National Museum of Suburbia
and Suburban Policy Forum
Johnson County, Kansas

Interpretive Master Plan

September 2011
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Johnson County, Kansas

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Developed in consultation with museumINSIGHTS, objectIDEA and the Johnson County Museum

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Please note: The titles used to reference the Museum and Policy Forum throughout this document are working titles.
Executive Summary

Born on a farm outside Olathe, Kansas, in 1880, Jesse Clyde Nichols would live the American Dream by helping others achieve theirs through home ownership in America’s suburbs. His story and that of many others are among the stories to be told in the new National Museum of Suburbia.

The story of American suburbia is a long and complicated one. Some believe its infancy lies in the homogeneous neighborhoods of 1950s Levittown, but its true beginnings are much earlier, in the 1840s. Today’s suburban places are unrecognizable from earlier visions and more diverse than ever before, in terms of people, places, and ideas.

The 2000 U.S. Census data confirmed that more Americans live in suburban areas than in urban and rural areas combined. Many Americans today know no comparison; they were born and have lived in suburbia their entire lives. As a result, they may have little appreciation for the major paradigm shift that has occurred over the past century in how Americans organize their work and personal lives. No museum in the nation is telling this critical story of how suburbia has transformed the landscape, lifestyle, and value systems of a majority of Americans. The Johnson County Museum, with its great success interpreting the county’s suburbanization, intends to tell that story in the National Museum of Suburbia.

For many, suburbia equates to the American Dream, a hopeful vision with roots dating to the Great Depression. It is a dream of home ownership and better opportunities for one’s self and one’s children. Many Americans found that “good life” in the years following World War II. But not all were afforded opportunities in suburbs, and some rejected them altogether. It is a complicated story with many factors and contributors shaping it.

By many measures, Johnson County, Kansas, stands out as an archetypal suburban community, where visionary leaders and thoughtful planning have resulted in an exemplary place to live and raise families. Johnson County is an ideal location for a National Museum of Suburbia.

The Suburban Policy Forum will be a major program of the Museum. The goal of the Policy Forum will be to explore suburban policy issues and to support policy-makers and others concerned with suburbia’s future (see page 41).

The National Museum of Suburbia and Suburban Policy Forum are proposed as a public-private partnership between the non-profit entity of the Museum and Johnson County Government. Locally, the Museum and Policy Forum will give a stronger context for the achievements and challenges in Johnson County. Nationally, the Museum and Policy Forum will give voice to the paradigm shift that has occurred as more and more Americans choose to live in suburban communities. The Museum will be a must-see destination for visitors to the Kansas City region.

For the past 20 months, and with the support of a prestigious Institute of Museum and Library Services grant and a Johnson County Heritage Trust Fund grant, a task force of volunteers, members of the Museum’s staff, and a team of consultants has worked to create this Interpretative Master Plan. In addition, nearly 700 community members shared their feedback and ideas during this process. This Plan is a first step in a lengthy planning process and an important one for the visionary course it sets for the Museum.
Starting Points

Mission (p. 9)

The National Museum of Suburbia challenges you to explore your understanding of the American Dream.

Vision (p. 9)

Key components of the Museum’s vision include becoming:

- One of the first places people think of when they talk about the history and future of suburbia.
- A museum that is as much about the future as it is about the past.
- A “must-see” destination for visitors to Kansas City.

Resources, Challenges, and Opportunities (p. 10)

The Museum brings many resources to the project and understands that there will be many challenges, but also many opportunities. The Suburban Policy Forum can help to shape the discussion about the future of the suburbs. The Museum itself can become a place that transforms how people perceive suburbia. It is easy, and fun, to make light of suburban lifestyles, but it is also important to explore, and even celebrate, the strong American values that underpin life in suburban communities.

The Museum Today (p. 12)

The current Johnson County Museum is in desperate need of a new building. The existing building is not adequate for current needs, is poorly located, is spread across three sites, and cannot be expanded nor easily renovated to meet the Museum’s requirements. Centralizing the Museum’s operations in a more accessible location will help the Museum to better serve Johnson County’s residents as well as visitors from across the nation.

Interpretive Plan (p. 14)

Transformed as the National Museum of Suburbia, the Museum’s exhibitions will interpret the suburbs from three distinct, though interrelated views:

- **The suburbs are a place.** They are designed, planned, physical landscapes. Johnson County’s suburban communities have a long history—from the late 19th-century to today’s exurban developments. How and why suburban communities have come to dominate the built environment is worthy of exploring in a national museum.

- **Suburbia is a cultural construct.** Living in the suburbs represents a lifestyle. Cultural manifestations like “desperate housewives,” mall rats, bowling leagues, and PTAs have evolved as a result of suburban living.

- **Suburbia is valued collectively and individually—and both positively and negatively.** Whether loved or despised, the suburbs feature in many popular notions of things Americans value. They are criticized and celebrated in literary, design, social history, and psychology circles. The suburbs are painted, photographed, filmed, studied, blogged, and sung about with positive and negative passion.

In the tradition of the existing museum, a history of Johnson County is planned, an ideal case study from which to explore other dimensions of suburban history across the country and across time. Johnson County’s history provides local context and immediate relevance.
**Interpretive Vision** (p. 16)

The Museum’s interpretive vision is:

*A new Johnson County Museum will capture, commemorate, and critique the ideas of American suburbia, including the story of how the suburbs took hold and played out in Johnson County, Kansas. By interpreting suburbia through the eyes of agencies, planners, developers, builders, neighbors, policy-makers, residents, and scholars, the Museum will strive to chronicle how the suburbs came to be; reveal their many physical and cultural dimensions; and encourage people to think about suburbia’s real and imagined place in their hearts and minds, and its place in America’s future.*

**Exhibit Overview** (p. 22)

The Museum’s orientation area (light grey) introduces the ideas that the suburbs are a vision of the American Dream for many (but not all), and have evolved beyond any one definitive definition of a suburb.

The Museum’s four main, permanent galleries include: *Johnson County History* (brown), *Designing the Suburbs*, *Suburban Lifestyles*, and *Valuing Suburbia* (dark grey). These galleries will feature both thematic and chronological exhibitions and represent the “backbone” of the interpretive program.

Four focus galleries (yellow) showcase the Museum's expanding collections and its All-Electric House, provide experiences specifically for children, and provide space for changing exhibitions, some of which could be informed by the work of the Suburban Policy Forum.

In creating a new exhibition program, the Museum is committed to strengthening its relevance and educational value for the local community (especially school-aged children and families) and boosting the entertainment value of the Museum experience for tourists and local intergenerational audiences.

*Please note: The diagram is not meant to represent a floor plan of the Museum, but rather a plan of the content of the Museum’s exhibitions.*
**Program Plan** (p. 34)

The Museum’s program plan is a descriptive outline of the activities that the Museum proposes to undertake in order to achieve its mission. The program plan builds upon the interpretive plan by outlining the exhibits, programs, and activities that will be needed to tell the story of suburbia and to serve the Museum’s many different constituents.

**The Museum's Constituents** (p. 35)

The Museum will serve three broad constituencies:

1. **Regional community** members who will be interested in a wide range of programming and activities.
2. **Destination** visitors, including people visiting the Kansas City region, who will be looking for an interesting experience.
3. **Scholarly & academic** constituents, including historians, preservationists, and others interested in preserving and understanding the history of suburbia and of Johnson County and policy-makers and others interested in exploring options for suburbia’s future.

**Program Components** (p. 39)

The Museum’s Program Plan will encompass a wide range of programs and activities designed to meet the needs, desires, and expectations of each of its potential constituent groups. In most cases, constituent needs will be met in multiple activity areas as outlined below:

- The **Core Exhibitions** will be the heart of the Museum experience. They will challenge visitors to explore their understanding of suburbia and its relationship to the American Dream.
- **Changing Exhibitions** will encompass a wide range of topics and issues. They will be created by Museum staff members and drawn from other regional and national sources.
- The **Suburban Policy Forum** will serve as a center for exploration of suburban policy issues to support policy-makers and others.
- The Museum’s **School Programming** will include exhibit tours, summer camps, performances, and other programs designed to meet national and state educational standards and inspire children to understand and explore their own urban, rural, and suburban communities.
- **Public Programming** will include lectures, workshops, performances, and other programs designed to educate community members about suburban issues past, present, and future.
- The **Children’s Gallery** will be devoted to younger audiences to engage them in interactive role-playing opportunities designed to be both fun and educational.
- **Visitor and Community Services** including a museum store and cafe, will help make each visit a satisfying experience.
- **Revenue-Generating Events** will include fundraising events, corporate receptions, and private parties for large and small groups.
- The Museum’s **Collection** of artifacts, photographs, and archival material related to the history of Johnson County will be expanded as artifacts become available. The Museum will also collect artifacts related to the broader suburban story, primarily for use in exhibits.
- **Online Programming** will touch every aspect of the Museum's programming to create a strong regional and national presence.
Staffing and Operating Projections
The staffing and operating projections presented here represent preliminary order-of-magnitude estimates of the staffing, funding, and expenses that will be needed to operate the Museum in its first stable year after opening. That stable year is projected to be the beginning of year four of operations. The Museum anticipates dramatically increased earned revenue based on the exhibits and program outlined in this plan. The attendance and the revenue projections included here are preliminary and are believed to be conservative.

Attendance Projections (p. 51)
The consultant team estimates that 60,000 people will annually pay admission to the Museum, generating approximately $190,000. The Museum currently serves 30,000 people annually, and there is no general admission fee.

Projected Staffing (p. 52)
Once fully operational, it is anticipated that the Museum will need 22.5 FTE positions to operate with a total salary expense of $855,000. The current staffing level is 7.8 FTE with a total salary expense of $476,000.

Projected Revenues (p. 53)
A public-private partnership between county government and the Museum's non-profit entity will be responsible for the annual revenue required, anticipated at $1.5 million. The county's portion will not increase significantly, and is expected to be comparable to the current level of Museum funding. New revenue-generating opportunities in a new facility will significantly increase the support provided by the private Museum entity.

Space Needs (p. 56)
The Museum’s current facility is 20,000 square feet. In order to accommodate the programs and attendance projected in this plan, the Museum needs 56,000 square feet, with the potential to add an additional 40,000 square feet in the future.

Capital Budgets (p. 61)
The preliminary capital budgets presented here represent overall order-of-magnitude estimates of the costs of building the new Museum and new exhibits, and the related soft costs. The projected capital budget will be achieved through a public-private partnership:

- Approximately $34 million (including land acquisition) expected to be funded by county government to fund the facility.
- Approximately $10 million to be raised by the Museum's non-profit entity to fund the exhibition program.

All costs are in 2011 dollars. Where appropriate, escalated costs are included with the full budgets.

Next Steps (p. 64)
The preceding planning work is only the first step in planning for and designing the new Museum. Significantly more detailed planning and design work will be required before the Museum is ready to open. In the best case, the work listed here could be completed in three to five years.
Introduction

Background

From its beginnings, the Johnson County Museum has actively worked to enhance and improve its services to the community. Since 1987, the Museum's leadership has created four long-range plans and overseen their successful completion, receiving as a result eighteen regional and national awards for excellence.

The leadership of the Museum has again come together to develop a plan for how the organization can better serve the growing population of Johnson County, metropolitan Kansas City, and, now, the nation. The Museum is at a critical point in its history. It is in desperate need of a new building and, at the same time, is ready to take on a level and quality of services that can bring Johnson County national attention while better serving county residents.

The planning work began with the Museum’s 2006 strategic plan which outlined an ambitious vision for the Museum. Working together, the Task Force, the Museum Advisory Council, the Friends Board of Trustees, and the Museum staff have developed a master plan that ensures that the Museum continues to be an essential community resource and achieves its vision of becoming the National Museum of Suburbia.

Historically, museums have been located in cities along with most other cultural entities. However, as the population shifts to suburban areas like Johnson County, the centers of culture need to shift as well. Johnson County, a leader in so many other areas, has the opportunity to lead again by continuing to reinvest in its county Museum as it takes on a nationally prominent role. The new Museum will represent the pride and confidence Johnson County has in its people, heritage, and future.
Why Here? Why Now?

As an exemplary American suburb, Johnson County is an ideal location for a museum about suburbia. No other museum in the nation presents the story of the American suburbs. Establishing it in Johnson County, combined with the program of the Suburban Policy Forum, will represent another significant opportunity for national recognition for Johnson County.

To historians, the development of Johnson County offers multiple case studies in the ways suburbs grow and change, from the early developments of J.C. Nichols to contemporary development strategies. Historically and currently, Johnson County has many of the characteristics viewed by demographers as indicative of successful communities: high employment, a highly educated citizenry, and very high average household income (19th nationally). CNN/Money has ranked three Johnson County cities as among the 100 best places to live in the U.S.

To many residents, living in Johnson County is a realization of the American Dream: owning a home, living a full and satisfying life, and raising successful children.

Compared to other counties, Johnson County truly is outstanding. Citizen surveys reveal that Johnson County residents are very satisfied with the lifestyle found here. The 2011 results revealed that citizens rank:

- The quality of life 14% above the national average and 21% above the large community average.
- The image of the county 22% above the national average and 28% above the large community average.
- Public safety services 10% above the national average and 15% above the large community average.
- The quality of county services 28% above the national average and 38% above the large community average.
- The county 30% above the national average in planning for growth and 37% above the large community average.
- The value received for tax dollars 18% above the national average and 25% above the large community average.

County residents and the officials they elect have also long understood that investing in the community, especially in the schools, pays long-term benefits: businesses are attracted to the area because of availability of well-educated workers and residents have affordable housing options, attractive recreational and cultural amenities, and safe communities.

The Museum will tell a balanced national story of how and why the suburbs have come to dominate the American landscape—a story not told anywhere else.

Robert Bruegmann
Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Art History, Architecture, and Urban Planning
University of Illinois at Chicago
Beginning in 2000, the U.S. Census data demonstrated that more people live in America's suburbs than in urban and rural places combined. That shift is arguably one of the most significant changes in how Americans are choosing to live.

The Museum will help county residents and visitors to understand this phenomenon as it evolved in Johnson County and around the nation. The Museum will also help residents to understand what historically has made Johnson County a great place to live and provide a place for them to come together to both celebrate its success and to plan for its future as an exemplary suburban community.

**A Note About the Planning Process**

The exhibit concepts, program plan, facility recommendations, staffing plans, and budgets included here are preliminary. The estimates included with them are based on assumptions about facility location, sources of operating support, estimated attendance, and other variables that cannot be confirmed this early in the planning process. These estimates are designed to give stakeholders an early approximation of what will likely be required to make the Museum a success. The next phase of work will include prototyping, testing, and evaluating the exhibit and educational program concepts, and validating the projected staffing needs, capital and operational budgets, and space needs. A fundraising feasibility study will also be necessary.
Starting Points

The planning for the Museum begins with its mission and vision, which were developed during the Museum’s 2006 strategic planning process. The plan takes into consideration the Museum’s resources and is cognizant of its restraints. The Museum must be aware of the challenges it faces as it moves forward, and be prepared to capitalize on opportunities that present themselves.

Mission

The Museum’s mission statement was drafted in earlier planning. It serves as the foundation for developing all of the Museum’s programs and activities.

*The National Museum of Suburbia challenges you to explore your understanding of the American Dream.*

Vision

The vision is what the community would like to see the Museum accomplish. Based on the input and feedback from the community, the Museum will be:

- One of the first places people think of when they talk about the history and future of suburbia.
- A museum that is as much about the future as it is about the past.
- A place that provokes and enables discussion about suburbia’s past and future across communities of professionals, local and regional residents, scholars, and other interested people nationwide.
- A “must see” destination for visitors to Kansas City.
• A place where there is always something new to see, do, or participate in.
• A place where children of all ages are engaged in active learning about the places they live and their relationship to the wider world.
• A place where people come to understand how and why Johnson County is what it is today and what their options are for shaping how it grows in the future.
• A community gathering place for meetings, events, and discussions about local and national issues.
• A museum that has a strong partnership with metro area schools and other community and cultural organizations.
• A museum that has a strategy to sustain itself over the long term.

Resources
The Museum’s resources are the things on which it can draw as it plans for the future. The Museum has many resources. The principal ones include:

• A rich story with many entry points.
• National interest in the topic of suburbia, with no significant competition.
• All-Electric House.
• Stable county funding.
• Smart, committed staff with expertise in suburban history.
• Energetic and enthusiastic board members.
• Growing audience for museum programs.
• Highly educated county population.
• Strong 2-D and 3-D suburban collections.
• Successful programming at the Lanesfield School.
• Relative abundance of artifacts available inexpensively.
• Many potential benefactors in the community of Johnson County.
• A national story with the potential to attract national funders.
• A more visible and accessible location could be a result of the search for a new site.
• Recognition by the County Commission that quality of life is an economic development tool.

Challenges
The Museum’s challenges are areas that need to be addressed as the planning for the new Museum continues. The planning work will address many of these challenges, but some may remain as underlying constraints into the future.

Overarching Challenges
These broad-scale challenges can be addressed will be addressed, but, it is best to be aware of them as the project moves forward:

• Convincing local and national funders that suburbia is a topic worthy of support in a national museum.
• Overcoming negative attitudes about suburbia.
• Continually making the case that it is appropriate to locate a national museum of suburbia in the Midwest and Johnson County and, specifically, to address the common question: “Why isn’t the museum in Levittown?”
Facility Challenges

The Museum’s most significant challenges are its current site and building. Parts of the building are unusable because of water and mold problems. The remaining areas of the building are inadequate for basic museum functions and are severely restrictive in many of the Museum’s core programmatic areas. Specific concerns include:

• A location that is isolated from other cultural facilities and from main travel routes within the county.
• Inadequate space to provide guided tours to the public.
• No place to host revenue-generating events.
• No auditorium, which limits adult programming.
• Inadequate space to accommodate most available traveling exhibits.
• Limited area for Museum-related merchandising and no food service that would encourage longer visits.
• Inadequate space for large groups of school children and bus tours.
• Inadequate space to professionally store the Museum’s collections—both in terms of size and environmental controls.
• Lack of space for exhibit preparation and storage.
• Lack of appropriate processing spaces for incoming collection items.
• No space for a research library and limited space to assist researchers and store research materials.
• Lack of space for robust volunteer and intern programs.
• Lack of office space for existing or increased staffing.
• Lack of general storage areas.
• Lack of space on the current site to expand to meet Museum needs.
• No room on site for future expansion.
• Inability to capture the imagination of potential donors.

Opportunities

The Museum’s opportunities are areas where the Museum might excel once its challenges are addressed.

• By creating a nationally significant cultural institution, the Museum can help to solidify Johnson County’s position as a nationally ranked county.
• By establishing the Suburban Policy Forum, the Museum will help lead the discussion about the future of suburbs and develop a reputation as a museum that looks to the future as well as at the past.
• By focusing its nationally significant programming on regional residents, the Museum can build strong connections to the community and become a model for other museums with a national story and a regional focus.
• As a center for community events, the Museum can contribute significantly to the quality of life in Johnson County by preserving and sharing the county's heritage and its many links to the national story of suburbia.
• The Museum can become a place that transforms how people perceive suburbia. It is easy, and fun, to take pot shots at suburban lifestyles, but it is important to celebrate the strong American values that underpin the choice people make when they choose to live in a suburban community.

Perhaps the biggest opportunity is that the Museum can develop a national reputation simply because of the story it tells. **No other museum is telling the national story of suburbia.**

By taking up the story of suburbia, Johnson County once again positions itself as a national leader in developing suburban communities, in understanding what makes them successful, and in learning lessons that can be used in the future.
The Museum Today

Main Museum Building

Core Exhibitions
- Johnson County history exhibit: 6,000 square feet.
- KidScape: 1,500 square feet.
- All-Electric House.

Changing Exhibitions
- 700 square feet of temporary exhibit space.
- Regular temporary exhibitions created by Museum staff.

School Programming
- Structured educational programming for school and youth groups.
- Online curriculum guides and resources for teachers and students.
- One small classroom.

Collections
- Collections of artifacts and archival materials related to the history of Johnson County.
- 3,000 square foot archival and 3-D artifact storage.

Lanesfield School
- Listed on National Register of Historic Places.
- 800 square foot exhibition on one-room schools in Kansas.
- Award-winning educational programming.

Off-site Collections Storage
- Located in Johnson County Operations Center in Olathe.
- 4,000 square feet of space.

Deficiencies of the Existing Facilities
As outlined on the previous page, the Museum’s most significant challenges are its current site and building. The most critical include:

- Parts of the building are unusable because of water and mold problems.
- No auditorium, which limits adult programming.
- Inadequate space for large groups of school children.
- Limited exhibit, collections storage, and program space.
- No place to host revenue-generating events.
- Inadequate space to professionally store the Museum’s collection: both in terms of size and environmental controls.
- Lack of office space for existing or future staffing.
- A location that is isolated from other cultural facilities and from main travel routes within the county.
- Lack of space on the current site to expand to meet these needs.
Locations of Museum Facilities

Map showing the locations of the Main Museum Building, Collection Storage Building, and Lanesfield School.
Interpretive Plan for Exhibitions

- *Why did Johnson County Museum decide to become a National Museum of Suburbia?*
- *Why should a national museum be located here?*
- *What will it display and what will it be about?*

Take a moment and, before reading further, create a picture in your mind that represents the suburbs. What image or images do you see?

You might picture a landscape like that seen when one descends into the Kansas City Airport: curvaceous, tree-lined streets, backyard patios and pools, privacy fences and clusters of houses that all look somewhat the same. You may have conjured up images of people that comprise the ideal suburban family: Mom, Dad, Junior, and Sissy—the friendly neighbors that sometimes borrow sugar. You may have pictured modern conveniences and a two-car garage, imagined no crime, great schools, and nearby soccer fields and places to shop. You might offer this suburban lifestyle as a great way to raise a family—an American dream.

Or, you may envision the suburbs in less-celebrated light. You may have thought about the historical oppression of women, environmental issues of sprawl, the discrimination towards people that are not like the others, the amount of time spent commuting or working in the at-home office, or the loss of personal self-expression in a neighborhood of beige.

This is the complex history of suburbia.
Background

Through research, surveys, and a great deal of healthy debate, the Task Force seeks to organize the stories of a new National Museum of Suburbia around three main ideas:

First, the suburbs are a place. They are designed, planned living-scapes. Johnson County’s suburban communities have a long history—from the late 19th-century to today’s exurban developments. How and why suburban communities have come to dominate the built environment is worthy of exploring in a national museum.

Second, suburbia is a cultural construct. Cultural manifestations like “desperate housewives,” mall rats, bowling leagues, and PTAs have evolved as a result of suburban living. Consider that 2010’s Grammy-winning album of the year, entitled The Suburbs (by Arcade Fire) explores “the badlands between safety and boredom.”

Finally, suburbia is valued collectively and individually—and both positively and negatively. Dearly loved or despised, the suburbs feature in many popular notions of American values. They are criticized and celebrated in design, social history, and psychology circles. The suburbs are painted, photographed, filmed, studied, blogged, and sung about with positive and negative passion.

Exhibitions in the Museum will equip visitors so that they can examine the celebrated and criticized issues in suburbia’s past as well as its future, such as:

- What accounts for the historical ebb and flow as people flee from and, lately, return to the urban core?
- What role has suburbia played in racial segregation?
- Are the suburbs an environmental disaster or more of a success story?
- Have government programs helped or hindered their development?
- Has transportation been too accommodating?
- Has infrastructure been too supportive of sprawl?
- How have people realized their American Dreams in the suburbs?
- Why is it that more than half of the American population resides in the suburbs?

Only in Johnson County, at the National Museum of Suburbia, will one be able to explore the history of the suburbs. Familiar favorites—like the Museum's 1950s All-Electric House—will remind visitors of one vision of the American Dream. Added will be new context—objects, environments, and innovative multimedia programs—to provide windows into suburbia’s physical, cultural, and psychological or affective dimensions.

The United States enters the 21st-century as a suburban nation. The U.S. Census confirmed this back in 2000 by reporting that 50 percent of Americans live in the suburbs. Suburbia is a landscape that is ubiquitous, a backdrop to life so commonplace that few take conscious notice of it.

To urban sociologists, “suburbs” is an ecological term, distinguishing these settlements from cities, rural villages, and other kinds of communities. “Suburbia” on the other hand, is a cultural term, intended to connote a way of life, or, rather, the intent of those who use it to connote a way of life.

Interpretive Vision

The transformed Johnson County Museum, now called the National Museum of Suburbia, is intended to capture, commemorate and critique the idea of American suburbia, including the story of how the suburbs took hold and played out in Johnson County, Kansas. By interpreting suburbia through the eyes of agencies, planners, developers, builders, policy-makers, neighbors, residents, and scholars, the Museum will strive to chronicle how the suburbs came to be; reveal their many physical and cultural dimensions; and encourage people to think about suburbia’s real and imagined place in their hearts and minds, and its role as one vision of the American Dream.

This vision has guided the planning team through the master plan process and has shaped the vision for the visitors’ experience.

As Becky Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese write in The Suburban Reader,

Suburbia is a landscape. Freeways, shopping malls, lawns, detached homes, mortgage payments, and home fix-it jobs define the texture of life for many of us as we go through our daily routines shaped by the suburban framework of life. Yet few of us stop to think critically about this backdrop, the spatial organization that shapes our everyday lives.

Through the implementation of this interpretive plan, Johnson County Museum, in an expanded museum facility, will tell the story of how America has become a suburban nation. This plan provides a framework for how the exhibits might be organized, identifies what major themes might be addressed, and offers some ideas about how Johnson County’s suburban story might be woven into the larger national story.

The museum is proposing to tell the national story thematically around three core ideas: Designing the Suburbs, Suburban Lifestyles, and Valuing Suburbia. Continuing its commitment to the local Johnson County community, the Museum also plans a gallery focused on the county’s own suburban story in a generally chronological format.
Underpinnings: What Informed Our Process?

The statement of vision, and much of the plan that stems from it, was shared with a small scholarly community through telephone interviews. It was also informed by a public survey that was shared via the Museum's website and mailed to the Museum's current members and supporters (see appendix). To date, nearly 300 people have taken this survey and have provided valuable impressions, reactions, and advice.

The concept for a mobile exhibition was developed during this phase of planning and launched in April 2011. The exhibition was staged as an “Idea Fair” in which the core messages of the evolving interpretive plan were shared and discussed in a highly participatory format. In the Idea Fair, images and questions provoke people to use sticky notes, scribble maps, and graffiti boards to tell the Museum what they know and what they expect to see, learn or do in the new Museum (see appendix).

Benchmarking

In April of 2010 members of the planning team traveled to Washington, DC to “benchmark” the challenges and opportunities that national museums face. Lessons learned from the DC trip were summarized during a follow-up meeting (see appendix). Those lessons in bold were noted as crucial and given extra discussion by the planning team. They are:

- Align funding model and audience needs.
- Articulate: Why are we national? Why do we become so? How do we prove that we are?
- Be picky with forming partnerships. They matter.
- Define the relationship between the Museum and the county.
- Know your audience in order to serve it. Distinguish audience from constituents.
- Location matters.
- Provide different perspectives on core topics.
- We need a big idea that we can all articulate.
- Be clear on national identity and brand.
- Collaborate with architects. Facility is really important. Building is part of the package.
- Define how the county needs and national identity work together.
- Define measures for success.
- Great venues make money.
- A museum needs to know its story.
- Navigation (intellectual and physical) must be simple.
- The Suburban Policy Forum is perhaps the best vehicle for achieving a national reach.
- Remember, most people visit museums to see things.
- Staff should be integrated and motivated.
- Changing exhibition space is really important.
**Design Goals**

A design goals workshop was conducted in May of 2010 and again, informed by the benchmarking trip, a visit to the National Museum of Suburbia was imagined and critiqued, with the goal of defining the best visitor experience. The visit was broken down into several typical experiences: approach, arrival, orientation, self-guided permanent exhibitions, facilitated programs, and signature experiences.

Goal statements and expectations were drafted for each stage of the experience. They are:

**Approach and Arrival**

- Set the Museum in a familiar suburban context. The authenticity of the location should be felt.
- The museum should be easy to find. Parking and navigation should be easy.
- The building should represent an outward expression of suburbia. Ideas include a grand lawn and a very usable backyard with the sound of lawn mowers greeting visitors, or the exterior of the building could invoke a drive-in theater setting that might be truly functional for evening showings of suburban-themed movies.
- There should be a “Wow!”

**Orientation**

- Foreshadow the Museum’s core ideas.
- Provide a sense of familiarity and nostalgia.
- Offer a really good map and a highlights brochure.
- Be known for a “visitors come first” culture. Greet visitors and give them a friendly welcome.
- Provide a museum overview in a dedicated orientation space.

**Self-Guided Permanent Exhibitions**

- Create personal connections with objects. People should be moved emotionally and touched nostalgically by them.
- Provide relevance. Offer: “How did this impact the U.S.?”
- Offer then and now experiences to help people cross-reference enduring and trendy ideas over time.
- Offer here and across the nation experiences to help people cross-reference consistent and contrasting ideas over a geographical spread.
- Debunk myths and misconceptions.
- Provide intergenerational experiences.
- Interpret through a multiplicity of perspectives.
- Foster creativity. For example, let visitors design their own suburbs.
- Provide chronology.
Facilitated Programs

• Encourage people to explore the suburbs “for real” by offering walking and driving tours or podcasts.
• Offer contemporary issues programs via films and lectures.
• Amenities spaces—food service and gift shop, for example—should be evocative of museum content. Event space should be dramatic and attractive.

Signature Experiences

Possible signature experiences include:

• Re-interpreting the All-Electric House.
• Gaining a reputation for theatrical, performance-based programming.
• Collecting and showcasing other model homes: Lustron House, Sears & Roebuck houses (1908-1940), LEED house, etc.
• Creating the world’s first drive-through exhibition. (Perhaps an interpretive “car wash” experience?)

Assumptions

At the goal setting workshop, the planning team engaged in a friendly debate over a few controversial assumptions. The assumptions were phrased as declarative statements and all participants cast votes for how strongly they agreed or disagreed with them. This exercise resulted in agreement about the following assumptions.

The planning team strongly agrees that:

• The idea of the American Dream is what will “hook” the widest possible audience.
• Johnson County is a good case study for illuminating a national, suburban story.

The team also agrees that:

• The story of Johnson County is the most important piece of our interpretive program.
• The new Museum mostly explores contemporary ideas.
Exhibition Planning

With these underpinnings, the Museum ventured forth to develop the master plan, which in turn, guided the exhibition planning team as it continued to define and refine the exhibits during the first true phase of exhibition design.

The creation of a unique, new, world-class museum with a national message is a multi-layered task. First, the Museum must create exhibits that not only convey to visitors the important ideas and stories that can be learned from suburban history, but it must also create exhibits that will bring the past to life and excite visitors to learn more.

Given the Museum's national vision and its need to cover day-to-day operating expenses, it must become both a destination attraction for tourists and be embraced by the local community. It will continue to be important to serve the local audience well, and the proposed Johnson County-specific exhibits and public program offerings will do that.

With its recommendation of more than 16,000 square feet of permanent, changing, and special exhibitions, the program plan represents the threshold size of exhibitions for a destination attraction. Packaged attractively and with a strong marketing presence, family appeal, a carefully crafted website, accessibility to the interstate, and a growing, cultural tourist market in Kansas City, it can appeal to an audience beyond regional boundaries. To do so will require that the Museum create memorable experiences worthy of the powerful stories it has to tell. The real story of the American suburbs is not well known by many, despite the numbers who live there, and its richness allows for a wealth of exhibition opportunities.

The goal at the outset of the master plan is to identify the key exhibit messages that the Museum wants every visitor to understand. They in turn inform the development of the stories in the exhibits. The proposed exhibitions that unfold in the following pages all stem from the core idea set forth below. If visitors remember nothing else about suburban history from their visits, they should remember this core idea. Museum evaluators have found that if a museum does its job well, visitors will be able to recall or articulate the core idea and up to seven (plus or minus two) additional secondary messages. And evaluators advise that messages be stated in a single sentence with an active verb. The sentences that follow the core idea are those supportive messages as developed by the planning team.

Core Idea for Exhibitions

The American suburbs are a physical, cultural and emotional construct—the ideas they embody challenge us to explore our understandings of “The American Dream.”

The core idea above provides a general armature for the content of the exhibitions. It suggests that we can examine the suburbs (the built environment) and suburbia (the state of mind) as a way of peering into one aspect of American identity—the American Dream.

Exhibitions will use the story of suburbia in America as a mirror to reflect the history of our nation; as a window to provide a glimpse into the multi-dimensional aspects of what it means to be an American; and as a lens to focus our individual ideas about what the American Dream means to each of us—yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The core idea declares that the Museum will interpret suburban history. But it also invites the Museum’s exhibitions to explore themes that bridge historical and contemporary subjects and issues of suburbia in both
complexity of their impact. Creating a museum that will reach the host of varied audiences, from school children to tourists, families to local residents, requires a clear understanding of the separate and overlapping needs of different age groups and audience motivations. This plan outlines some of the issues and methods for achieving maximum audience impact.

**Thematic Approach**
The well-articulated messages create a centerpiece of rich meaning and promise a powerful audience experience. The proposed exhibits and programs present opportunities for both formal and informal learning, and will be clearly and fully connected to the key interpretive themes. These overarching themes solidify the close connection between the relationship of suburbia and the idea of an American Dream, offering insight into the workings and intentions of the institution and personalizing the physical, cultural and emotional dimensions of suburbia. An understanding of these thematic connections will support the most engaging of visitor experiences. The enjoyment of history is always enhanced by a sense of personal connection. The interpretive developer’s role as “audience advocate” is to assure that all visitors are invited into a deep and personal interaction with the material presented.
Exhibit Overview

The following narrative and associated diagrams provide a written description of the proposed exhibitions for the National Museum of Suburbia. This overview offers a glimpse into what visitors may experience when the new Museum is open.

The bulk of the exhibitions will be divided into five main long-term galleries (all working titles): Johnson County History, Designing the Suburbs, Living in Suburbia, Valuing Suburbia, and a children’s interactive gallery. This gallery division provides visitors with a choice of how they might experience the Museum and options for future visits. A visitor who is seeking an in-depth experience could spend about 45 minutes in each gallery.

While each gallery will have a unique look, common elements should unify the overall design. Galleries might include respite areas where visitors can pause to sit and reflect on their museum experience or visit with their group or other visitors. Open spaces within the galleries will accommodate gatherings of small groups for live, theatrical, interpretive programs.

Balance will be achieved through the use of traditional media, graphics, objects and artifacts, and computer and hands-on interactive elements.

Some of the proposed exhibits cover difficult and complicated subject matter. The exhibits should be designed, both visually and in content, to be accessible to the widest possible audience. Throughout the Museum, the voices of individuals will be used to illustrate key messages where appropriate and to assist visitors with making more abstract ideas vivid. The use of personal narrative will also help visitors to make personal connections to the issues explored in the exhibits.
Exhibition Program Diagram

The exhibition program diagram* at right suggests that visitors might begin their museum visits by considering the ideas of suburbs, suburbia (or suburban lifestyle), and the American Dream. The orientation area (the light grey bubble) should introduce the ideas: that the suburbs are a vision of the American Dream for many (but not all), and have evolved beyond the definitive definition of a suburb. The idea that suburbs and suburbia are valued differently by people should also be included.

Following orientation, visitors might choose either of two major context galleries: the Johnson County story (brown) or a series of galleries about American suburbia (dark grey). Each of these galleries provides interpretation of the suburban story, from a local/regional context and from a national context, respectively. These galleries will feature both thematic and chronological exhibitions that represent the “backbone” of the interpretive program.

Focus galleries (yellow) serve special audiences and highlight the collections and operations of the Museum. Some ideas include a collections-based exhibition gallery, a spotlight on the All-Electric House, a children's gallery, and a flexible gallery devoted to changing exhibits, some informed by the work of the Suburban Policy Forum.

* The diagram is not meant to be a floor plan of the Museum, but rather a plan of the content of the Museum’s exhibitions.
Museum Arrival and Orientation

A welcoming lobby, grand and impressive enough to host events for the community, will inspire and whet the appetite of visitors. Here they are immersed in first impressions, make decisions about where to go and what to see, and get their questions answered about special exhibitions, ticketing, and programming options for the day.

It is always a good idea, in “neutral” museum spaces such as the Museum lobby to provide some preview exhibitions at no cost, and to provide sight lines to some key attractions. This sketch shows that the lobby may include views to the relocated All-Electric House (potentially located inside the new Museum), which may be offered under a separate ticket price, and feature artifacts like the Museum’s 1955 two-tone Chevy Bel-Air, the White Haven Motor Lodge neon sign acquired in 2010, or smaller collection items related to special exhibitions, seasonal events, or new acquisitions.

The complex story of suburbia may require an orientation and this should be offered relatively close to the threshold of the exhibition gallery entrances. Each visitor to the Museum will have his/her own unique understanding of what suburbia is, so an orientation experience will help usher them into the Museum with a few foundational messages:

• Many Americans’ vision of the American Dream has been a suburban one.
• There are stereotypes about suburbs and suburban living—some consistent over time and some new.
• An agreed upon definition of what constitutes a suburb does not exist. The definition of “suburb” evolves over time.

Orientation experiences range from simple graphic panels, to the classically straightforward documentary film, to elaborate exhibit installations. For the National Museum of Suburbia, the consultant team recommends a dedicated theatrical experience, that has both pre- and post-exhibit value, that is, an experience visitors may use as a preview or summary to their experience.

The recommended experience is an object theater in which dimensional stage sets and objects are brought to life through audiovisual media technology. This technique lends itself especially well to explaining complex subjects interpreted through multiple perspectives.
Designing the Suburbs
The gallery might illustrate suburbs representing different times, locations, and characteristics of developments:

- Picturesque Suburbs of the middle of the 19th-century to the early 20th-century like Llewellyn Park, West Orange, NJ, Riverside, IL, and Mission Hills, KS in Johnson County.
- Streetcar Suburbs like Brookline, MA, Oak Park, IL, Chevy Chase, MD, and New Rochelle, NY.
- Homeowner-built suburbs promoted by Sears kit houses and the more working-class suburbs like the African-American area of Chagrin Falls outside of Cleveland and South Gate outside of Los Angeles, CA.
- Post-war Suburbs like Levittown, NY, Lakewood, CA, Prairie Village, KS.
- Edge Cities like Boca Raton, FL, Scottsdale, AZ, Palo Alto, CA, and Overland Park, KS.

Each of these suburban types could be profiled with a large overhead map that offers a birds-eye view of the layout of the suburbs, a “typical” home that one might find there, and objects and stories that compare and contrast regional distinctions.

Additional exhibit themes may address the role of planning and zoning, federal government policies that supported or hindered suburban development, and the role developers and real estate associations played in creating and institutionalizing deed restrictions and racial covenants.

A multimedia streetcar exhibit (next page) affords visitors the opportunity to climb aboard a streetcar to tour America’s suburbs during key moments in their development. Local residents might recognize the re-created Strang Line interurban car, which carried commuters and visitors to and from Overland Park.

Inspired by the aerial photographs of Jim Wark and the interpretations of suburban landscape by Dolores Hayden *Putt Putt Suburbia* (page 26) introduces visitors to some of the types of suburban communities built across the United States from the 1880s to the 2000s, by inviting them to play a round of mini golf.

Key secondary messages for this gallery include:

- Initially set in the outskirts of many urban cities in the early to mid 1800s, suburban housing stock grew exponentially with the advent of the streetcar and homeowner-built suburbs, both highly dependent on reliable transportation means. This growth exploded in post-war suburbs with revised mortgage lending policies, incentives for new home builders, and the Federal Highway Act.
- The role of planning and city involvement varied dramatically at different periods of time.
- There was not one model for all suburban developments. Regional differences and dates of establishment were significant factors.
- Lessons learned from Henry Ford’s innovative assembly line production of cars were instrumental in the mass-produced housing of the post-war era. The affordability of cars made it possible for more people to move to the suburbs.
- The federal government was a major player in the growth of suburbs. The ideal of homeownership for every American was promoted by the federal government during the Great Depression of the 1930s and continues today.

No great town can long exist without great suburbs.
Frederick Law Olmsted
*Landscape Architecture* 21 (July 1931): 262
• Rapid growth of the suburbs characterized the post-World War II era for three chief reasons:
  1. The economic boom following World War II
  2. The need to quickly solve the housing shortage for returning veterans
  3. White people fleeing the urban areas as a result of school segregation and the larger Civil Rights movement ("White Flight")

• Federal legislation made it cheaper for someone to construct a new home outside of the city than to build a new home or improve upon a preexisting structure in the city. Loans and subsidies also favored new housing in suburban areas as opposed to in established cities. The real estate lobby played a significant role in many of those federal policies.
Suburban Lifestyles
In this gallery, the organizational structure of the exhibitions shifts from a geographical, or location-based approach (as seen in Designing the Suburbs), to a more chronological approach in which key events and brackets of time are distinctly reflected in suburban lifestyles. The hallmark moments, materials, and mind-sets of these lifestyles will be presented, illuminated, and discussed.

Thematically organized displays highlight ideas that cut across time—themes like health and safety, kids and family, women’s and men’s roles, work and recreation, and community and diversity.

A highlight of the exhibition may be an experiential installation entitled But What Will the Neighbors Think? It features a suburban backyard surrounded by a privacy fence. At key locations in the fence peep-holes and listening spots offer opportunities to eavesdrop and spy on some of the less-popular associations of suburban life: conformity, the role of women, exclusivity both in terms of wealth and race, etc.

Also in this gallery, visitors may find a Tag Sale! (this page)—a collection of household artifacts, displayed as if for sale from someone’s garage and offered by several generations of suburbanites. A survey of the no-longer-useful items may prompt conversations about how life has changed in the suburbs. In the display, “serious history” items from across the decades are mingled with items of popular culture. In the richly textured assemblage visitors might find screen-printed tin lunch boxes emblazoned with images of television shows like Batman, The Partridge Family, and the Dukes of Hazzard. As well, they might find toys and board games, lawn furniture, household appliances, power tools, and family camping gear.

As visitors browse the collections, it is expected that visitors will share stories like, “I used to carry that lunch box!” or “Remember when we had patio furniture like that?” Overhead, dissolving projections of images and clips from commercials and the Museum’s photograph collection add to the visitor experience. A section of the exhibit might invite visitors to sit and relax while watching vintage clips from television shows and movies.
Many people were attracted to the homogeneous nature of many suburban communities. People sought areas where people of the same social standing, economic means, religious views, and ethnic backgrounds also lived.

The ideal of home ownership was seen as “American” during the 1950s when communism and the USSR seemingly threatened American democracy. The prosperity of that time promoted a consumer culture of materialism that was encouraged as patriotic at the beginning of the Cold War. Innovations in consumer products supported the new materialism, as did the strong economy.

Many Americas believed they had achieved the good life, or American Dream, during the post-war years after experiencing the economic hardship of the Great Depression and sacrifices during World War II.

Community-mindedness, volunteerism, and civic engagement flourished in suburban communities until the 1980s when marked decreases were reported, and social isolationism grew.

Bedroom communities were, in time, no longer dependent on the core city they surrounded. They had their own shopping, employment and financial centers, and cultural and recreation amenities. The impact of this shift from a lifestyle perspective is significant.

Lack of regulation created a record mortgage crisis in the 2000s with the highest number of foreclosed mortgages in U.S. history. The economic crisis that ensued shook the ideal that home ownership was an American value that all citizens should aspire to achieve.

Suburban lifestyles gave rise to distinct “cultures”—consumer culture, popular culture, car culture, and youth culture.

The suburbs have played an extensive role in popular culture. They are painted, photographed, filmed, studied, blogged and sung about with positive and negative passion. Popular depictions of suburban lifestyles will be presented to visitors to demonstrate how impressions have changed over time. Classic television of the 1950s, like Leave it to Beaver and Father Knows Best, idealized the suburban home and lifestyle; by the 1980s, television programs like Roseanne attempted to tell another story—that of the working-class family living in suburbia. In 2010, the Grammy Album of the Year was entitled The Suburbs. The band, Arcade Fire, explored “the badlands between safety and boredom.” Even a new Disney show joins the suburban landscape with the 2010-debut of Kick Buttowski: Suburban Daredevil, based on creator Sandro Carsaro's experiences growing up in suburban Stoneham, Massachusetts.

Key messages for this gallery include:

- People have been attracted to suburban lifestyles for varied reasons over time, including the belief that suburban living was healthier, safer, provided a better education for children, encouraged more family time, was cleaner, and better guaranteed home investment and property values.

Becky Nicholaides and Andrew Wiese, The Suburban Reader, 259
Valuing Suburbia

In *Valuing Suburbia*, visitors come face-to-face with some of the residents of suburbia across time and place. This is intended to be a media-rich gallery in which the historic voices and images of designers, dwellers, and dreamers are chronicled through oral, historical accounts. The gallery may be organized according to numerous and pervasive human responses that are found in the history of suburbs: responses like hope, tension, joy, defeat, love, fear, celebration, distaste, etc. The idea of hope, for example, might be explored by listening to the aspirations of a 1920s land developer, a 1940s small business owner, a 1960s African American homeowner, and a 12-year-old soccer star who plans to go to high school in 2014.

The idea of fear might be explored by listening to the concerns of a 1980s farmer whose livelihood is threatened by encroaching development, a 1960s white man who is concerned about his property value because of the recent entrance of an African American family to the neighborhood, that same African American family who is concerned about racial discrimination in its new home; a 1990s elderly person worried about losing his/her home due to rising property taxes, and a 2000s neighbor upset about the changing character of her mid-century neighborhood.

Also in this gallery, critiques of American suburbs will be confronted to better understand their origins, as will issues of regionalism, the tension between city and suburb, and the growing tensions between new and old suburban areas.

America's suburbs are criticized and celebrated in design, social history, and psychology circles. That critique began with suburban housing itself. Even in 18th-century England, the boxlike nature of housing was ridiculed, and that critique has intensified over time. Initial critiques centered around the architectural or design aesthetic of suburban housing. By

We can no longer afford the luxury of sprawl.

Dolores Hayden,
Cited from *Building Suburbia*, 157

Throwing away older neighborhoods while constructing new ones is an expensive practice that taxpayers in the United States cannot afford to pay for.

Dolores Hayden, "What is Sprawl?"
Hartford Courant, July 1, 2004
(Reprinted in *The Suburban Reader*, 476)

The social circles in the burbs are more arbitrary and less wary. They’ll take almost anybody in—just as our little town took me in, long before I knew I wanted to be taken.

Charles McGrath,
“We Stayed for the Kids…and Stayed and Stayed”
(Reprinted in *The Suburban Reader*, 497)
the middle of the 20th-century, the criticisms against
suburbia grew to include the identity of those who chose to
live in suburban communities. Historian John Archer
argues that the critiques stemmed from “the culture
establishment,” which was “profoundly fearful of the rise
of mass culture,” (“Everyday Suburbia: Lives and
condemning 20th-century suburban lifestyles is prolific:
David Riesman’s The Lonely Crowd (1950), William H.
Whyte’s The Organization Man (1956), Lewis Mumford’s
The City in History (1961), and many others circulated that
message. The 1964 Malvina Reynolds song “Little Boxes,”
popularized by folksinger Pete Seeger, poignantly captured
the critiques of conformity in housing and people’s
lifestyles, and is still one of the more popular citations.
Other contemporaries debunked the simplistic critique that
all suburbanites were identical people, living in identical
houses, participating in identical activities, and even
decorating their homes in identical ways.

Through a video capture station visitors may be able to
leave their own blog-like impressions about suburban
design, suburban lifestyles, and how they relate to the
stories they’ve heard in the Museum.

Key messages for the Valuing Suburbia gallery include:

• People value the suburbs (from love to hate)
differently.

• Supporters of suburban lifestyles value factors such
as education, investment stability, kid-friendliness,
safety, outdoor and green space, greater space than
some urban living experiences allow, etc.

• Critics point to deficits such as sprawl,
infringement on agricultural land, environmental
impacts, conformity both socially and in the built
environment, lack of transportation options, loss of a
unique sense of place, isolationism by some people,
and the decline of urban areas.

• The political discourse between urban and suburban
areas often leads to tension and disagreement related
to regional priorities for planning and federal
resources.

• Artists, poets, musicians, and writers have written
about suburbia positively and negatively. How do
their commentaries affect public opinion and policy?

• The aging infrastructure in many suburban
communities raises the question: what, from
suburbia, is worth saving?
Johnson County History: A Case Study

Alongside the national suburban galleries, the story of Johnson County’s suburbs will be presented, informed by the current successful exhibit, *Seeking the Good Life*. The exhibit focuses on Johnson County’s growth and development as a premier suburban county, and its relationship to the major urban city of Kansas City.

Major themes will address the changing role of family; the impact of technology, specifically transportation; the market economy, especially in relation to land use; and the role of government (federal, state, and local). Visitors will explore Johnson County’s history as they retrace the history of the American migration west, Johnson County’s early suburban beginnings, the growth of post-World War II suburbs, and today’s modern suburban cities where residents can live, work, and play.

How the Johnson County story intersects with the national exhibit galleries will be refined with a group of scholars in the next phase, with the goal of identifying which stories are best suited for the local community, and which warrant national attention.
Exhibitions for Young Audiences

Plans call for incorporating interactive experiences throughout the exhibition program. It is expected that children will find delight in such experiences as "riding" the interactive streetcar, exploring the toys and popular culture displays, touring the All-Electric House, and designing their own ideal suburb at interactive computer stations.

The Museum has already successfully engaged a community of families with young children with the popular KidScape exhibit. The consultant team recommends an equally engaging exhibit experience be developed specifically for young audiences around national curriculum standards dealing with community.

Children will be inspired to learn about urban, rural, and suburban communities as they explore environments where they can compare and contrast them. Children might explore a suburban backyard to learn about the natural environment as they climb in a tree house; they might build, as a team, a product to sell at market. They might explore the farmhouse where they can role-play being a farmer or a paid laborer. Older children may have the option of designing their own suburban neighborhood or community, complete with garbage dump, hospital, and soccer fields.
Program Plan

The interpretive plan outlined in the previous section represents the core of the new Museum: its exhibition program. To develop that plan, significant time was spent identifying the Museum’s potential audiences and constituencies, and those of audiences for the additional services the Museum will provide. The following preliminary program outlines the results of that process.

The Museum’s program plan is a descriptive outline of the activities that the Museum will undertake in order to achieve its mission. The program plan builds upon the interpretive plan by outlining the exhibits, programs, and activities that will be needed to tell the story of suburbia and to serve the Museum’s many different constituents. While it is important to understand the broad scope of the Museum’s proposed activities, the program plan is also important in developing preliminary staffing and operational and space plans upon which preliminary operating and capital budgets can be based.

The program plan outlined here is preliminary. It is designed to start a discussion regarding the resources needed to successfully achieve the Museum's vision. The program plan will evolve significantly as the Museum delves into the details of the project after it is accepted in concept by the Johnson County Commissioners.
The Museum’s Constituents

Understanding the many different constituent groups that the Museum could serve is the essential first step in developing a program plan for the Museum.

Each group will have different interests and needs, which will be met by different programs and will result in different outcomes. While there will be overlap among the groups, it is important to understand the unique needs of each group in order to identify programmatic priorities, which in turn drive staffing, operational considerations, space needs, and their associated budgets.

The Museum will serve three broad constituencies:

1. **Regional community** members who will be interested in a wide range of programming and activities.
2. **Destination** visitors, including people visiting the Kansas City region, who will be looking for and expecting interesting and high-impact experiences.
3. **Scholarly & academic** constituents, including historians and others interested in preserving and understanding the history of suburbia and of Johnson County, and others interested in exploring options for suburbia’s future.

Understanding the different interests, needs, and priorities of each of the three groups is important to the success of the Museum and provides the foundation for developing the program plan.

**Community Constituents:** A museum’s community constituents are brought together either by proximity or by a particular shared interest. They typically have a continuing relationship with the Museum through program and event participation, online activities, or educational programs.

Community constituents have varied motivations for visiting and supporting the Museum, but, most important, they need to feel that the Museum is their Museum. The Museum will need a wide variety of exhibits, programs, and activities to cater to their many different interests and to keep them coming back again and again.

Community-focused programs build broad-based support through memberships, donations, volunteerism, and from funding through special-event rentals and program fees.

**Destination Constituents:** A museum’s destination constituents (aka tourists) typically come to visit the Museum on an irregular basis, frequently only once. They are looking for an engaging experience, often for a small group that includes family members. Other times, they may arrive in large tour groups.

Destination visitors are most likely to come to the Museum as one stop on a trip to the area that includes other activities or destinations. They are likely to be intrigued by the idea of a museum about suburbia and will expect an engaging, unusual, and high-quality experience. The goal is for Kansas City regional visitors to think of the new Museum as a must-see attraction.

Attracting destination visitors will increase the Museum’s earned revenue through admissions, gift shop sales, and, potentially, food service sales.
Scholarly & Academic Constituents: A museum’s scholarly and academic constituents are interested in the core objects and stories of the Museum. They may be professional and amateur researchers, collectors, or simply have an interest in a specific subject or type of artifact. Some may physically visit the Museum while others may only visit virtually.

Scholarly and academic constituents can be a museum’s most passionate advocates and often will donate artifacts or financially contribute to capital or endowment campaigns.

Finding the Right Balance
The Museum’s programs will address each of these groups, with relatively greater weight given to community-focused programming.

The diagram at right represents the most desirable balance of programming for the Museum in its new facility.

The Museum’s programs will focus primarily on the regional community constituents (blue), while maintaining a strong scholarly and academic focus (yellow) and continuing to develop as a must-see destination for visitors to the Kansas City region (green).
**Constituent Matrix**

The following table outlines the group members for each of the three constituencies; their interests, needs, and desires; the types of programs that they would find most compelling; and the potential outcomes of their engagement with the Museum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Members</th>
<th>Interests, Needs, and Desires</th>
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<th>Group Members</th>
<th>Interests, Needs, and Desires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Johnson County residents.</td>
<td>• Easy, low-cost fun and learning for families.</td>
<td>• Tourists visiting the Kansas City area.</td>
<td>• An interesting or unusual experience.</td>
<td>• Academics and researchers interested in suburbia’s history and development as well as those interested in its future. Disciplines include history, urban planning, American culture, geography, architecture, economics, and sociology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Kansas City metropolitan area residents.</td>
<td>• A variety of unusual, high-quality experiences.</td>
<td>• Visiting friends and relatives (VFRs) of Johnson County and metropolitan area residents.</td>
<td>• A fun and engaging outing to share with family and friends.</td>
<td>• Suburban development practitioners and policy-makers including government officials; urban planners; and professionals engaged in suburban planning, development and design.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Families with children.</td>
<td>• Ways to understand Johnson County’s past and future.</td>
<td>• Nostalgia seekers (baby boomers, former suburbanites, or pop culture fans).</td>
<td>• Finding evidence and artifacts from their own personal history.</td>
<td>• Artifact donors and collectors with specific interests in the cultural history of suburbia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organized school groups.</td>
<td>• A place to take out-of-town visitors that speaks well of Johnson County and its role in the national story of suburbia.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Learning about the area.</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• A place to come together for community gatherings and celebrations and for special events, both public and private.</td>
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Historians, collectors, and potential artifact donors will be particularly interested in the collections. Others will be interested in:
- A place to identify and explore issues related to the future of suburbia with access to resources and new ideas.
- Networking opportunities with peers engaged in similar projects or research.
- Methods for broader distribution of current suburban research and ideas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Community Constituents</strong></th>
<th><strong>Destination Constituents</strong></th>
<th><strong>Scholarly &amp; Academic Constituents</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programs and Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community events, films, lectures, and discussions.</td>
<td>• Core exhibits.</td>
<td>• Access to the Museum’s 2-D and 3-D collections in person and online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changing and core exhibits.</td>
<td>• The All-Electric House.</td>
<td>• Conferences, seminars, and webinars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formal and informal gathering places inside and outside the Museum.</td>
<td>• Unique gifts and nostalgic souvenirs.</td>
<td>• Award and recognition programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hands-on group activities and structured educational programs.</td>
<td>• Formal and informal gathering places inside and outside the Museum.</td>
<td>• Online and print publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Storytellers, music, and other family friendly programming.</td>
<td>• Themed hands-on exhibit areas.</td>
<td>• Potential for participation in the Museum’s national advisory board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Themed hands-on exhibit areas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Thoughtful, informed, and connected community members.</td>
<td>• Very positive word-of-mouth: “Wow!” “A must see!”</td>
<td>• Significant enhancement of the Museum’s reputation as a national resource engaged in exploring important questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engaged citizens.</td>
<td>• Memorable shared experiences.</td>
<td>• Better informed decision makers and, as a result, better suburbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ongoing support through memberships, annual donations, and volunteers.</td>
<td>• An understanding of the complexities of suburbia and a desire to learn more.</td>
<td>• Wider and faster cross-fertilization of ideas between the multiple disciplines studying suburbia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Political and corporate support.</td>
<td>• Earned revenue from admission and gift shop sales.</td>
<td>• Increased currency and intellectual depth for the changing exhibition programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Earned revenue from admission fees, program fees, museum store and food services sales, and rentals.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Donations of artifacts and contributions to the endowment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Perhaps most important: the Museum becomes a gathering place where everyone can have fun and learn something at the same time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program Components

Overview
The consultant team recommends that a wide range of activities designed to meet the needs, desires, and expectations of each of the potential audience groups be offered. These include:

1. Core Exhibitions
2. Changing Exhibitions
3. Suburban Policy Forum
4. Programming for School Children
5. Public Programming
6. Children’s Gallery
7. Visitor Services
8. Revenue-Generating Events
9. Collections
10. Online Programming

Each of these is described in more detail below.

1. Core Exhibitions
The Museum’s core exhibitions, as described in the interpretive plan, will serve as the high-impact heart of the new facility. The core exhibitions will tell the story of suburbia, locally and nationally. They will explore historic and contemporary issues and how they have affected Johnson County. As important, they will challenge visitors to explore their understanding of suburbia and its role in the American Dream. A focal point will be the Museum’s 1950s All-Electric House, a one-of-a-kind artifact.

The core exhibitions will have appeal across the Museum's constituents. They will be a must-see for visitors to the area, an engaging place for families, an inspiration for community members, a resource for children, and a touchstone for scholarly/academic constituents.

Courtesy of Library of Congress.
2. Changing Exhibitions

The Museum will host a wide variety of changing exhibitions created by Museum staff members and drawn from other regional and national sources. They are intended to cover a range of historical, geographical, planning, and policy topics.

The Museum’s changing exhibitions will appeal primarily to the Museum’s community constituents. Changing exhibitions will allow the Museum to address a broader range of subjects, inspire repeat visits, generate ongoing publicity for the Museum, and help to build attendance.

The Museum’s subject area is fertile ground for developing robust changing exhibitions. A few initial ideas might be:

- Yesterday’s Tomorrow: Historic visions of the future of suburbia.
- Today’s Tomorrow: Contemporary visions of the future of suburbia.
- A Field Guide to Sprawl: based on Dolores Hayden’s book, the exhibit will use photographs to define the new terms that are the vocabulary of suburban development.
- Cul-de-sacs and Community: How does the physical structure of suburbia shape interactions among suburban residents?
- Eco-Suburb: an exhibit exploring the ways that suburban communities can be more ecologically sustainable.
- Women in the Suburbs: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Betty Friedan, and Beyond. Explore the way women have shaped and been shaped by life in the suburbs.
- J.C. Nichols, Kansas City's Community Builder: Nichols’s real estate developments set the standard for quality post-war suburbs. Where Levittown was known for its little boxes all in a row, Nichols’s developments were known for their sculptures and fountains, as well as for their now notorious restrictive covenants.
- The English Garden Suburb: The 19th-century garden suburbs outside London were the first truly modern suburbs and have influenced suburban development ever since.
- Race in Suburbia: Exclusion and inclusion.

Traveling Exhibits: Because of the unique nature of the Museum’s subject matter, changing exhibitions produced at the Museum will likely be attractive to other museums. The Museum will develop its changing exhibitions so that they can travel to other museums. This could, in turn, become another revenue stream for the Museum, and continue to build the Museum's national reputation, bringing recognition and prominence to Johnson County.
3. Suburban Policy Forum

As a major new initiative of the Museum, considerable attention was spent investigating the concept of a Suburban Policy Forum. It will bring together leading researchers and practitioners to critically examine suburbia’s history and explore options for its future. The Forum intends to:

- Bring academics, policy makers and leading edge practitioners together to explore, discuss, and debate issues critical to suburbia’s future.
- Publish proceedings of conferences and symposia.
- Focus policy discussions in ways that clarify issues, inspire academic research, and encourage creative thinking about policy options.
- Provide suburban decision makers and practitioners access to current research and information, and create opportunities for them to share ideas and discuss alternatives with academics, policy-makers, and leading-edge practitioners.
- Provide a rich resource for the Museum’s staff members as they develop changing exhibitions, public programs, and publications keyed to the needs of a general audience.

Need: While there are many organizations engaged in research and analysis of suburban issues, there is no single place that has an interdisciplinary focus on the future of suburbia and bridges the gap between academia and practitioners. Two existing academic institutions have “suburban” in their titles. Hofstra University in Hempstead, NY, established the National Center for Suburban Studies in the late 1990s. Its focus is largely on academic research and the eastern U.S. The Edward J. Blakely Center for Sustainable Suburban Development at the University of California—Riverside, established in 2003, focuses its work primarily in California.

The Suburban Policy Forum will distinguish itself by having a truly national scope, by reaching across disciplines and job descriptions to engage people in discussions, and by offering tactical solutions to immediate challenges. It will also be unique in bridging academia with practitioners and elected officials who are charged with making decisions about future growth and development.

Partnerships and Collaborations: From time to time, the Forum will partner and collaborate with other organizations, including academic institutions, trade associations and professional organizations, that research and analyze suburban issues, make policy regarding its future and invest in its future through development, re-development, and infrastructure. These partnerships/collaborations will serve to help Forum staff members define pertinent issues, develop programs, underwrite events, and market events to defined audiences. Such partnerships and collaborations will require Forum staff members to be vigilant about both real and perceived conflicts of interest so that the Forum’s programming will be and will be regarded as independent and objective.

Activities: The Forum’s activities could take on any number of forms. With limited staffing initially, the Forum will need to be strategic about selecting the kinds of activities that will best serve its constituents and best position it for further growth. The first task of the Forum’s director will be to identify the most effective mix of programs. Initially, the Forum’s programs might focus on:

- Hosting an annual suburban policy symposium on a defined topic critical to suburbia’s future.
- Producing and distributing proceedings publications from symposiums.
Hosting regional roundtables to engage metropolitan area policy makers and practitioners with leading-edge thinkers and researchers on topics pertinent to regional growth and development.

Hosting an online presence including a website with ready access to research and discussions of current issues, a blog, Twitter feeds, Facebook page, e-mail newsletter, etc.

As the Forum establishes its national reputation, the programming could grow to include:

- Hosting an annual award ceremony honoring individuals who have made significant contributions to the understanding of suburbia’s history, the shaping of its existence, and the exploration of its future.
- More frequent symposiums and roundtables.
- Establishing its presence at academic, policy and professional conferences, and trade association meetings.
- A peer-reviewed journal of suburban futures focusing on current research.
- Research fellowships for postdoctoral students to pursue research of interest to the Forum’s constituents.
- Grants and fellowships to encourage research outside of the Forum.
- National design competitions for relevant, suburban issues in need of solutions.
- A publication program focusing on making suburban issues research accessible to a broad audience.

**Positioning:** The Forum’s uniqueness will lie in its ability to bring together researchers, leading-edge practitioners and policy-makers to explore issues critical to suburbia’s future, create robust discussions about their policy implications, and inspire additional research. While the Forum will not be a research center, it will from time to time engage others to do research on topics that further the Forum’s exploration of suburbia’s future.

The Forum will also be critical to the initial positioning of the Museum as a “national” museum of suburbia.

**Guidance:** The Forum will be a program of the Museum. It is intended that its work be guided by a national advisory board of suburban scholars and policy experts.

**Sources of Revenue:** Initial funding for the Forum’s programs will be sought from the Johnson County government, major foundations, organizations involved in the development of suburbia and symposium, and roundtable fees. Office space and other operational overhead will be provided by the Museum.

**Measures of Success:** The Forum’s success will be measured by the impact it has on forward-looking suburban policy and the development that grows out of those policies. Ideally, the Forum’s work will result in better informed decision makers, more research on suburban issues, a basis for legislation, and ultimately, enhanced quality of life in the suburbs.
4. Programming for School Children

The Museum will develop educational programming for school children including field trip programming, summer camps, performances, and other programs designed to meet national and state curriculum standards and inspire children to explore their understanding of where they live.

The Museum intends to engage school-aged children through a variety of programs including:

- Curriculum-focused tours of the core and changing exhibits with the option of participating in hands-on activities led by Museum staff members and volunteers.
- In-school programs led by educators from the Museum.
- After-school and summer programs for various age groups, focusing on many different topics.

Programming for school-aged children will benefit children individually and in groups. These kinds of programs engage students directly with the Museum, help to build strong community support, and generate ongoing publicity.

Signature Education Programs

The Museum will develop a signature education program that allows older students to delve more deeply into contemporary suburban issues. The Museum will experiment with a variety of program concepts while the new building is being developed, to ensure plans meet the needs of regional and national teachers. Initial concepts that might be developed and evaluated include “Suburban Role Play” and “Investigating Where We Live,” each of which is outlined below.

**Suburban Role Play:** In this program concept, students will role-play various perspectives of key players involved in a suburban development issue. Teachers will be able to select from a variety of scenarios appropriate to their subject area and consistent with national and state curriculum guidelines.

Students will research the roles that people play who are involved in the suburban development process—from elected officials, planning staff, developers, neighbors, and concerned taxpayers—to more fully understand the complicated factors that impact decisions. Students will be given preparatory materials to research and craft their arguments at their schools and then take part in a half-day experiential exercise at the Museum. Experiential situations might include a planning workshop, a public hearing, or a council meeting. Scenarios might include:

- **Transportation Infrastructure:** Student teams will analyze transportation options for a particular community and recommend infrastructure investments that will best meet the needs of that community.
- **Shopping Center Refit:** Student teams will be given a particular site to redevelop and must then present the plan for approval to other student teams role-playing the public and the planning agency.
- **You’re the Developer:** Students will be given a simple set of planning guidelines and will plan and propose a project that meets the guidelines, is supported by the community, and returns a profit.
- **What’s Old is New Again:** Using materials developed by the First Suburbs Coalition, students will act as a planning board looking at options for revitalizing a typical first suburb community.
- **Neighborhood Update:** Students who have participated in prior workshops will be invited to work with teams to develop ideas for their own neighborhoods—perhaps the area around their school—to enhance the area and make a more livable community while being constrained by a limited budget. Students will consider options and costs and present their ideas to local governmental officials.
Investigating Where We Live: This concept focuses on small groups of middle and high school students who will explore, document, and interpret the built environment in their communities and neighborhoods. Students in groups will work to gather information about the neighborhood’s history and identity. Using digital photography, they will explore and document the important landmarks, major thoroughfares, businesses, residential areas, parks, and people. The goal will be to understand the choices made by those who developed an area, and to understand the role of planning in an area's development.

Through this longer-term project, students will learn the basics of digital photography and exhibit design, and how to successfully research and communicate complex ideas.

In order to better understand how to photograph and interpret the county’s suburban landscape, students will work alongside Museum staff members and local photographers. Over the course of the program, students will improve their ability to interpret neighborhoods through photography and writing as means of visual communication where no spoken word is needed.

The culmination of this experience is an exhibition designed, planned, and installed by the students to communicate the highs and lows of neighborhood life, the importance of community identity, and the value of collaboration among students from across the county.

Lanesfield School Programs: Lanesfield School is the oldest standing one-room schoolhouse in Johnson County. It is maintained by the Museum and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Museum offers educational programming for kindergarten through 6th grades at the site, including the award-winning Living History program for fourth and fifth grade students. The Museum will continue to offer this programming at the schoolhouse.

Enhanced Collaboration and Resources

Collaboration with Teachers: The consultant team recommends the continuation of the Museum's partnership with local schools districts via the Educator's Advisory Group. It will play a critical role by providing input into the types of programs the Museum should develop for students. All programs will meet the national curriculum standards.

Online Resources: The Museum intends to expand its online resources—enhancing the digital history site (a federally funded partnership initiated by the Museum with the Johnson County Library and other keepers of local history resources) beyond photographs to include maps, oral histories, newspapers, and other resources. Curricula developed by the Museum already provide teachers the tools to teach American history using local resources. Potential additions will allow teachers to post curriculum plans they have developed to the website and allow students to create their own online exhibits. The public may also be invited to post pictures significant to their lives along with memories about living, working, and playing in Johnson County.
**Teacher In-Service:** The Museum will continue its outreach efforts to local teachers by conducting continuing education classes for Baker University. The program will enhance teacher understanding of how suburban history can be taught in classrooms, and serve to build the Museum's national reputation as the go-to resource for curriculum resources that address suburban issues.

**5. Public Programming**

The Museum will develop a wide variety of programming for local and regional community members, including lectures, workshops, performances, and other programs designed to reach out to a wide range of constituent groups, with a particular focus on programming for families.

Public programming will primarily benefit local community members and groups of children who will have more opportunities to participate in activities that occur only at certain times or seasons. These kinds of programs will help to build strong community support for the Museum and generate ongoing publicity.

**Programs for Kids and Families:** The Museum’s programs for families will focus primarily on Johnson County history, which, of course, includes its development as a place of suburban communities. Activities could include:

- Programs for families where parents work alongside children as they participate in interactive and role-playing activities.
- Lecture and demonstration series tied to current exhibitions, screenings, or other special programs.
- Classes and workshops that teach specific skills related to the history of Johnson County.
- Family Fun Day: programming to encourage intergenerational learning.
- Family-friendly programs that use storytellers, musical performers, and other entertainers to engage community audiences.
**General Programs for Adults:** The Museum’s general programs for adults will focus on historical and contemporary issues and concerns, giving special attention to how they have affected or will affect Johnson County.

- A lecture series on Johnson County History with a focus on the people who have made Johnson County what it is today.
- A film series with movies (and perhaps TV shows) that depict life in suburbia. The series would have an optional discussion before or afterwards hosted by Museum staff members or local scholars.
- Meetings and events that relate to current issues facing today's suburban community members.

**Festivals, Performances, and Other Public Events:** The consultant team believes that the Museum will be a natural locus for county-wide events with performances, demonstrations, and activities that encourage families to think about where they live and to visit the Museum. The Museum might sponsor, with partners in the community, events such as:

- Outdoor film festivals featuring suburban-themed movies.
- Community car shows.
- Go Green Fair: a community event with activities, events, and vendors focused on sustainable decorating, landscaping, and building ideas.
- Community festivals and other gatherings.

**Potential Future Programs:** As the Museum matures, it may choose to develop programs for adults that focus on regional suburban issues, in close cooperation with the Suburban Policy Forum. Such programs could be designed to engage regional residents in such a broad discussion about the future of the region’s suburban communities. Programs could include:

- Suburbs Now: A lecture series that focuses on current issues in suburban design, development, and policy.
- Suburb Sites: Organized and self-guided tours of suburban neighborhoods and communities, old and new, designed to help people understand the different types of neighborhoods and the trade-offs each approach involves.
- Construction Watch Tours: Tours that provide Museum members an up-close understanding of the design and construction of many of Johnson County’s construction and renovation projects—from roads and bridges to new subdivisions, parks, shopping centers, and municipal and institutional buildings.
- Informal “happy hour” discussions on current suburban issues hosted by regional scholars and experts.
- Meetings and events that relate to current issues facing community members.
6. Children’s Gallery

The Museum has successfully engaged young audiences with interactive exhibitions and programs. Over the past four years (2007-2010), attendance at the Museum has increased by 613%. Suburban communities are known by many as being good places to raise children; it is fitting for a museum of suburbia to have exhibits that speak directly to that audience.

The children’s exhibits should be designed to address issues of community and be based on national curriculum standards. Children will be inspired to learn about the different types of communities—urban, rural, and suburban—as they explore environments where they can compare and contrast them.

The Museum’s existing Kidscape exhibit will serve as a prototype, but will be enhanced, retooled, and refocused to support the Museum’s new interpretive plan.

The children’s gallery will primarily serve local community members, particularly young families, who have the opportunity to visit on a regular basis. Programs for young families stimulate early learning, help to build strong community support for the Museum, and generate memberships and, potentially, lifelong engagement with the Museum.

7. Visitor Services

Visitor comfort and convenience are nearly as important to a successful museum experience as exhibits and programs.

Orientation to the Museum from the parking lot to the lobby is important, as is ease in ticketing and wayfinding once visitors enter the Museum space. Comfortable sitting areas throughout the exhibit areas are important to alleviate museum fatigue and as a place for groups to gather, socialize, and reflect on the Museum's exhibits.

Museum Store

A museum store can provide additional resources for learning as well as souvenirs that spark memories that help build long-term connections to the Museum.

An expanded Museum Store is recommended. It should offer a rich array of merchandise related to suburbia, popular culture, and Johnson County items. As the retail outlet for a uniquely specialized museum, the store can carry a merchandise mix unlike any other store and potentially become a destination in and of itself. With an integrated online and point of sale retail sales system, the Museum will be able to manage both web and onsite purchases from a single inventory management system.

Food Services

The proposed size and scope of the new Museum warrants offering basic food services for visitors. Food services should focus on refueling visitors so that they can enjoy a longer visit. While a full-scale restaurant is most likely not feasible, sandwiches and other healthy snacks along with hot and cold beverages should be available.
8. Revenue-Generating Events

The Museum can potentially earn significant revenue as a rental facility for community events and functions, with appropriate space devoted to such functions within the architectural plan. The Museum’s lobby should be flexible enough to accommodate Museum events and to serve as an event rental venue. Ideally, it should be finished with a grandeur that allows for that dual functionality.

The auditorium space is desired to serve museum and county-wide program needs, be a service to the community, and to be an additional revenue-generating space. It will be available at a fee for community theater groups, dance companies, and lectures presented by community groups, and for Museum and county-wide programs.

Education classroom spaces will also be utilized for revenue-generating events. Events might include:

- Industry and corporate meetings and events, especially those related to the Suburban Policy Forum.
- Community celebrations.
- Receptions associated with special programs.
- Birthday parties.
- Musical performances.
- Art demonstrations.
- A rental venue for weddings, family events, corporate events, and conventions.

While revenue-generating events will create significant income for the Museum, they are also important in fulfilling the Museum’s mission since they often involve people who are engaged with the community but who might not otherwise visit the Museum. Such visits raise awareness about the Museum and can help to generate indirect support and donations.

9. Collections

The Museum will continue to collect artifacts and archival materials related to the history of Johnson County, to preserve those artifacts, and to facilitate research of the collection. The Museum will also collect artifacts related to the broader suburban story, primarily for use in exhibits.

In developing the Museum’s collections, staff members will strive:

- To actively collect contemporary artifacts and information, in recognition that the present quickly becomes the past and that current objects are best preserved and documented by their users or creators.
- To identify gaps in the existing collection and build strengths without acquiring materials that would constitute excessive duplication.
- To identify and document relevant materials housed at other museums and libraries, and to build relationships with those institutions to foster collaboration.
10. Online Programming

The Museum’s online programming will be crucial to extending the Museum’s reach to a national audience. While the initial programming should have a strong focus on physical experiences, to serve a national audience the Museum should always be looking at new and innovative ways to extend its reach beyond onsite programming.

Every part of the Museum will use online tools to create a strong regional and national presence.

- The Museum’s website will include online versions of the Museum’s changing exhibitions, videos from its programming, and activities and games that engage people of all ages.
- The Suburban Policy Forum will develop extensive archives documenting its programming and will develop online discussion opportunities and video conference discussions to engage its constituents in contemporary issues.
- The signature educational programs will be available in a virtual format through video conferencing, both live and recorded.
- The Museum store’s merchandise will also be available online.
- The Museum will continue to engage with its many constituents through social media including Facebook, Twitter, and their successors.
- The Museum’s video conferencing facilities will also be used to engage teachers in online continuing education.
**Preliminary Attendance, Staffing, and Operating Projections**

The attendance, staffing, and operating projections presented here represent preliminary order-of-magnitude estimates of the attendance, staffing, funding, and expenses that will be needed to operate the Museum in its first stable year after opening. The first stable year is typically the fourth year after opening, and is when additional staffing and funding required for startup are no longer needed.

Because of the change in vision and scope, the Museum is essentially a new museum. Accordingly, these projections are designed to give the Museum’s planning team an initial understanding of the scope of operating funding that will be necessary for the Museum envisioned in the plan. As the ideas in the plan are prototyped, evaluated, and refined, the projections will need to be updated. The projections will also need to be updated as attendance estimates are confirmed in consultation with a market analyst and other specialist consultants.

The following estimates are based on the current Museum’s operating costs, comparisons to museums with similar programming in similar communities, and on the consultant team’s direct experience with similar museum projects.
**Attendance Projections**

This preliminary attendance projection is based on comparisons with attendance at comparable institutions, in Kansas City and across the country.

The consultant team conservatively estimates that 60,000 people will visit the proposed Museum each year. This estimate is based on a fully operational museum, expected at the end of year three. The $6 adult admission price is somewhat lower than at comparable institutions. Actual attendance could be substantially higher and will depend on the Museum’s location and the specifics of the exhibits and programs that it offers.

A discount for Johnson County residents could be offered to offset the newly proposed admission fee, in recognition of the taxes paid by county residents to support the Museum. For this preliminary budget, that discount is 20 percent.

In addition, it is intended that free admission days will be offered at regular intervals throughout each year to ensure that the Museum remains accessible to all—that access is not limited to those able to pay the entrance fee.

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**Projected Annual Visitors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>60,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Groups</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free (members)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Admission will include the core and changing exhibitions and a tour of the All-Electric House. Some special changing exhibitions may justify an additional charge, to offset the expense of mounting them.

**Ticket Prices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>$6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Groups Participants</td>
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</table>

**Revenues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>$126,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Groups</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subtotal**

$213,000

Discount for Johnson County Residents

20% discount for approximately 50% of visitors

20,000

**Total Projected Admissions Revenue**

$193,000
Projected Staffing

The projected staffing outlined here is based on the activities proposed in the program plan and the attendance projected in the visitation projection.

These projections represent the staffing needs expected when the Museum is opened. Future positions would be added as those programmatic areas warrant additional staffing.

The Museum’s current staffing level is at 7.8 FTE. The proposed staffing level is for 22.5 FTE.

The staffing projection assumes that the Museum’s financial matters will be largely managed by the county and that building maintenance and repair will be managed by county facilities.

The salary and wages totals at the end of the staffing table are calculated based on Johnson County salary standards and museum industry standards for the new positions.
Projected Revenues

The consultant team devised the projected sources of funds, taking into account the Museum’s current budget along with estimated increases attributed to the new facility and its new programs. The projection is based on a fully operational museum, expected at the end of year three of operations. Additional start-up costs will be required from the county or other sources to reach this level.

The county currently contributes approximately 85% of the Museum’s operating funds. This plan is designed to reduce that percentage as the Museum’s revenue-generating activities mature.

Notes

- All amounts are in 2011 dollars.
- Museum store and food service income is based on industry averages. These are net figures, after expenses.
- Income from revenue-generating events will depend largely on the type, size, and amenities of the actual space, as well as an ambitious marketing team working to promote the venue widely in the Kansas City region.
- The donated and other unearned revenue is similar in scope to other area cultural facilities.
- The estimated endowment revenue is based on an endowment of $1,000,000, which is included in the capital budget. This endowment estimate is included as a starting place for future endowment fundraising efforts. A larger endowment would further reduce the county’s contribution.

### Projected Revenues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projected Revenues</th>
<th>2011 Dollars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Admissions Income</td>
<td>$193,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>60,000 Annual Visitors</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Educational Program Fees</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Museum Store Net Income</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>@ approximately $.75/visitor</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Museum Food Service Net Income</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>@ approximately $.15/visitor</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Net Income from Events, Meetings, etc.</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Annual Fund</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>@ $50 average per donor</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Annual Fundraising Event</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Corporate Gifts and Grants</td>
<td>25,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Membership Income</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>@ $50 average per membership</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Miscellaneous Revenue</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Income from Endowment</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>5% of endowment value drawn annually</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Johnson County Operating Support</td>
<td>1,050,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Projected Revenue**

$1,532,000
Johnson County's Contribution
Currently, the Museum receives approximately 85% of its operating revenue from the county, an annual total of approximately $1,050,000 (including cost allocation). By significantly expanding its programming, the Museum will be able to earn and raise the additional support that will be needed for the larger operation. The total amount of county support will remain at the current level.

The county’s percentage of the operating funding for the new facility is expected to decrease over time. Once the Museum reaches a stable year, at the beginning of year four, the county’s portion of the Museum’s funding is projected to be 70% of the operating budget.

Why can't the Museum be fully self-supporting?
While it would be ideal if a museum could generate sufficient revenue through earnings and fundraising to support all of its operations, this is seldom, if ever, possible.

In order to be viable, museums need a foundation of support from either a substantial endowment (like the major art museums established in the 19th-century), a patron organization (like a university or government entity), or support from local government. The amount and type of foundational support varies with every institution and can range from 95% of the budget to as little as 30%. The Smithsonian, with its universally recognized brand, receives approximately 70% of its support through direct federal allocations.

The Museum’s new programming model, with its national scope and agenda, positions the Museum to attract additional outside funding. Once the Museum has established its reputation, it could continue to grow and reach new audiences without the need for additional county funding. However, in order for the Museum to continue to develop as a national institution, it is important that it maintain an organizational identity that allows it to change and develop as a unique county department.
### Projected Expenses

The consultant team devised projected expenses for the new Museum based on the current budget and with projected increases based on the new facility and programs. The increases in costs are more than balanced by the increases in earned and donated revenue. These expenses are based on a fully operational museum, which is likely to occur at the beginning of year four.

**Notes**

- Salaries, wages, and fringe benefits are consistent with equivalent county positions.
- Fringe benefits are estimated at 25% to account for part-time staff who do not receive the full county benefit package.
- Operational and administrative expenses are typical for buildings of this size and type.
- The marketing and advertising expenses are required to ensure that the Museum reaches its projected attendance.
- Exhibit and education program expenses are directly related to attendance and other revenue sources. The greater the investment in these areas, the greater the revenue will be.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projected Expenses</th>
<th>2011 Dollars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Salaries and Wages</td>
<td>$855,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on Johnson County Museum existing salaries and museum industry standards for new positions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fringe Benefits (@ 25% of Salaries and Wages)</td>
<td>214,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate includes part-time staff who do not receive the full county benefit package.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Utilities (@ $3.00/sf)</td>
<td>168,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Building and Grounds Maintenance and Repair (@ $.50/sf)</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including contract maintenance of mechanical, electrical, security, and fire protection equipment. Does not include depreciation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Administrative Costs</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including telephone, supplies, legal fees, reproduction, travel, professional development, etc. @ $2,000/FTE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Marketing and Advertising Expenses</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Collections and Conservation Supplies</td>
<td>27,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Exhibit Program Expenses</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including changing exhibit rentals, and materials and supplies for exhibit construction and maintenance. Assumes most exhibit production will be grant funded.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Education Program Expenses</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including classroom and live demonstration supplies and equipment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Special Projects and Miscellaneous Expenses</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Projected Expenses**

$1,532,000
Space Needs

The space needs outlined here represent the minimum required to accommodate the programming outlined in the program plan and the 60,000 projected visitors. In order to accommodate growth in the Museum’s collections and programs, the new facility should be sited and designed to allow for long-term growth, equal to approximately 100% of the area outlined here. Potential areas of growth are indicated on the Architectural Program as Phase II.

Areas Included

The new Museum will include the following principal areas:

- An inviting lobby that is large enough to serve as a place for Museum programs and other events including revenue-generating activities.
- A visitor services area with ticketing kiosks and information about the Museum.
- A museum store with an interesting and eclectic mix of merchandise primarily related to suburban history and popular culture.
- A simple cafe equipped to serve coffee, drinks, snacks, and sandwiches.
- An exhibit area for state-of-the-art core exhibits that explore the history and culture of suburbia and its connections to Johnson County.
- Changing exhibit galleries designed to host a wide variety of changing exhibitions created by Museum staff and drawn from regional and national sources.
- Auditorium space for students and the general public to experience Museum programs and events, for conferences and symposia sponsored by the Policy
For the Museum and for use by Johnson County Government and community groups.
- Activity rooms for educational programs for students that can also be used by the general public for classes, workshops, and demonstrations.
- Collections storage, processing, and research areas.
- Administrative support, exhibit support, and building service areas.

**Location**

Finding the right location for the new facility will be critical to the Museum’s long-term success. The following factors will be important as the Museum considers potential sites:

- As a place that primarily serves the regional community, the Museum needs to be located near population centers with easy access and convenient parking.
- In order to be perceived as a desirable destination, the Museum needs to be architecturally distinctive, readily visible, and easy to find.
- The Museum’s users would likely find it desirable if the new facility were located in a historically significant area or near other cultural amenities.
- The Museum could be located in an existing building, if it is well located, has sufficiently high ceilings for the exhibit areas, and can be updated externally to make it visually distinctive.
- A new building would best meet the complex needs of a contemporary museum.
Outline Architectural Program

In the simplest terms, the outline architectural program is an initial estimate of the spaces needed in the new Museum. The architectural program reflects programmatic priorities and is a critical first step for defining and clarifying space needs and for developing a preliminary construction budget.

Notes
- Phase II areas are estimated based on potential future growth.
- Office areas are consistent with county standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Visitor Services Areas</th>
<th>Phase 1 Net SF</th>
<th>Phase II Net SF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Lobby/Reception/Event Area</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Ticketing/Information</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Museum Store Sales Area, Office, and Inventory</td>
<td>800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Food Service Seating Area (included in Lobby)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Cafe and Catering Prep Area</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Function Space (standing reception for 200 people)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Revenue-Generating Events Storage</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Public Restrooms (distributed)</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Lunch Storage for School Groups</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0 Storage Area for Wheelchairs and Strollers</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Exhibition Areas</th>
<th>16,300</th>
<th>13,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 National Suburbia Exhibits</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Johnson County Exhibits</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Children’s Gallery</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Changing Exhibit Galleries (easily dividable)</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Community Gallery (included with Changing)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Exhibit Production Workshop</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Exhibit Staging Area</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Exhibit Props Storage</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Education and Public Program Areas</th>
<th>4,725</th>
<th>2,100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Multipurpose Auditorium (200 to 250 seats)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.1 Lobby and Queuing</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.2 Seating Area @ 10/sf per seat</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.3 Stage and Backstage Area</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.4 Projection Booth</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.5 Storage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Activity Rooms @ 600 sf each</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Education Programs Storage</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outline Architectural Program (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. 2-D and 3-D Collections Areas</th>
<th>5,900</th>
<th>11,500</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 3-D Collections Storage Area</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Library and Archive Storage</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Research and Access Area</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Collections Registration and Processing</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Conservation Area</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Staff and Volunteer Offices and Work Areas</th>
<th>3,465</th>
<th>2,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Staff Offices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.1 Executive Director</td>
<td>180</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.2 Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.3 Policy Forum Director</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.4 Curator of Collections</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.5 Curator of Education</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.6 Curator of Interpretation</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.7 Development Director</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.8 Visitor Services and Business Manager</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.9 Assistant Curator</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.10 Collection Manager</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.11 Exhibit Technician</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.12 Building Manager</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.13 Marketing and Membership Associate</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.14 Museum Store Manager</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.15 Education Coordinator</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.16 Education Assistants</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.17 Work Space for Volunteers (6 Carrels)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Staff Break Room</td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Shared Work Areas (e.g. printers, throw-off space, etc.)</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Board Room/All Staff Conference Room (seats 20-25)</td>
<td>550</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Internal Conference Room (4 person)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Internal Conference Room (8 person)</td>
<td>225</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Internal Conference Room (future growth for 2 people)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8 Additional Offices and Work Areas</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Outline Architectural Program (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Building Service Facilities</th>
<th>5,320</th>
<th>4,500</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Building Maintenance and Security Offices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.1 FAC Area</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.2 Work Area for Security Staff</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Building Receiving Area</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 General Building and Custodial Storage</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Mechanical/Electrical @ Approx. 10% of Net Area</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 7. Space Contingency           | 2,000  |        |

| Total Net Areas:               | 43,235 | 37,200 |

| Total Gross Area (Approximately 1.3 times Net): | 56,000 | 48,000 |
Capital Budgets

The capital budgets presented here represent overall order-of-magnitude estimates of the costs of building the new Museum, creating new exhibits, and related soft costs. The funding will be secured through a public-private partnership between county government and the Museum's non-profit entity.

The costs are divided into two parts, capital costs expected to be incurred by the county and capital costs that will be borne by the Museum through a fundraising campaign.
## County-Funded Capital Costs

It is anticipated that the county will fund construction costs for the Museum and that the Museum will raise the necessary funds for the exhibit program and other costs.

### Notes:
- The construction budget is based on figures developed by the county’s facilities management department working with Museum Insights to identify special museum-related costs. Full details of the budget are available from the department.
- The capital budget shown here corresponds to the architectural program outlined above. The costs are for a new building. Renovating an existing building that is in good condition may cost 10% to 30% less than new construction.
- The raw construction cost of $300/sf is at the low end for high quality museums built in the past few years. Museum construction ranges from $300/sf to well over $1,000/sf.

### County-Funded Capital Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2011 Dollars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Building Construction
  * Includes building construction @ $300/sf, parking, site development, additional fit out for changing exhibition galleries, signage, moving the All-Electric House, reimbursable expenses, LEED costs, inflation to CIP year, contingencies for design, construction, and scope, and other related costs. | $ 22,556,526 |
| 2. Owner’s Costs
  * Includes project management, architectural and engineering fees of approximately 12%, testing during construction, special consultants for security systems and environmental controls, and reimbursable expenses. | 6,218,918 |
| 3. Capital Costs @ 15% of Construction
  * Includes office furniture and equipment; exhibit workshop equipment; voice, security, and IT systems; window coverings; museum store furnishings and equipment; food service furnishings and kitchen equipment; projection equipment for auditorium, activity, and seminar rooms; exterior and interior signage exclusive of exhibit areas; and Museum transition and startup costs (approximately 5% of total). | 2,569,106 |
| 4. Public Art                                   | 380,995      |
| Total Construction Costs in 2011 Dollars        | $ 31,725,545 |
| 5. Potential cost in 2015 Dollars               | 38,500,000   |
  * Inflation estimated at a total of 21% over four years

### Estimated Land Acquisition Cost

| Estimated Land Acquisition Cost | $ 2,000,000 |

---
**Museum-Funded Capital Costs**

The Museum, through its Friends organization, will raise the funds necessary to design and install new exhibits in the building and the endowment funds needed to support its operation.

**Notes:**
- Exhibit costs are calculated in 2011 dollars. Escalation to 2015 could increase these costs by up to 20%.
- Exhibit costs include design, construction, and installation of interpretive exhibits.
- Design costs are approximately 25% of the overall exhibit costs.
- Exhibit costs assume that the gallery space is finished with concrete floors, drywalled walls backed with plywood, utility lighting, and roughed-in electrical service and plumbing (if required).
- $650/sf for exhibits is consistent with high quality museum exhibit design and construction. The exhibits at the World War I Museum had a probable cost when the museum was built of about $1,000/sf, which is typical for truly high-impact exhibitions.

**Museum-Funded Capital Costs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2011 Dollars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exhibition Costs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. National Suburbia Exhibits @ $650/sf</td>
<td>$ 4,550,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Johnson County Exhibits @ $400/sf</td>
<td>1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Children's Gallery Exhibits @ $300/sf</td>
<td>900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. All-Electric House Installation @ $200/sf</td>
<td>320,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>6,970,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exhibition Contingency @ approximately 10%</strong></td>
<td>730,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Exhibition Costs</strong></td>
<td>7,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Project Costs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Endowment to be raised</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Fundraising Costs</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Museum-Funded Project Costs in 2011 Dollars</strong></td>
<td>$ 9,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Potential cost in 2015 Dollars</td>
<td>11,780,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Inflation estimated at a total of 21% over four years*
Next Steps

The preceding planning work is only the first step in planning for and designing the new Museum. Significantly more detailed planning and design work will be required before the Museum is ready to open. Some of the major tasks that will need to be accomplished include:

- Approve project concept with County Commissioners.
- Commission market assessment.
- Assess fundraising feasibility.
- Refine humanities themes for the exhibits and develop exhibit story lines, story boards, and scripts.
- Identify and acquire an appropriate site.
- Hire capital campaign staff and plan campaign.
- Work with marketing and branding consultants to create a strong, clear identity for the Museum.
- Begin “quiet phase” of fundraising.
- Select an architectural team.
- Select an exhibit design team.
- Hire Suburban Policy Forum Director and begin programming.
- Hire a museum project management consultant.
- Determine the program components that will be included and set final building and exhibit capital budgets based on results of the “quiet phase” of fundraising.
- Develop site-specific architectural, exhibit, and educational programming concepts.
- Begin to develop, prototype, and evaluate exhibit and program concepts.
• Unveil building and exhibit concepts and begin public fundraising.
• Complete architectural and exhibit design through construction documents.
• Begin construction of building and exhibits.
• Hire additional staff needed for startup and initial operations.
• Install exhibits.
• Grand opening celebration.

In the best case, the work listed here could be completed in three to five years. The most significant variable is fundraising. A significant portion of the funds for the project should be committed before proceeding with the design work. The other significant variable will be finding a suitable site. The timeline could change dramatically depending on either of these.

Notes
• Assessing fundraising feasibility: One of the first tasks will be to assess the feasibility of raising the necessary capital funding. This process is often contracted to fundraising professionals with experience in the community. They will use the concepts in the interpretive plan to interview funding prospects, establish a preliminary chart of gifts, and make recommendations about the potential amount of money that can be raised from the community, the region, and across the country.
• Hire development staff: Fundraisers can be contracted for a project like this, but it is often less expensive, and more effective, to have full-time staff committed to the project. The firm hired to do the fundraising feasibility assessment will also recommend the size and qualifications for the development staff needed to implement the capital campaign.

• Plan fundraising campaign: A clear plan with benchmarks needs to be established at the beginning of the campaign, so that priorities can be adjusted as the campaign develops.
• Set final program and budget: The Museum will use the fundraising feasibility assessment and any additional funds identified to set a final budget for the project. The Museum should then, if necessary, re-assess the priorities outlined in the program plan and the impact of any changes in the capital budget on the Museum’s future operations. These updated program and operating plans will serve as the guide for the final size and scope of the building and exhibits.
• Hire a museum project management consultant. Museums are buildings with many unique features. The services of a museum construction project manager experienced with the practical and contractual issues that can arise will be invaluable.
• Support staff: Generally new management level staff should be brought on board six months to a year before opening, so they can be involved in final decision making about the Museum, and its exhibits, and programs and so that the best candidates may be retained. The search process would start even earlier so that good candidates may be recruited.
Appendices

- The Planning Team: Task Force Members, Consultants, Scholars, and Community Stakeholders
- About the Planning Process
- Museum Benchmarking
- Idea Fair Summary Results
- American Dream Survey Summary Results
The Planning Team

Task Force Members
Task Force members were drawn from the Museum’s Advisory Board, the Museum’s Friends Board of Trustees, and the Museum’s staff. Members of the Task Force included:

- Mindi Love, Executive Director of the Johnson County Museum
- Jerry Baird, Friends board member
- Georgia Gavito, Johnson County Facilities Department
- Kevin Greischar, Friends board member
- Mary Kay Ingenthron, Friends board member
- Benjamin Mann, Museum Advisory Council member
- Larry Meeker, Friends board member
- David Oliphant, Museum Advisory Council member
- Sarah Plinsky, County Manager’s Office
- Michel Sportsman, Museum staff
- Heather Woodson, Museum Advisory Council member
- Jennifer Crane, Museum staff
- Kathy Daniels, Museum staff

Consultants
Museum master planner Guy Hermann, founder of Museum Insights, has worked with and led master planning teams for dozens of museums, large and small. He has developed plans and feasibility studies for projects as diverse as the Academy Museum of the Motion Pictures in Hollywood, the NASCAR Hall of Fame, and the Smithsonian’s new National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Interpretive planner Matt Kirchman, objectIDEA’s principal, works with educators, curators, museum administrators and designers to craft the communication and experiential aims for exhibitions. He guides the sequencing and pacing of exhibition story lines, and contributes to the creation of appropriate and dynamic methods of exhibition in various interpretive environments.

Exhibit designer Christopher Chadbourne of Christopher Chadbourne & Associates is an internationally renowned exhibit designer based in Boston, Massachusetts. With over thirty years in the business, he brings substantial lessons learned to each project, as well as a fascination with new ways of capturing the imagination of today’s visitors. His exhibits employ a carefully orchestrated combination of artifacts, cutting-edge technologies, interactive components, theatrical techniques, and clear and compelling information design.

Scholars
The consultants and Museum staff members also consulted with a number of prominent scholars with interests in suburban development, history, and policy.

- Witold Rybczynski is the Meyerson Professor of Urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania. He has written on architecture and urbanism for the *New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, and *Slate*, and is the author of critically acclaimed *Home* and *A Clearing in the Distance*, a biography of Frederick Law Olmsted. His recent book *Last Harvest* explores issues of contemporary suburban development. He is the recipient of the National Building Museum’s 2007 Vincent Scully Prize. He currently serves on the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts in Washington, DC. He is also Professor of Real Estate at the Wharton School, and founding co-editor of the *Wharton Real Estate Review*. 
Becky M. Nicolaides, is Lecturer in Urban Planning and Research Scholar at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women. She serves as co-editor for the “Historical Studies of Urban America” series published by University of Chicago Press and is on the nominating committee of the Urban History Association. She is at work on her third book, to be titled *On the Ground in Suburbia: A Chronicle of Social and Civic Transformation in Los Angeles Since 1945*, with support from a Haynes Major Research Grant. Other books include *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*, and *The Suburban Reader*.

Herbert Gans is emeritus professor of Sociology at Columbia University. His 1967 book *The Levittowners*, a groundbreaking study of the sociology of suburbia, was based on several years of participant-observation in New Jersey's Levitt-built suburb in Willingboro and demonstrated the inaccuracy of the popular depiction of the post-war suburbs as homogeneous, conformist, and anomic.

Kenneth Jackson is the Jacques Barzun Professor in History and the Social Sciences at Columbia University and Director of the Herbert H. Lehman Center for American History. His book *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* was the first full-scale history of the development of the American suburb and won both the Bancroft Prize and the Francis Parkman Prize.

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**Community Stakeholders**

As the process of developing the master plan began, the consultant team met with community members to seek their opinions about the Museum’s vision to develop a National Museum of Suburbia and a Suburban Policy Forum. The interviews were conducted during February 2010, and were confidential. In addition to the individuals listed below, the consultant team interviewed all Museum board members and Museum staff members in small groups.

- Deb Brown, Social Studies Coordinator K-12, Shawnee Mission School District
- Maureen Donegan, Social Science Coordinator, Olathe School District
- Mike Hendricks, *Kansas City Star*
- Charles Jean-Baptiste, Citizens Vision Commission
- Dean Katerndahl, First Suburbs Coalition, Mid-America Regional Council
- Laura McConwell, Mayor, Mission, Kansas
- Dean Palos, Director, Johnson County Planning
- Eli Paul, Director, National World War I Museum
- Blake Schreck, President, Lenexa Chamber of Commerce
- Annabeth Surbaugh, Chair of Johnson County Commission
About the Planning Process

Planning for the new Museum began in 2004 with a strategic visioning process. In 2008, the strategic vision was expanded to encompass a broader interpretation of how and why America has become a suburban nation and to include establishing a Suburban Policy Forum to explore public policy issues and options for sustainable suburban communities.

The current planning work arose from the need to develop an Interpretive Master Plan, to more clearly define the stories the Museum would tell about suburbia and Johnson County and the best ways to tell them. Because a new facility is needed for the Museum, the Task Force also undertook a preliminary study of the programmatic, facility, staffing, operational, and capital funding that would be required as a result of the expanded museum program.

The Museum applied for and received a prestigious Institute for Museum and Library Services grant to fund the planning process and undertook a national search to select a planning team. A Task Force of museum board and staff members selected museum planning consultants Museum Insights of Mystic, Connecticut, working in collaboration with objectIDEA of Salem, Massachusetts.

Over the course of more than a year, the consultant team worked with the Task Force to:

1. Review prior planning work and become familiar with Johnson County.
2. Meet with dozens of Museum stakeholders and other community members and review visitor surveys and other data.
3. Benchmark, visit, and document comparable museums.
4. Survey museum visitors, county residents, and others about their understanding of the American Dream and its relationship to suburbia.
5. Conduct a visioning workshop to discuss alternative programmatic scenarios and develop a comprehensive program plan for the new Museum.
6. Develop interpretive options that illustrate alternative approaches to interpreting and presenting the Museum’s themes and stories.
7. Conduct several interpretive planning workshops to develop consensus about the interpretive approach and a vision for the exhibition experience.
8. Develop preliminary interpretive concepts into a portable “Idea Fair” to gather community input about the project.
9. Develop a detailed interpretive plan.
10. Develop preliminary operational, facility, and capital projections.
11. Develop final reports and presentations for County officials and other stakeholders.

This Interpretive Master Plan, is the culmination of that work.
Museum Benchmarking

As part of the planning process, members of the Task Force embarked on a trip to Washington, DC, in April 2010 with consultant team members Guy Hermann and Matt Kirchman. The Task Force members visited four museums as a group, as well as a number of other museums individually, to develop a shared vocabulary for the planning process, to understand best-practices at other museums, to learn what makes a museum successful and sustainable, and to better understand the range of choices available to the Johnson County Museum. The Task Force was also particularly interested in learning about the different ways each museum approaches being a “national” museum. The lessons outlined here summarize the most significant findings from that experience. The complete Benchmarking Report is available by request from the Johnson County Museum.

Lessons Learned

Mission

- Mission and vision need to be clearly linked to audience and programs.
- A simple, direct mission with a clear call to action helps focus a museum’s programs and activities.
- Everything we do must advance the mission in ways that are obvious to constituents and other supporters.
- We need to be clear about how county needs and national identity work together.
- Partnerships matter. Be picky when forming them.

The People We Serve

- A museum is about people.
- No one word sums up the various people we serve.
- There is a difference between audiences and constituents. Audiences receive something from us. Constituents are part of us and work with us.
- We need to know who our constituents are and what they need, want, and value. This is the first step in developing our programming model.
- Communities come in many different forms, from local, to communities of interest. Identifying these communities is a first step to building a strong constituent base.
- The more we know about people, the better we can serve them. The better we serve them, the more successful we will be.

Collections

- Artifacts matter. People are still inspired by interesting, exemplary, and unique items, even if their visit is initially motivated by a great story.
- Collecting for exhibits rather than scholarship is an accepted strategy at other major museums.

Visitor Experience, Exhibits, & Interpretation

- Content matters.
- We need to be very clear about the “Big Idea” that we articulate and the specific ideas we would like visitors to take away with them.
- Multiple interpretive approaches can help people to understand. They can also make for a disjointed visitor experience.
- An overarching narrative may be helpful, but is not essential.
- Temporary exhibit space will be critical to refreshing the content and experience, especially for community audiences.
- “Where am I and where am I going?” Navigating through the museum needs to be intuitive and simple.
- You can’t tell a big story through a single example.
- High-tech, big, and splashy can cover up shortfalls in the overall experience. We would rather use these techniques to tell a compelling story; exhibits that marry substance and style work best.
Site & Architecture

- The building really matters. It is part of the whole package.
- Ambitious architecture is not always visitor-friendly.
- Form and function both matter, but function matters more to the visitor inside the museum.
- The mission and message should dictate the design, not the personal vision of the architect.
- Adapting historic or other existing buildings for museum use can present challenges for visitors. Not every building is meant to be a museum building.
- Location, location, location. Different locations are appropriate for different types of museums with different types of constituents and programs.
- The quality of the facility is part of the overall experience.
- The spaces within the building must align with user and program needs—it is not all about long-term exhibits.

Revenue & Business Model

- The communities a museum serves are its most important source of support.
- In successful museums, the funding model aligns with the museum’s focus and its constituent’s needs.
- Operating subsidies come in many forms, ranging from endowments, to building maintenance.
- Linking your mission to a cause can build membership and support, but “feeding” members can be expensive.
- Rental space can both generate significant revenue and attract new audiences.
- Need to be clear about the relationship between the Museum and the county and to be aware of when the Museum’s focus may diverge from the county’s.
- Don’t move too fast. Planning is cheap compared to reengineering design mistakes. Spending time to plan well is a good investment. However, too much planning may be as much of a risk as not enough.
- Revenue can come from many different sources, but balancing potential revenue with impact on mission is important.
- A great museum store can help build reputation, while also increasing revenue.

National Identity

- If we say we are national, we better be able to deliver.
- We could be national now, without any kind of designation. Congressional designation would be very valuable.
- We don’t have to say that we are a national museum to be a national museum. At first, it might be better not to claim national status—at least until some strong programming is in place that we can point to.
- The Suburban Policy Center may be the easiest vehicle to justify the national brand.

Outcomes

- Outcomes matter. We need to be able to articulate what is different in the world because of the new Johnson County Museum and why that difference matters.
- We should be talking about the metrics we use to measure success right from the beginning. What are they? What do the measure?
- In order to measure outcomes, we need data.
Idea Fair Summary Results

Over a course of six months in 2011, the Johnson County Museum Interpretive Task Force solicited and gathered feedback about the proposed exhibition program for the National Museum of Suburbia. The traveling “Idea Fair” exhibition was created and placed in community locations throughout Johnson County and the metro area. It is estimated that more than 2,500 people viewed the exhibition, and approximately 200 submitted their ideas in writing. This report details, at a high level, the results of the questions posed and provides a sample of the narrative ideas expressed by those the Museum solicited.

Core Exhibit Idea

The American suburbs are a physical (Designing the Suburbs), cultural (Suburban Lifestyles), and emotional (Valuing Suburbia) construct—the ideas they embody challenge us to explore our understandings of the American Dream.

Designing the Suburbs

People were asked if they considered certain cities and neighborhoods across metropolitan Kansas City to be suburban or not. A variety of community types were selected to gain a better understanding of what today’s residents consider suburban.

On a map of the Kansas City region, respondents were asked to circle areas they considered suburban.

- Top vote getters included Olathe, Prairie Village, and Mission in Kansas, and Lee’s Summit and Blue Springs, in Missouri.
- The least number of votes were received by the communities of Brookside and Waldo in Kansas City, Missouri.

When asked in tandem if Mission, KS, and Brookside, a neighborhood in Kansas City, MO, were suburban, 78% of respondents said Mission was suburban versus only 33% stating Brookside was suburban.

Comments included:

- “Both Mission and Brookside are close-in and not suburban.”
- “Both Mission and Brookside have access to public transit, have lots of trees, and are closer to city core. I don’t view either as suburban.”
- “Brookside is in Missouri and nearer to KC.”
- “Brookside is a tightly knit community with many things within walking distance.”
- “Brookside seems connected to downtown, while both are aged, nothing about Missouri seems suburban to me.”
- “Brookside is looped into Kansas City, Missouri, both politically and economically while Mission is not.”

When asked the same question of Olathe, KS, and Liberty, MO, 85% agreed Olathe was suburban versus 45% citing Liberty as suburban.

Comments distinguishing the two cities included:

- “Olathe's original status as an independent city has been overwhelmed by suburban work and lifestyle.”
- “Liberty is too far north to be a suburb. It is separated by distance and development.”
- “Liberty still is small town in character and not suburban.”
When asked the same question in reference to Prairie Village, KS, and Waldo, a neighborhood in Kansas City, MO, 80% agreed Prairie Village was suburban versus 29% citing Waldo as suburban.

Comments distinguishing the two cities included:

- “Waldo is too close to mid-metro to be suburban.”
- “Prairie Village was created for the sole purpose of living in suburbia. Waldo was just expansion of the city.”
- “Waldo seems more of a core community (and not suburban).”

**Suburban Lifestyles**

To explore this concept, the Museum presented popular depictions of suburban lifestyles, largely from television, to solicit which depictions most represented the experiences of suburbia among the respondents.

Respondents most connected (in order) with the depictions from *Leave it to Beaver, The Brady Bunch, The Wonder Years*, and *The Cosby Show*. Reasons included:

- *Leave it to Beaver*: “Reminds me of my childhood,” “A fixture of my youth, but nothing like my own family or childhood,” and “The timing of the show and that it was in the suburbs.”
- *The Brady Bunch*: “Family with lots of children,” “Lots of kids,” and “a safe place.”
- *The Wonder Years*: “Middle class family in the suburbs,” and “car in the driveway.”
- *The Cosby Show*: “A complete family supporting middle class values,” “How we wished a family was,” and “They taught morals in the show.”

Respondents least connected (in order) with the depictions from *Desperate Housewives, The Cosby Show, American Beauty, The Dick Van Dyke Show*, and *The Courtship of Eddie’s Father*. Reasons included:

- *Desperate Housewives*: “Not realistic” and “Too much drama!”
- *The Cosby Show*: “Too urban,” “more urban than suburban,” and “urban family.”
- *American Beauty*: “Just not true to my memory.”
- *The Dick Van Dyke Show*: “Don’t remember seeing outside of house!”, and “I remember it taking place in a high rise apartment condo in a large city.”
- *The Courtship of Eddie’s Father*: “I have married parents,” and “based in the city.”

**Valuing Suburbia**

For this concept, the Museum employed graffiti-type boards for respondents to write on to express what they “love” about the suburbs and what they “hate” about the suburbs. The wide array of comments illustrate the complexity of what individuals value or don’t value about suburban communities and lifestyles.

Many of the comments were expected, like loving good schools, green space, and safe communities. The same can be said about the things people “hate” about suburbs. Expected answers about sprawl, “cookie cutter” houses, racism, and lack of individuality were expressed, along with comments about the lack of transportation options.
Love

- **Green space**: “Green space and a place to call my own,” “Garden, lawn,” and “Dogs and green grass.”
- **Education**: “Better public schools,” “Good schools,” “Community schools,” and “I feel safe at school.”
- **Community**: “Socializing,” “The sense of community,” “Nice neighbors,” “Bon fires,” “Flashlight tag!”, “Walking and enjoying neighbors, dogs, & kids!,” and “The sense of community.”
- **Proximity**: “I get the benefits that the city has to offer plus all the benefits,” “Easy access to the county and big city,” and “Commuting is a breeze!”
- **Amenities**: “Great libraries and public services,” “Bike trails and parks,” “Mahaffie home and history of the region,” and “Community Pools.”
- **Safety**: “Less violence,” “Safe environment to enjoy your life,” “Lower crime rate,” and “You don’t have to excessively worry about crime in the burbs.”
- “Stable home prices.”
- “I don’t want kids, but I love suburbia because I feel safe. Going in the city is a welcome adventure, but I love coming home.”
- “My son can go outside and play with the neighborhood kids without the worry of excessive traffic and crime. I love the easy park/playground/school access to a safe environment and very kind people!”

Hate

- **Development patterns**: “Leap frogging from the core city,” “Unsustainable,” and “They take up valuable land space that could be used for farms.”
- **Conformity**: “All the houses look the same Johnson County beige,” “Sameness!,” “Little boxes made of ticky tacky and they all look the same,” “No character,” and “Johnson County Beige.”
- **Transportation**: “Have to have a car,” “Built for cars, not communal community living,” “Where is public transportation in JoCo?,” and “No public transportation or sidewalks.”
- **Diversity**: “Lack of diversity,” “Discrimination. This isn’t the 1900s,” and “Too many white people.”
- **Isolationism**: “Garage door openers, so you don’t see your neighbors” and “Lack of neighborly socializing.”
- “People who think they don’t need the urban core to make their suburban lives thrive.”
- “When people label you because of being white and from JoCo.”
- “Culture desert” and “Strip Malls.”
- “Homes associations.”
- “All the snotty, spoiled brats living in McMansions and their kids too!”
American Dream Survey Results

As part of the process to develop the Johnson County Museum’s interpretive plan, the Task Force sought to better understand how people think about “suburbia” and the “American Dream,” and any relationship between the two. The team developed an online survey and distributed it on social media sites, the Museum’s website, the Johnson County Government websites (internal and external), and the JoCoHistory.net website. The survey was also mailed directly to Museum members and supporters. In total, 287 people responded to the survey. Their feedback proved invaluable, as the Task Force worked to develop an exhibition program for the new Museum. Highlights of the survey are below.

1. Which of these words do you think of when you think about life in the suburbs?

Top Five Responses
- Good for kids 87%
- Family friendly 83%
- Good schools 83%
- Safe 71%
- Car-centric 62%

Bottom Five Responses
- Artistic 5%
- Dense 4%
- Few opportunities 3%
- Liberal 2%
- People living in poverty 1%

2a. On a scale from 1 to 5 please rate your perceptions of American suburbia?

1 being mostly positive and 5 being mostly negative.

2b. Using the same scale, how do you think other people feel about suburbia?
3. What role does suburbia play in your understanding of how people achieve the American Dream?

Of the respondents, 90% believe that there is a solid relationship between suburbia and the achievement of the American Dream; only 10% did not associate the two ideas together. A representative sample of the comments collected include (comments are included as they were entered in the survey):

- It never occurred to me before this that living in the suburbs was the American Dream. I do think of owning your own home as part of the American Dream.
- I think suburban living accurately reflects the American Dream with both the good things and the bad things that make up the American Dream.
- The American Dream seems to take shape and evolve around the idea of sense of ownership of a plot of land. Where people no longer feel that sense of ownership (dense, failing cities) the suburbs evolved to fill that need of sense of ownership. In some urban areas that are in transformation, the residents feel a sense of ownership in better designed, better managed environments.
- Everyone strives for a beautiful family, 2 1/2 kids, a home of their own and a white picket fence aka those pictured in Leave it Beaver.
- I think that suburbia is a manifestation of the post WWII booms—economic, educational, social and baby. It was an orchestrated attempt to make the American Dream achievable for a large group of people. Due to it's quick growth, some areas lacked future planning for transportation and cultural institutions. As OUR suburbs became more affluent, the cultural and social parts of our urban downtown found their way to our outlying area. Convenient shopping, medical facilities, sporting venues and business parks seem to have dispersed the urban core that once existed in the Kansas City area.
- Suburbia is the American Dream. It's right in the middle. It is close to the city and all it's hype but it's far enough away to have the luxury of space to raise a family.
- Suburbia is a result of hundreds of years of community evolution. It is the culmination of what our ancestors where trying to achieve. Safe, comfortable, and enjoyable living spaces. It is not the end all be all of lifestyle but thanks to the freedoms we enjoy in our country, it is a choice open for anyone willing to work for it.
- It plays no role.
- A lot of people move from more urban settings to suburbia when they have kids in the hope of finding good schools. That seems to be a step towards achieving the American Dream. Often housing in suburbia is newer, less expensive and higher quality than in inner cities, so that's also a step towards achieving the American Dream. The tradeoff, of course, can be increased commuting time to get to and from work.
- A house in the suburbs--one of the iconic versions of the American Dream.
- Suburbia is the epitome of the American Dream--house, car, kids.
- Suburbia provides a launching pad for many individuals to move into the next economic level.
- It reinforces self-sufficiency (homeowners), hard work, achievement through many activities (sports, community organizations).
- Suburbia is the embodiment of the American Dream, a house to call a home in neighborhoods that are tree lined with children laughing and playing in a safe and comfortable environment.
- Not much. My idea of the American Dream is and has always been freedom. It's about the opportunities that America offers people: to get an education, get a meaningful job that fulfills one's aspirations, to not be constantly afraid of the government (I mean really
afraid, of violence and overthrows, etc.), and to have the freedoms that are guaranteed in the Bill of Rights.

- Suburbia is often where families can afford to purchase their first home. To me, home ownership is the epitome of the American Dream.

- For many people the American Dream is fulfilled with a nice owned home in a safe neighborhood with excellent schools and a satisfactory job near their home. As jobs move to the suburbs the American Dream becomes attainable.

- I look upon suburbia from the eyes of my parents--WWII veteran/Depression children. It was their way of leaving behind poverty and the WWII experience. They prided themselves on moving to the suburbs & embraced all it entailed in the 1950s.

- It is where the American Dream happens for many people. Good quality schools lead to an educated population which leads to higher education and lucrative job opportunities. Of course recent economic conditions have changed some of those opportunities.

- Suburban life reflects the values of the individual. Urban life reflects the values of the crowd. Individuals have a shot at the dream--crowds don't.

5. What would you expect to see or learn about in a museum about Johnson County and the pursuit of the American Dream?

Participants provided a wide variety of answers. A sample is below:

- The common things that most American suburbs had and experienced and those unique things that set different American suburbs apart.

- The fifties post war rock and roll, boom years, cold war stereotypes.

- As an elected official in a suburb, I would benefit from programming related to suburbia...from its beginnings to where it is headed. Lectures, workshops, courses, and exhibits would affect my profession. I would also expect opportunities to reach out to the central city and its leaders/residents and understand how we are all connected, how we can all benefit from one another. As a parent, clearly it is an opportunity to teach our children about their community through a variety of sensory experiences. I would expect fun learning for children through exhibits, events, and hands-on play.

- The truth about the purposeful segregation and the inequality with the suburbs vs. the city.

- Displays- styles of homes & other buildings, collections of furniture & toys, diagrams of subdivisions/shopping centers/etc., history of real estate prices.

- How the suburbs developed, what life is like in the suburbs, and how the suburbs are changing, demographically and economically. Differences between older (original) suburbs and newer ones, including challenges facing older suburbs.

- I'd expect to learn about Levittown and the building of similar suburbs after WWII. I'd like to see time saving appliances that changed women's lives in the 50's. I'd like to learn about ideas for new suburbs.

- I would expect to see photos of street after street of identical houses with identical yards and cars, of back yard barbecues, kids riding their bikes. I would also expect a lot of displays of what life was like in the first suburbs--furniture, toys, clothes, magazines. Pictures of kids watching TV. Mom showing off "her" kitchen. Dad mowing the lawn. I think all the memorabilia would make visitors talk about whether the suburbs have changed, or just people's perceptions have changed.

- How they began, why they began, ways to make suburbia work more cooperatively with the big city and vice versa.

- The suburbs must always be in a stage of evolution to meet the needs of the community. I would like to know some of the visionaries of past and present, how what some critics see as a beige community as one that is colorful and teaming with life. This requires citizen...
involvement and dedication to a standard of quality of community life.

• Television and movies set in the suburbs. Supportive and critical views, nostalgia. What is currently relevant?

• Timelines, unexpected problems that occurred as a result of suburb growth, how major US cities have adapted to suburb growth, how suburbs are financed, charts/graphs detailing population shifts, impact on civil rights and tolerance (specifically the African American point of view).

• Sociological impact of the perception of Suburbia. Actual environmental impact. The evolution of the "suburbs" from rural farmland to developed area's. From Johnson County's perspective, how did we go from living in Mission to the expansive "McMansions" of suburban Shawnee/So OP/etc.

• See and learn about the changes from rural and urban life to suburban, trends in population and demographics, models of successful suburbs with transportation and employment hubs, plans for the future of the community.

• How the community has evolved and what struggles there have been by people living in suburbia in the past to make it what it is today. History tells what it was like then and how it is now and how hard people living in suburbia have had to work to make it what it is today. It is nice to see the history of one or several individuals and their stories about what contributions they made and what sacrifices were made during their lifetime. I like to see information that most people forgot about, like the electric house museum. Never knew about that house!

• I would expect to encounter exhibits on the unique architecture and sprawling nature of the suburbs. Also, exhibits on the cultural evolution of the suburbs through time -- attitudes, expectations, lifestyle. Does anyone mow their own lawn anymore? Things have changed tremendously in my lifetime.

• How our tax policies, economic policies encourage outward flight, leaving the donut hole to decay. This is the reverse of most nations, where the poor live in the outer ring. Why is the US so different?

• Influence of federal highway funding & federal insured mortgage programs on growth of suburbia. Effect of continuous outward movement from city core on infrastructure costs and older suburbs.

• More "walkthroughs"--less reading. Perhaps at least audio available for non-readers (eye or language problems). More hands-on activities.

• Much of what is currently in the museum but expanded.

• History of suburbia. Why it evolved. Role of city planners in suburbia. How post WWII played a part in suburbia. Has it lived up to the expectations?

• I would like to see the growth in positive, as well as, negative ways: political, population, socially, recreationally, employment, etc.

• To recognize the successes and admit the failures of Suburbia. I would like to see hard issues tackled such as the early efforts placed to keep suburbia "white only" and to analyze current effects of Hispanic and Asian cultures immigrating and embedding within our local communities. Currently, a focus on these effects can be studied as the Shawnee Mission School District faces pending closures. There appears to be a full life cycle being displayed for the NE Johnson County area, and may very well cause a ripple-effect.

• To me, any project which addresses the suburbs must see itself as a look back at how it all happened and a look at the ultimate limits to which this lifestyle can go and still provide the possible cost/benefit comparisons in a world increasingly aware of the need for efficient use of resources.

• Information and exhibits for different kinds of suburbs around the country.

• How suburbs have influenced city planning, laws, politics, city growth, jobs and other related matters.
(The following questions were asked to learn more about the respondents to the survey.)

6. The area I live in now is mostly:

7. The area where I grew up was mostly:

8. How long has your family lived in the United States?

(Recent immigrant respondents were negligible and do not appear on the chart.)

9. What is your zip code?