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## How walkable is downtown?

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A bank sign flashed a temperature reading of 31 degrees shortly after noon Friday. Nice day for a stroll around downtown? Not really.

But that's what about 30 people chose to do on the first day of a two-day "walk-shop," an event designed to help downtown planners figure out what makes the area walkable.

"We want to see the city through your eyes," Jeff Fluhr, president of the Wichita Downtown Development Corp., told the group.

Representatives of Goody Clancy, the Boston-based

consultant firm leading the downtown revitalization master plan, gave a 50-minute presentation to the group at Eaton Place, 523 E. Douglas.

Then the walkers split into small groups and hit the streets. They observed, made mental notes and took pictures.

One group chose a path — north from Douglas on St. Francis to Second Street, west one block to Emporia, then south to Douglas before heading back to the starting point — that is guaranteed not to draw high marks for walkability.

Broken sidewalks and windows and vacant lots and buildings dominated.

"I love downtown," Jennifer Marshall said. "But to be honest, I wouldn't walk any of this by myself."

Angee Cisco, who has a 10-year-old daughter, was not impressed by the faded white crosswalk lines at First and St. Francis.

"I can see where moms would be wary of taking their children across there," she said.

Phil Laney liked seeing an automotive repair shop on the southwest corner of First and St. Francis.

"You need business diversity and services that people need," he said.

Mary Means, a Goody Clancy rep who joined the group, agreed.

"But if there were a row of shrubs here," she said, "it would be more attractive than noses of cars."

A half-block to the west on First, Laney pointed out the south side of the street was lined by a row of shrubs and a low, red-brick wall.

"Much better," Laney said.

The group found nothing attractive about the east side of St. Francis between First and Second. Two abandoned buildings with broken windows framed a large, vacant lot. An 8-foot chain-link fence topped by three strands of razor wire stood between the vacant lot and the sidewalk.

"At least there's the security of the fence," Nathan Law said. "You know no one's going to jump out at you."

"But there's potential. It's all about potential."

Means, who lives above a store in Alexandria, Va., could see the potential of the vacant building on the southeast

corner of Second and St. Francis.

"I'd love to live there," she said. "You could build lofts."

Walking south on Emporia, they saw plenty of parking meters — but no cars. Empty parking lots, too.

"There are plenty of parking locations," Cisco said.

"Trouble is," said Means as she paused to take a picture of a crumbling sidewalk, "there's not much to come to downtown."

As Means got ready to cross First, she said, "This does look like they built the city for the car."

Wide streets, plenty of parking lots.

"And empty buildings," Means added.

Another walk-shop will be from 9 a.m. until noon today, again meeting at Eaton Place.

Pictures from the two walks will be on display. Shortly after 1 p.m., breakout sessions will be held to discuss walkability issues and allow walkers to provide development leaders with input.

A major reason to make a downtown walkable is that characteristic attracts residents as well as retail businesses.

David Dixon, a Goody Clancy consultant, said Wichita's downtown is ripe to attract more residents.

He said 62 percent of Wichita's households are one- or two-person. The national average is between 50 and 60 percent.

"But Wichita is not set up for that," Dixon said.

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