



Webb City, Lamar to receive state funds for renovations

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There are up days and there are down days in Lou Gutheil's restaurant business. On a rainy afternoon, business at the Bradbury-Bishop Deli in downtown Webb City was fair, but owner Gutheil's spirits were high. "This is one of the best things to happen to Webb City in a long time," Gutheil said of Gov. Matt Blunt's announcement Thursday that the town has been named a 2008 DREAM city.

The Downtown Revitalization and Economic Assistance for Missouri Initiative started three years ago. It is designed to give a handful of small and medium-sized communities each year greater access to state economic development tools and grant money. Webb City officials applied for the designation every year since the program started, and watched as the communities of Neosho and Aurora were chosen in 2006 and 2007, respectively. Persistence also paid off for Lamar this year, as the city earned a DREAM city designation after applying for it last year without success. Last year, Lamar's largest employer, O'Sullivan Industries, shut down its local plant, putting more than 700 people out of work. Later that winter, a devastating ice storm left Lamar with no power for a week and \$1.3 million worth of damage. "We're ready for some good news for a change," said Lynn Calton, Lamar city administrator. "We got a vision"

Officials with both communities attribute their DREAM designations this year to having a plan, specifically through their partnership with a group of architecture students from Drury University in Springfield. The architects-in-training created a downtown revitalization plan for Lamar in 2007 and one for Webb City earlier this year. "Without the Drury study, I don't think we would be getting this DREAM award," said Steve Garrett, Webb City city administrator. Calton said Lamar officials invited input from the Missouri Department of Economic Development when the city was not named a DREAM city last year. The city made changes based on those recommendations, and Lamar now has a DREAM committee as well as a downtown committee working on the project. Despite two years of rejected applications, Garrett said Webb City officials moved ahead with a plan for downtown revitalization. The city is doing a streetscaping project to replace the sidewalks and streetlights along Main Street. "We got a vision," Gutheil said of Webb City. "When we tried for this three years ago, we didn't have the elements that the state wanted to see. But I look at this construction that's already started and I see that the city has already made a commitment to it. The citizens need to catch the dream now too."

Earlier this summer, Webb City hired former Joplin planning and community-development manager Dick Largent to develop and implement a historic-preservation ordinance for the city. Webb City does not have any type of official historic district and has just one building on the National Register of Historic Places. Garrett said the City Council will vote on that ordinance in the next couple of months. That should make the city and individual investors eligible for state and federal tax credits for building and renovation projects, he said.

The plans Lamar's plan for its downtown includes doing facade work on historic buildings on the square; connecting the Harry S. Truman birthplace to the square through streetscaping; beautifying Gulf Street from the square to the city park through landscaping; and turning the empty Gilkey Building on the square into a museum, restaurant or community center. "None of these things will happen overnight," Calton said. "We're still on cloud nine right now. We need to get back on the ground and get to work."

The plan the Drury students developed for Webb City's downtown is a modern take on early 20th century history. It involves organizing Main Street into separate areas, each with its own feel and purpose. The design proposals include a pedestrian bridge over Missouri Highway 171 that would connect Main Street with King Jack Park; a series of pavilions and awnings; welcome signs; roundabouts to slow traffic; turning the old Route 66 gas station into a welcome center; and establishing a festival center. Chuck Surface, Webb City economic-development director, said the city will move forward immediately with a facade project and will work to fill the approximately 10 empty commercial spaces on Main Street, as well as put a Route 66-themed event in place. Surface said city officials will celebrate Webb City's DREAM designation Sept. 17 with a visit from Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder. "We will be bustling again," Gutheil said.

On the list

This year's other DREAM cities are Boonville, Farmington, Fulton, Lebanon, Louisiana, Macon, Strafford and Warrensburg. The 20 communities that were named DREAM cities in 2006 and 2007, **including Neosho**, have received more than \$46 million in state grants for rebuilding their downtowns.

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