighborhood anchors. The degree to which the physical and programmatic relationships these commercial areas have to their surrounding neighborhoods should be strengthened through the neighborhood planning discussed in Chapter 6.

The point of this discussion is that the 2012 Comprehensive Plan stopped short of looking at all of Joplin's commercial corridors together, organizing them into a coherent pattern, and planning holistically for their future. The general approach outlined in the Comprehensive Plan is good. It just needs to be expanded to understand and include all of the corridors and to incorporate historic resource values and methodologies into its planning and implementation.

**RECOMMENDATION 7.1.A: Update the 2012 Comprehensive Plan to create a comprehensive, structured approach to the development of commercial corridors. Distinguish between regional, city-wide, and neighborhood commercial corridors. Emphasize the revitalization of older commercial corridors within Joplin's historic core.**

- Analyze and assess existing commercial corridors and their roles within the city. Distinguish between **regional, city-wide, and neighborhood commercial corridors** and develop goals and strategies tailored to the opportunities, needs, and characteristics of each in concert with the city's broader economic strategy.
- Recognize Range Line Road and connected areas as a **regional commercial corridor** critical to Joplin's economy and the city's financial base. Develop strategies for its long-term viability in continuing to attract regional shoppers in the face of anticipated competition from growing commercial areas in other communities. Develop its interchange with I-44 as a southern gateway to Joplin.
- Recognize Hearnes Boulevard and West 32nd Street in the vicinity of Mercy Hospital and Freeman Hospital as a **regional commercial corridor** providing healthcare services to residents throughout the Tri-State Region. Emphasize West 32nd Street connecting Freeman Hospital and Hearnes Boulevard to Range Line Road as a Planned Development Corridor of regional commercial importance, linking the city's two regional commercial corridors and focusing on support services and businesses. Develop the Hearnes Boulevard interchange with I-44 as a southern gateway to Joplin.
- Recognize the other Planned Development Corridors and Future Infill Corridors as **city-wide commercial corridors** hosting businesses and services important primarily to city residents.
- Recognize East 7th Street and South Main Street (Business Route 44) as a city-wide commercial corridor of historical significance and economic

importance, worthy of special focus in Joplin's revitalization. Extend the **South Main Street Overlay District** from 15th Street to 10th Street to encourage mixed-use development that revitalizes the area and connects to Downtown Joplin. Develop guidelines for the overlay district that require the rehabilitation of historic buildings and their incorporation into mixed-use projects.

- Recognize West 7th Street and other commercial areas as city-wide or neighborhood commercial corridors as appropriate. Develop strategies, guidelines, and projects to **connect neighborhood commercial corridors** to adjacent residential neighborhoods both physically with sidewalks and trails and in terms of landscape character.



**Historic residential buildings, some now used for business, along South Main Street near the tornado zone.**

## 7.2 SURVEY AND PRESERVATION

Joplin has at least three periods of historical development of its commercial corridors—the pre-highway period of about 1900 through the mid-1920s, the state and national highway period of the late 1920s to about 1950, and the interstate and suburban development period from the mid-1950s to the present. As discussed above, because of the pace of change and redevelopment along Joplin's commercial corridors, few historic commercial buildings appear to remain except in a few specific areas.

The historical development of Joplin's commercial corridors has not been adequately studied and documented. The 2008 Multiple Property Documentation Form prepared for Joplin provides a framework for such study and outlines a structure and methodology for surveying Joplin's commercial buildings.

In continuing to survey the city's historic resources as recommended in Chapter 4, Joplin's Historic Preservation Program, buildings and landscapes along Joplin's commercial corridors should be grouped as a distinct topic for survey and documentation. In planning for its commercial corridors, the city should study the historical development of its commercial corridors, identify remaining historic

commercial buildings and landscape characteristics, and incorporate historic resources into future planning and development.



**Historic gas station along South Main Street.**

**RECOMMENDATION 7.2.A: Undertake a historic resource survey of commercial buildings and landscape characteristics along Joplin's commercial corridors.**

- Using Joplin's 2008 Multiple Property Documentation Form as a base, undertake a **survey of historic commercial buildings** along Joplin's historic commercial corridors. Include the routes of historic Route 66, other early state highways, East 7th Street, and South Main Street. Encompass historic commercial developments through the entire twentieth century, including the development of Range Line Road from the late 1950s.

- Use Missouri State Historic Preservation Office **methodologies** and formats in undertaking the survey. Include survey results in city and state GIS databases.

- In undertaking the surveys, note the level of **integrity** of identified historic resources with respect to changes that have occurred over time.

**RECOMMENDATION 7.2.B: Prepare a history of Joplin's commercial corridors relating their development to the key historic contexts and themes of the city's growth and economy.**

- Building on the Statement of Historic Contexts included in Joplin's 2008 Multiple Property Documentation Form, prepare a history of Joplin's **physical development of commercial corridors**. Relate the history to the story of Joplin's economy, the history of Route 66, Missouri's state and local roads, national highways and the interstate system.

**RECOMMENDATION 7.2.C: Using the city's Development Guidelines, create strategies and guidelines for the rehabilitation of remaining historic commercial buildings and their incorporation into new development projects**

- Depending upon the number, type, significance, and integrity of remaining historic commercial buildings and landscape features identified in the survey noted above, develop **design guidelines** for the preservation and incorporation of commercial historic resources into the city's Development Standards for commercial corridors. This certainly relates to historic buildings along South Main Street, as discussed above, but it also relates to as yet unidentified commercial historic resources along Joplin's other corridors.




**Remodeled historic commercial storefronts along South Main Street.**

## 7.3 TRANSPORTATION AND CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENT

As discussed above, Joplin's commercial corridors are critical to the city's economic future; Joplin's status as a regional retail center is one of three legs of its economic strategy. Other commercial areas are developing within the four-state region that could grow to compete with it. The character of city and neighborhood commercial corridors is important to local quality of life.

Joplin's Comprehensive Plan and recent regional transportation plan emphasize road corridors, connectedness, and multi-modal forms of movement as the focus of strategies creating the city's future urban fabric. The Historic Preservation Plan should recognize this planning and incorporate historic preservation values and interests into its planning and implementation. Streetscape enhancement along Joplin's commercial corridors should strengthen the city's historic character.

The Development Standards included in the 2012 Comprehensive Plan are an important start to streetscape enhancement and have led to new development with generally appealing streetscape character within the areas of Mercy and Freeman Hospitals. However, the existing Development Standards currently only apply to specific corridors identified in the Comprehensive Plan. Recommendation 7.1.A above suggests that the Comprehensive Plan be updated to include all of Joplin's commercial corridors and to create a comprehensive long-term approach to their development.

This approach should include the application of high-quality landscape and development standards to all of Joplin's commercial corridors. Current development standards should be expanded, improved, and made more rigorous with the goal of significantly improving streetscape character city-wide over time. Design standards should be customized to the character of each corridor. Illustrative master plans of specific areas should be prepared to demonstrate the level of quality and design anticipated. The city should work with developers to maximize the enhancement of commercial streets, coordinating public infrastructure improvements with private development improvements.




**Historic commercial buildings along Joplin's streetscapes.**

Improvement of the character and appearance of commercial streetscapes should be a primary goal. Development and design standards should apply not only to Overlay Districts, Planned Development Corridors, Future Infill Corridors as outlined in the 2012 plan but to all of the city's commercial corridors.

**RECOMMENDATION 7.3.A: Incorporate community character and historic preservation best practices into planning for transportation corridors and quality of life.**

- Emphasize planning for **sidewalks, trails, and public open space** as a network of community amenities and enhancements to support neighborhood revitalization, homeowner investment, and quality of life throughout Joplin.

- Include **historic preservation principles** and standards for the rehabilitation and enhancement of historic streetscapes and landscape corridors as outlined in Chapter 3 in transportation and community planning.

**RECOMMENDATION 7.3.B: Develop, adopt, and implement high quality design guidelines and standards for Joplin's commercial corridors city-wide.**

- Prepare **design guidelines and standards** for new commercial development along Joplin's commercial corridors city-wide that can be implemented over time as new development projects are undertaken.

- Create the design guidelines and standards to promote development of beautiful commercial streetscapes that will **enhance the experience** of shopping in Joplin and help maintain the city's leadership as a regional shopping destination.

- Make **streetscape enhancement** a central component of the city's visual identity. Emphasize large canopy trees, green space, and creative signage. Collaborate with retail owners in design and visibility. Over the long term, move utility lines away from primary streets by placing them underground or locating them to the rear of commercial lots.

- Include **customized** design guidelines and standards for different types of commercial corridors—regional, city-wide, and neighborhood commercial corridors as discussed in Recommendation 7.1.A above. For neighborhood commercial corridors, emphasize pedestrian connections and landscaping that blends with adjacent residential streetscapes.




**Appealing gateway to the Range Line Retail District along East 4th Street.**