

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY AND EXISTING CONDITONS

HISTORY OF PLEASANT HILL

One of western Missouri's oldest communities, Pleasant Hill has experienced, and survived, several periods of "boom and bust". Until the year 1825, the area was the home of the proud Osage. In 1828, the first pioneer settlement was built atop the scenic ridge that gave the town its name. On October 8, 1844, William W. Wright filed the plat consisting of 12 blocks of the original Village of Pleasant Hill. One year later the town had about 40 residents, then grew to some 500 within the next ten years.

In 1858, the Village of Pleasant Hill was incorporated and Dr. J. Logan Reynolds served as the first Mayor. Dr. McReynolds also served as the legal advisor and the local medical doctor. The first town of Pleasant Hill was located on the highest point of ground in the vicinity and adjoined the north side of what is now the Pleasant Hill cemetery. The town continued to grow and prosper until the outbreak of the Civil War.

During the Civil War, Pleasant Hill was occupied as a military post by numerous commanders and suffered the consequences of such an occupation. Public buildings and many private properties were used to house soldiers and horses during the war years. Numerous skirmishes between Union forces and Quantrill's Confederate guerrillas took place around Pleasant Hill, including the 1862 "Battle of the Ravines". All of Cass County outside the borders of Pleasant Hill and Harrisonville were depopulated by the infamous "Order No. 11" issued in August, 1863 to deprive guerrillas of civilian support. By the end of the war, much of Pleasant Hill was put to the torch by one side or the other.

By 1865, the population of Pleasant Hill was greatly reduced as a result of the Civil War. Later that same year, however, Pleasant Hill began a rapid growth due to the arrival of the Atlantic Pacific (Mo.-Pac) railroad and within a few years was known as one of the most important towns in this section of the country.

The railroad reached Pleasant Hill on July 26, 1865. "Old Town", as the original town site was called, declined as the established firms moved down into the valley to "New Town" to be near the railroad. Many prospective investors came to Pleasant Hill from St. Louis on the first passenger train to arrive here. The next day a big sale of town lots took place.

With the coming of the railroad began an era of growth and prosperity seldom equaled by any western town. By 1866 the population of "New Town" had doubled and in 1867 had reached 2,200.

A.L. Webber's description of Pleasant Hill in 1867 was "a shipping point for cattle which were driven from Texas". Overland stages and large wagon trains traveled between Pleasant Hill and Ft. Scott, KS., Ft. Worth, Texas, and Indian Territory. It was not unusual to see 30 to 40 wagons loaded with merchandise on most any day of the week. Some businesses did \$4,000 a day and Pleasant hill was a rival of Kansas City.

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Even though Big Creek flooded regularly, the town continued to grow and prosper and by the 1870's stages for Harrisonville, Ft. Scott and all way stations arrived and departed from the Sherman House Hotel daily. In 1872, D.F. Beagle established the woolen mill laying the groundwork for the later Pleasant Hill Woolen Mills. George M. Kellogg established his "Maple Wood Flower Gardens" which became known as the largest greenhouse west of the Mississippi.

The Depression of 1873 caused Pleasant Hill to suffer greatly, but by 1880 prosperity was returning. The business of the Mo-Pac Railroad was enormous in the 1880's. The switch yards were the most extensive between Sedalia and Kansas City. In the 1890's businesses, professional service, manufacturing and industrial firms flourished in Pleasant Hill.

In 1904 a new rail line, the Rock Island, built a new depot ½ mile from the Mo-Pac depot. These excellent rail connections resulted in continued prosperity for the Pleasant Hill area. Pleasant Hill, in fact, became known as the "Friendly town of Famous Industries", boasting several important business operations. One of these, the Colonial Poultry Farms, was said to be the largest hatchery in the country. Another business of note was the Green Power and Light Company, which later became the energy giant Aquila, which got its start here with the construction of its first power plant.

The decline of the railroads after WWII greatly affected Pleasant Hill and the nation, causing the closing of the Rock Island depot in 1955 and the Mo-Pac depot in 1988.

As the nation shifted away from rail transportation and toward a reliance on automobiles, highways such as 7 and 58, which pass through Pleasant Hill, became more important. This transition led businesses to locate their stores along Highway 7 rather than in the downtown area. By the early 1980's most of the downtown commercial buildings were boarded up and empty.

The 7 highway business corridor, though more prosperous than downtown, was itself held back by competition from "big box" retail in neighboring communities. Since large commercial developments tended to locate near divided four-lanes, the two-lane 7 highway corridor was unable to attract retailers in sufficient numbers to replace the businesses lost. Pleasant Hill as a whole declined during this period, and in fact the population dropped by 100 between 1970 and 1980 to 3301. By the late 1980's, however, things began to change again, as the expanding Kansas City metro area and the exploding populations in Lee's Summit and Blue Springs resulted in people rediscovering Pleasant Hill in ever increasing numbers.

During the decade of the 1990's and continuing into the new millennium, a building boom changed Pleasant Hill forever. On average, 60 to 70 new homes were built annually during those years, with the 100-home mark reach for the first time in 2002. Construction and real estate development became important parts of the local economy. The population grew to 5,582 by the 2000 census, and soon topped 6,000.

New businesses opened up, particularly along the 7 highway corridor. Improvements were made to 7 highways to facilitate development. Revitalization of the old downtown business district also began in earnest, with the result that most buildings were completely or partially renovated for new business use.

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This revitalization was done in the context of historic preservation, and the entire downtown business district was declared a historic district.

As Pleasant Hill continues to grow and expand, it faces new challenges. Careful planning will be needed to ensure that community services and public infrastructure keeps up with the increased demand. Equally important is the need to preserve the natural and historic features which make Pleasant Hill unique.

LOCATION, CLIMATE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The City of Pleasant Hill is located in the southeast corner of the Kansas City Metropolitan Area, approximately 20 miles southeast of Kansas City, Missouri. Missouri Highway 7 connects Pleasant Hill with U.S. 50 Highway 6 miles to the north and Missouri Highway 58 runs east-west through the community. The present incorporated area of Pleasant Hill covers approximately 6 square miles.

The climate in Pleasant Hill has average temperatures of 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Winter temperatures will average 32 degrees Fahrenheit with summer temperatures averaging 77 degrees. The coldest temperature on record was -15 degrees in February of 1979 and the highest temperature of 115 degrees was recorded in July of 1954.

The annual precipitation is approximately 36 inches. Of this, 25 inches usually falls in April through September, during the crop growing season, which averages 200 days. Thunderstorms occur on about 53 day each year, with most of these occurring in the summer. Frequent springtime temperature changes often bring about the development of severe thunderstorms and occasionally tornadoes, but these are local and of short duration with damage being variable and spotty.

The average seasonal snowfall is approximately 17 inches. On an average of 5 days, at least 1 inch of snow is on the ground. The number of such days varies greatly from year to year. The average relative humidity in mid-afternoon is approximately 60 percent. Humidity is higher at night, and the average at dawn is about 80 percent. The sun shines approximately 75 percent of the time possible in summer and about 60 percent of the possible time in winter. Prevailing winds are from the south with an average wind speed of 12 miles per hour in spring.

Natural Resources. Soil is an important resource in the Pleasant Hill area, suitable for farming crops, raising livestock and construction of buildings. Limestone is another natural resource, in the Bethany Falls and the Higginsville geologic formations, and is used for concrete aggregate and road materials.

Topography. The City of Pleasant Hill is located mainly along a ridge between Big Creek and Duncan Branch. As its name indicates, the terrain is beautiful and has a pleasant atmosphere. Big Creek has varied flood plan, but work is under way to protect threatened developed areas. Duncan Branch poses no flood threat to the City of Pleasant Hill. Elevation in the Pleasant Hill study area ranges from 846 feet above sea level to high plateau at 1,000 feet above sea level.

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Special Areas of Concern. Several large lakes and drainage areas, for the most part adjacent to wooded area, exist in and around Pleasant Hill. These areas, often referred to as open space, should be protected. Protection should also be extended to the community's historic sites and properties.

CURRENT TRENDS

The rural development trends in northeast Cass County may be summarized as largely isolated residences and a few rural subdivisions. Within the Pleasant Hill planning area, most subdivisions proposed have been annexed or will be annexed when utilities are extended. Rural developments include:

- South of Pleasant Hill on Rafferty Road—seven units developed;
- Bay Hill Estates south of 155th Street—200 units developed;
- East of Pleasant Hill, south of 58 Highway—18 lot subdivision plat approved, undeveloped; and
- Several 3-4 lot subdivisions in isolated areas.

Remaining development is on single-lot 5-20 acres each. There are water districts east of 7 Highway and west of Pleasant Hill, though north of Pleasant Hill toward the city lake there is no rural water service, limiting development until annexation.

Pleasant Hill Residential Development Trends

The housing market in Pleasant Hill has altered significantly in the last decade. The total housing units increased by 637 units, a 41% increase. The County added to its housing stock by about 30% and Missouri's housing stock increased by about 11%. Occupancy rates increased across the board with Pleasant Hill's rates going up by about 3% and that of the County's by 1.3%. Owner occupancy in Pleasant Hill increased by about 1.3% and that in the County increased about 3.9%. Renter occupancy also increased in Pleasant Hill, while it declined in the County and the State. Vacancy rates dropped to about 6% indicating a strong housing market.

Undeveloped Lots by Subdivision in Pleasant Hill, MO (As of January 2003)

| Subdivision | Undeveloped, Platted Lots | Unplatted acreage |
|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Henley Meadows | 53 | 80 |
| Hunter's Ridge | 41 | 32 |
| Hickory Hills | 23 | 220 |
| Stone Creek | 26 | 0 |
| Glen-Rae Manor | 3 | 0 |
| Quail Meadows | 10 | 0 |
| Sugarland | 2 | 0 |
| Sugarland East | 42 | 0 |
| The Oaks | 7 | 35 |
| Wild Wood | 13 | 16 |
| Willow Creek | 19 | 0 |

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|---------------|------------|------------|
| Totals | 239 | 383 |
|---------------|------------|------------|

Source: City of Pleasant Hill

The average household size in Pleasant Hill has declined from 2.7 in 1990 to 2.66 in 2000. This has been a nationwide trend and is expected to continue in the future. Housing values have increased substantially in the City and in the County. The median housing value in Pleasant Hill increased from \$51,900 to \$94,300, an 82% increase and one of the highest in the State. Similar increases were registered in the County. Rents also increased by over 80% indicating newly built rental units.

Existing Land Use Distribution

Table 2.1 shows the land area of existing zoning/land use from the City's GIS showing total acreage of land in the city and acreages by each land use zoning classification. As this relates to the future land use map prepared for the comprehensive plan, the city should plan for its growth areas for other than just large-lot residential development. The “higher-density residential” must be accommodated where sewers can be cost-effectively extended.

Table 2.1: Existing Land Use Acreage by Type of Use

| Land Use Type | Within City Limits | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | Area in Acres | Percentage of Total |
| Large-lot Residential/Agricultural | 57 | 2.1 |
| Higher-Density Residential | 1,973 | 73.1 |
| High-Density Residential | 33 | 1.2 |
| Parks and Recreation | 58 | 2.1 |
| Public or Preservation Area | 4 | 0.1 |
| Institutional | 200 | 7.4 |
| Industrial | 186 | 6.9 |
| Commercial | 187 | 6.9 |
| Total | 2,698 (4.5 sq. mi.) | 100 |

Source: City GIS database, BWR

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