
Practice papers

Collaborative zoning, land use, and economic development along West Florissant Avenue

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Abstract The West Florissant Avenue Great Streets project in St. Louis County, Missouri, represents a rare example of three cities — Dellwood, Ferguson, and Jennings — developing and adopting a unified zoning ordinance for a historically disinvested, socially significant commercial corridor. This initiative to revitalise a corridor deeply affected by decades of disinvestment and the 2014 civil unrest following the death of Michael Brown Jr. integrates land-use reform, community-driven redevelopment, brownfields planning, and infrastructure investment and was coordinated by the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership in collaboration with the cities and other regional partners. This paper examines the governance structure, planning process, and policy mechanisms that enabled the creation of the shared West Florissant Corridor District Zoning Ordinance,¹ analyses its outcomes to date, and discusses how the approach can inform regeneration efforts in other multijurisdictional urban environments. The case demonstrates the value of sustained collaboration, shared regulatory tools, and community stewardship

in transitioning corridors from sites of crisis towards resilient, opportunity-rich places. This article is also included in **The Business & Management Collection** which can be accessed at <https://hstalks.com/business/>.

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BACKGROUND: A CORRIDOR DEFINED BY DISINVESTMENT AND UPHEAVAL

The West Florissant Avenue (WFA) corridor (see Figure 1), spanning approximately 3.5 miles through the cities of Dellwood, Ferguson, and Jennings, Missouri in St. Louis County, has long functioned as a key commercial and transport hub. The corridor hosts a collection of small-scale retail, auto-oriented businesses and aging commercial strip centres. On average, over 30,000 vehicles travel the corridor each day, with only a small percentage stopping

at the small businesses.² This is one of the factors for why many businesses have closed or relocated, leading to visible economic decline, vacant lots, deteriorating buildings, limited maintenance, and declining foot traffic.

Across Dellwood, Ferguson, and Jennings, all cities with majority African American populations, the demographic profile reflects long-standing patterns of concentrated disadvantage that diverge significantly from the broader St. Louis Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and the US as a whole.

While the region and the nation have experienced modest population growth

MAP 1.1. REGIONAL CONTEXT MAP

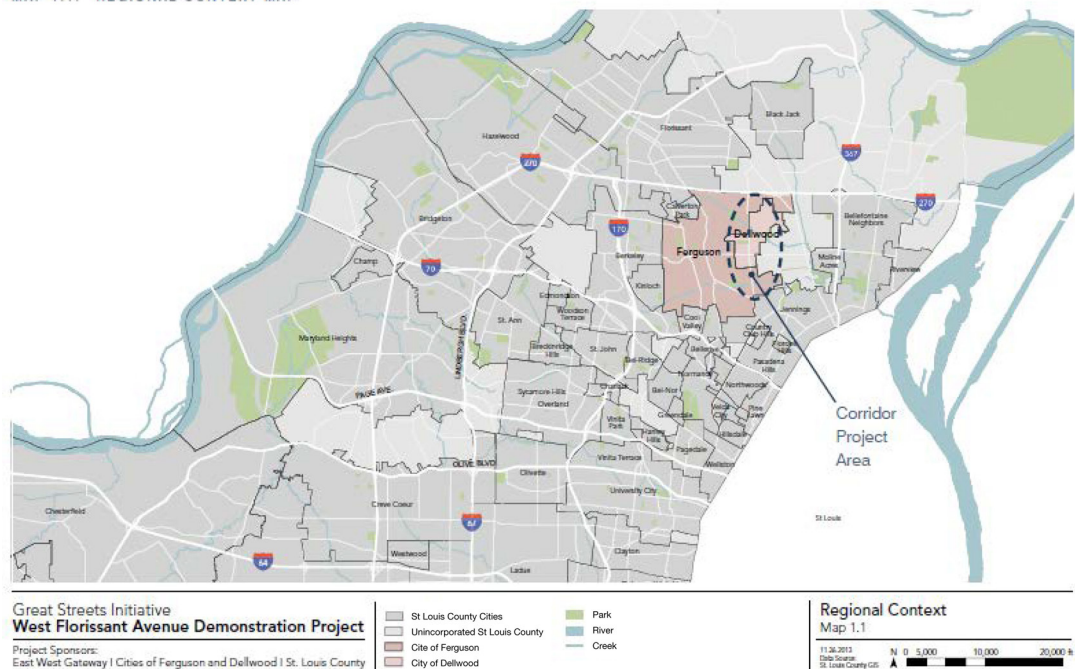


Figure 1: West Florissant Avenue corridor, St. Louis County, Missouri, USA

Source: West Florissant Avenue Great Streets Master Plan, East-West Gateway Council of Governments, June 2014

over the past decade (see Figure 2), all three cities show stagnation or decline, with Jennings and Ferguson experiencing notable population losses after 2020. In 2024, poverty rates in these cities stood at over 21 per cent (see Figure 3), almost double the national rate of 12.5 per cent, underscoring the community's persistent economic distress.

Median household incomes further illustrate these disparities. Although Dellwood shows recent gains, incomes across the three communities remain well below the national median income, which exceeded US\$80,000 by 2024 (see Figure 4). Home ownership, historically the most common avenue for wealth

building in the US, also differs sharply from the national rate of 65.1 per cent (see Figure 5). Owner-occupancy rates in the corridor communities have declined or fluctuated significantly over the decade, with the City of Jennings facing an owner-occupancy rate of only 45 per cent.

Finally, transport dependency is substantially higher than the national rate of 3.2 per cent in Jennings at 13 per cent and double the national rate in Ferguson at 6.6 per cent (see Figure 6). This demonstrates the corridor's reliance on non-automobile mobility relative to the rest of the nation, in a county where car ownership is widespread.

Collectively, these trends reflect structural inequities that shape redevelopment efforts along WFA and reinforce the importance of coordinated land-use, transport, and economic development interventions to narrow the gap with broader regional socio-economic conditions.³

These patterns of disinvestment affected Black and working-class residents, whose neighbourhoods relied on WFA for everyday services, retail, jobs, and mobility. By the early 2010s, however, WFA had increasingly come to symbolise systemic neglect, and the corridor's built form reflected decades of deferred maintenance, unmanaged land use, and minimal public reinvestment. This physical deterioration intersected with economic marginalisation, reduced access to quality amenities, and a weakening public support aggravated by government fragmentation along the corridor.

On 9th August, 2014, Michael Brown Jr., an 18-year-old Black man from Ferguson, was fatally shot by a police officer, sparking immediate outrage and protest. Witness accounts and police testimony diverged sharply; the disagreement over the moments leading to Brown's death, including whether he had his hands raised to surrender, ignited national debate over policing, race, and justice.⁴

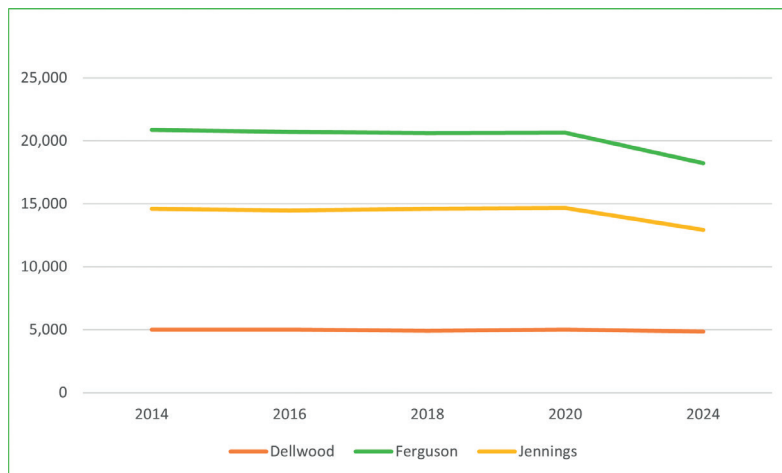


Figure 2: Municipal population by year

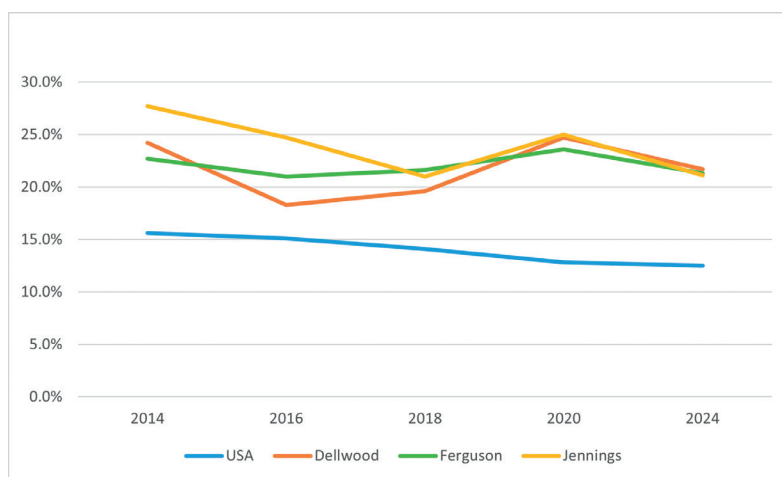


Figure 3: Poverty rate by year

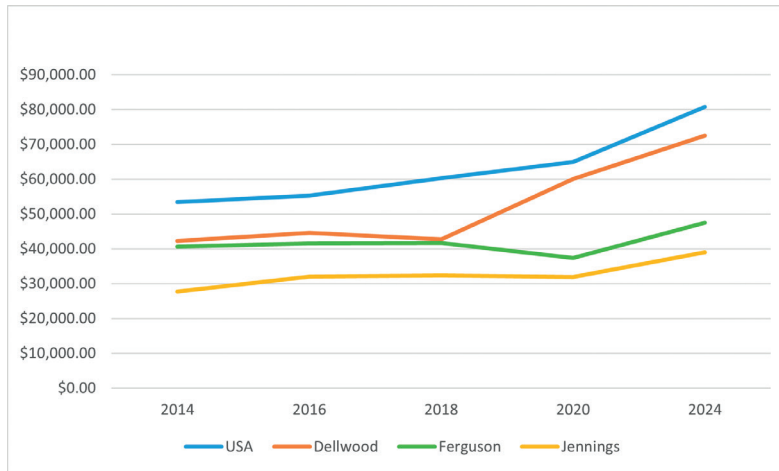


Figure 4: Median household income by year

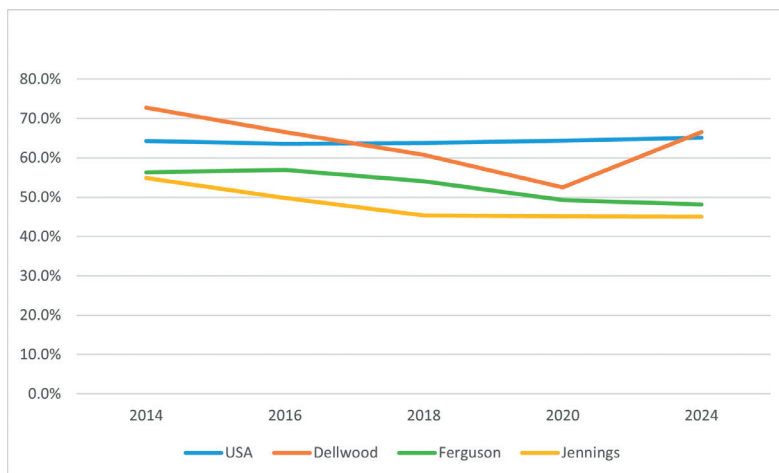


Figure 5: Owner occupied homes by year

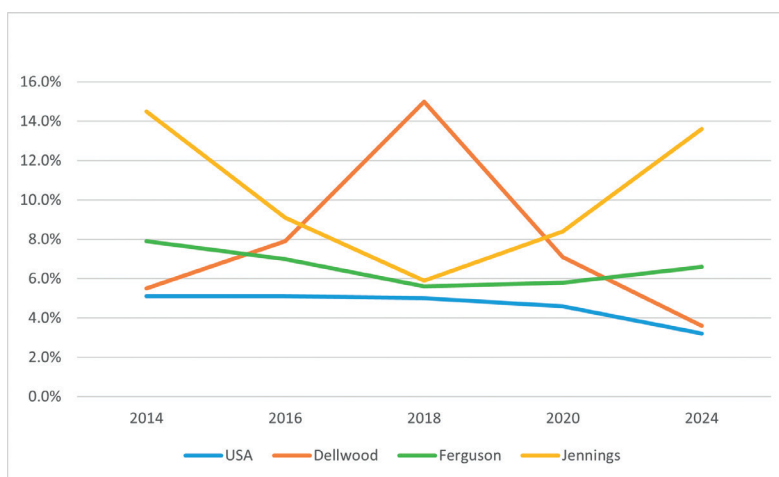


Figure 6: Transport-dependent populations by year

The killing sparked a wave of protests and soon escalated into widespread unrest, including arson at several sites along WFA and confrontations between protesters and law enforcement. These events encompassed initial protests beginning mid-August 2014, a second eruption in late November 2014 following a grand jury decision not to indict the officer, and further flare-ups around the one-year anniversary of the shooting.⁵

Notably, the unrest had a disproportionately damaging effect on the West Florissant Corridor, especially within Dellwood, because the avenue served as a main traffic artery that connected directly to the protests. One contemporary account described Dellwood as ‘getting hit the hardest’; many of the fires, looting, and destruction occurred along WFA, leaving large swathes of commercial real estate vacant or destroyed (see Figure 7).⁶

Community leaders including the STL Partnership, the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis (ULSTL),⁷ elected leaders, residents, business, and property owners collaborated to address the destruction and accompanying vacancy issues.

A NEW REGIONAL APPROACH: GREAT STREETS AND MULTIMODAL CORRIDORS

In response to the crisis, both structural and social, a coalition of city representatives, regional planning agencies, environmental agencies, and community stakeholders began to envision a path not just towards recovery but towards comprehensive regeneration. Local elected officials noted that residents, property owners, and even decision makers often did not recognise how city boundaries created ‘invisible lines’ that shaped land-use outcomes along the corridor (see Figure 8). This fragmentation made it difficult to address redevelopment comprehensively, reinforcing the need



Figure 7: Aftermath of the protests: (1) Dellwood Market; (2) Nail Trap; (3) QuikTrip; (4) West Florissant Reds BBQ

Source: St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, 2014

for a corridor-scale regulatory framework rather than piecemeal city efforts.

The concept was to treat WFA not as a collection of broken parcels, managed by multiple cities, but as a comprehensive corridor: a contiguous stretch of public right-of-way, commercial frontage, and community life that could be reimagined through coordinated planning, design, and investment.

The pivot began with the West Florissant Avenue Great Streets (WFGS) Initiative of the East–West Gateway Council of Government (EWG),⁸ the official Metropolitan Planning Organization⁹ for Greater St. Louis. This plan, which was completed just before the civil unrest, framed the West Florissant Corridor as a candidate for transformation into a multimodal, community-focused street capable of supporting stronger economic activity and higher-quality development. The planning process produced the WFGS Plan,¹⁰ identifying strategies for:

- pedestrian and bicycle safety;
- corridor identity;
- corridor-wide streetscape enhancements;
- land-use reform; and
- a coordinated development strategy across jurisdictions.

One of the plan’s key recommendations was to establish a unified, multi-city zoning framework to ensure consistency in development expectations and reduce barriers to private investment (see Figure 9).

RENEWED POTENTIAL: FROM TRAUMA TO OPPORTUNITY

In 2016, STL Partnership sought assistance from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to assess and prepare several blighted properties for reuse, including a former auto supply store that was decimated by arson. The EPA provided technical assistance to support

MAP 1.3. WEST FLORISSANT CORRIDOR AERIAL VIEW

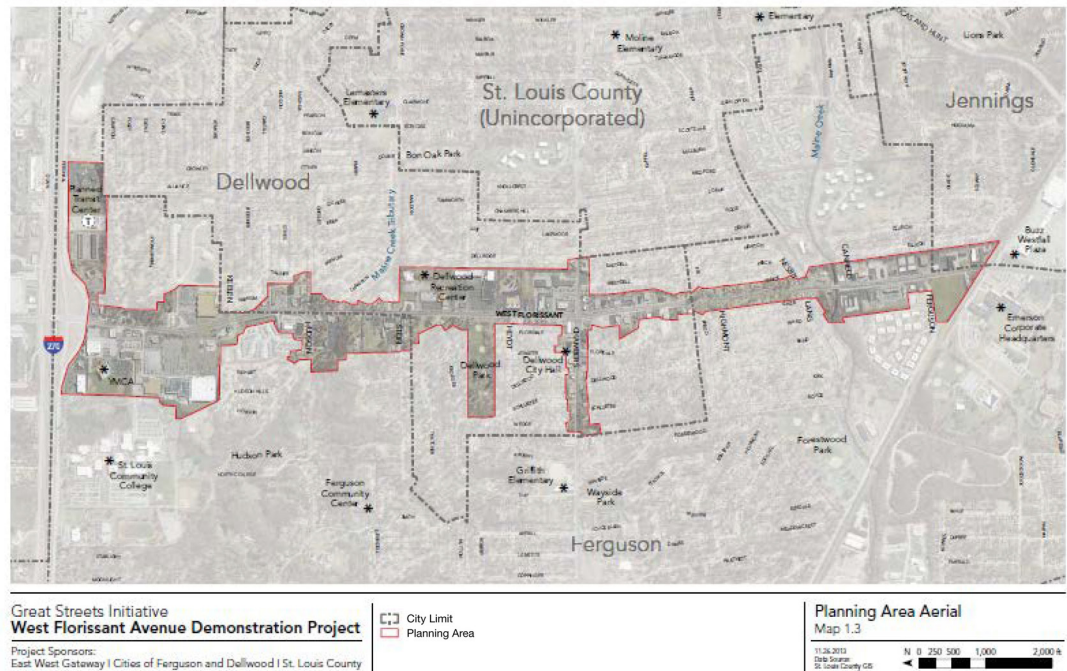


Figure 8: Aerial view of the West Florissant Corridor demonstrating the city dividing lines

Source: West Florissant Avenue Great Streets Master Plan, East–West Gateway Council of Governments, June 2014



Dellwood Town Center Existing Conditions



Desirable Character for Dellwood Town Center

Figure 9: Dellwood Town Center: image of the existing street view in comparison to the recommended changes

Source: West Florissant Avenue Great Streets Master Plan, East–West Gateway Council of Governments, June 2014

a design charrette in May 2017. During the charrette, community stakeholders, including residents, local officials, and non-profit organisations, identified key reuse opportunities for the sites that were rendered unusable after the civil unrest. In addition, the EPA supported a market analysis indicating unmet demand for housing, childcare, retail, and ‘maker space’ uses. These analyses helped local leaders visualise alternatives to the ‘auto parts and fast food’ commercial pattern that had dominated the corridor for decades and played a key role in ensuring the site reuse aligned with the community’s priorities.¹¹

In summary, this background underscores three overlapping guiding principles:

- The devastation along WFA was not just physical, it was social, economic, and psychological. The 2014–2015 unrest destroyed properties, displaced businesses, and deepened distrust in institutions.

- Single-parcel or piecemeal fixes would leave the corridor vulnerable to further decay. Without integrated planning, design, environmental assessment, and regulatory alignment, the wounds would likely never heal.
- A corridor-scale, community-grounded, multijurisdictional vision was essential. Only through coordinated action — across cities, across sectors, and with community participation — could WFA recover and build towards sustainable regeneration.

The ongoing effort to transform WFA is not just about building new structures, it is about healing past trauma, restoring dignity, and reimagining the corridor as a space of opportunity, identity, and community resilience.

Simultaneously, St. Louis County's Department of Transportation and Public Works coordinated five rounds of applications to the Federal Highway Administration requesting a significant federal investment in support of the WFGS construction. Partners that supported each round of applications through financial, technical, and community support included the cities of Ferguson, Dellwood, and Jennings, STL Partnership, Great Rivers Greenway, Bi-State Metro, Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, Inc. (ULSTL), Health and Homes, and many others. It was not until 2021 that WFGS was awarded US\$18.2m via the US Department of Transportation (DOT) Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant.¹² Securing this federal funding was essential to initiate a project estimated to exceed US\$25m.

The extended timeline required to secure federal investment underscored both the scale of the challenge and the need for interim local action. While awaiting confirmation of RAISE funding, the cities of Ferguson, Dellwood, and Jennings elected to proceed with policy

reform rather than delay implementation. Through coordinated zoning action, the cities developed and adopted a unified zoning framework intended to reduce regulatory friction, provide greater predictability for developers, and ensure that any near-term private investment would align with the WFGS vision. This proactive approach positioned zoning not merely as a regulatory tool but as a catalyst for early implementation and market signalling, encouraging diversification of uses and reinforcing corridor-wide design and development expectations in advance of major infrastructure construction.

Together, these actions reflect a deliberate shift from reactive recovery towards intentional regeneration. By pairing community-informed site readiness efforts with corridor-scale infrastructure planning and policy alignment, local and regional partners laid the groundwork for redevelopment that was both market-responsive and equity-driven. This integrated foundation ultimately enabled WFA to move from a symbol of disruption to a platform for coordinated reinvestment and long-term community resilience.

WEST FLORISSANT CORRIDOR DISTRICT ZONING ORDINANCE¹³

The original objectives of the West Florissant Corridor District Zoning Ordinance were rooted in the EWG Great Streets Initiative, which sought to re-envision major regional corridors as multimodal, community-focused environments capable of stimulating economic opportunity rather than remaining solely auto-oriented thoroughfares. At the organisational level, these objectives were established formally and adopted by the participating cities through an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA).¹⁴ The adopted zoning code articulated the initiative's overarching goals: improving connectivity, strengthening local

economies, and creating attractive, vibrant places through safer and more functional multimodal access.

The zoning ordinance produced several notable structural outcomes. The cities of Jennings, Dellwood, and Ferguson collectively adopted a unified zoning ordinance, creating an unprecedented level of intercity coordination along the corridor. The ordinance established a shared development framework applicable across city boundaries, eliminating inconsistent zoning classifications and streamlining development processes. Collectively, these goals reflect the broader mission of the WFGS Plan, which prioritises sustainable corridor redevelopment, multimodal mobility, and the reinforcement of community identity.

The IGA demonstrates that the project's objectives were simultaneously regional in vision and local in execution. They were shaped through multijurisdictional collaboration and grounded in prior community planning efforts.

How objectives were formed

Objectives were developed across several levels of governance and planning. At the policy and governance level, the city councils of Jennings, Dellwood, and Ferguson formally adopted the ordinance and authorised participation in the shared district framework. At the technical and professional level, a local consulting company coordinated the intergovernmental conversations through regular conversations with the three city planning departments and zoning commissions, elected officials, and community input sessions. An Advisory Panel, comprising representatives from the three cities, was also established to oversee nonconforming uses and special-use proposals, further institutionalising cross-jurisdictional coordination. Establishing these organisational structures worked to create interlocking strategic, policy, and

community commitments that would force ongoing collaboration along the corridor.

Structure and function of the corridor zoning framework: Five context-specific district segments

The corridor was subdivided into five districts or nodes: North Gateway, Green Boulevard, Dellwood Town Center, Residential Avenue, and South Gateway (see Figure 10), each with distinct dimensional, design, and land-use standards. Interviews with city planning staff confirm that public input varied significantly along the corridor, with residents in northern segments expressing concerns related to adjacency, scale, and privacy, while other areas emphasised economic revitalisation.

These spatially differentiated concerns directly informed the creation of multiple corridor segments with context-sensitive standards rather than a single uniform zoning district. These districts provide

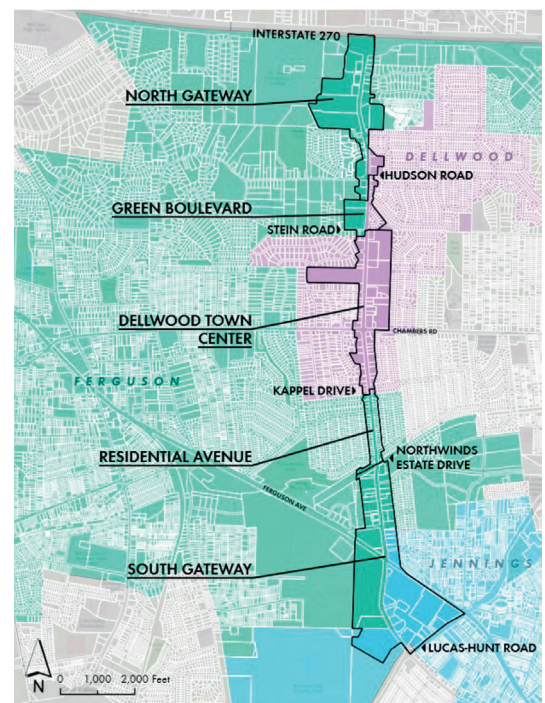


Figure 10: Image from the West Florissant Zoning Ordinance User Guide showing the delineation of the five distinct districts along the corridor

a more granular structure for guiding development patterns and ensuring that infrastructure, density, and design expectations align with local context.

The nodes are identified in the following ways:

- *North Gateway*: Regional retail, multimodal access, and entrance identity.
- *Green Boulevard*: Green buffers, reduced curb cuts, stormwater integration, and residential adjacency.
- *Dellwood Town Center*: Walkable civic-oriented commercial node with small-scale retail.
- *Residential Avenue*: Low-scale residential frontage emphasising scenic character and safety.
- *South Gateway*: Neighbourhood commercial district with mixed-use potential and future greenway connections.

The ordinance also introduced comprehensive design and development standards, including requirements for landscaping, lighting, screening, building materials, parking configuration, pedestrian amenities, and stormwater considerations. These standards aim to enhance corridor aesthetics, improve environmental performance, and increase development predictability.

Unified development standards

The zoning code clearly defines permitted, special, and prohibited uses across all five segments, significantly reducing regulatory uncertainty for property owners, developers, and city staff. Uses are cross-referenced with North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes,¹⁵ enabling clarity and consistency. The code also provides clear guidance on permitted, special, and prohibited land uses across all jurisdictions that residents can clearly understand without much special training,

with the goal of supporting a more diverse and sustainable mix of uses while reducing regulatory uncertainty.

Complementary sections of the code define corridor-wide standards for:

- off-street parking and shared parking incentives;
- façade articulation and massing;
- site lighting, screening, and landscaping;
- tree protection and stormwater best management practice (BMP) integration; and
- pedestrian and bicycle access requirements.

These standards ensure that all new developments will be predictable and of a high quality in alignment with the community's long-term vision for WFA as a walkable, mixed-use corridor.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT: STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE FUNCTIONS, AND POLICY SIGNIFICANCE

The Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) among Dellwood, Ferguson, and Jennings is the governance mechanism that operationalises activities along the consolidated zoning district. Beyond simply authorising joint zoning, the IGA creates a binding 50-year framework for coordinated land-use regulation, shared implementation authority, and long-term accountability among the three cities. Its provisions represent an unusually robust form of cooperative local governance, particularly in a fragmented metropolitan region, and position the three cities to manage growth along a shared commercial corridor as a single, unified district.

The IGA is the ordinance's operational backbone. It formalises:

- shared authority and responsibility for the zoning district;

- consistent adoption and amendment procedures;
- coordinated enforcement;
- a mechanism for resolving conflicts; and
- the 21-day advisory review process for specific development types.

It also includes financial penalty provisions for cities that approve nonconforming uses without appropriate cross-jurisdictional review, a rare but effective enforcement tool ensuring group accountability.

Advisory Panel: Cross-city development review

The ordinance created a formal intercity Advisory Panel responsible for reviewing nonconforming proposals and special-use requests. Each city retains authority to process applications for sites within its boundaries, but any proposal inconsistent with the coordinated zoning agreement must be referred to the Advisory Panel before a public zoning hearing can occur. This oversight mechanism serves as a governance tool for ensuring that development decisions remain consistent with the shared vision for the corridor.

The nine-member Advisory Panel is composed of three Planning and Zoning Commission chairs (or designees), one from each city, and six at-large members (two appointed by each city's mayor and confirmed by their respective council). Members serve staggered four-year terms, ensuring continuity and stability. The panel's composition — blending planning professionals, commissioners, and community members — ensures that decisions reflect technical rigour, city perspective, and neighbourhood priorities.

The Advisory Panel does not function as a regional zoning board. Instead, it reviews rezoning, special-use, and nonconforming development proposals prior to city review. It issues recommendations for approval, denial, or conditional approval.

The Advisory Panel must notify all three city councils if a proposal suggests potential need for a joint amendment to the ordinance. Although advisory in name, its influence may be substantial, since the IGA cites the risk of financial penalty and loss of cooperative standing if they disregard panel recommendations without justification. The panel's role is structurally significant because it institutionalises cross-city dialogue and ensures that no city evaluates major land-use changes in isolation.

Role of the zoning user guide in supporting Advisory Panel decision making

A critical implementation support tool for the zoning district was the 'West Florissant Zoning Ordinance User Guide'¹⁶ (see Figures 11 and 12), developed as a companion document to the adopted zoning ordinance. While the ordinance itself provided the legally binding regulatory framework, its technical density posed a challenge for the Corridor Advisory Panel, which included at-large members and civic leaders without formal training in planning or zoning administration.

The User Guide was intentionally designed as an accessible, plain-language reference that translated complex zoning provisions into clear summaries, visual explanations, and segment-specific tables. Organised around practical questions — such as how the ordinance is structured, how permitted and special uses vary by corridor segment, and when Advisory Panel review is triggered — the guide allowed panel members to quickly orient themselves during development discussions without relying solely on staff interpretation. In particular, the use matrix, segment descriptions, and concise explanations of the advisory review process enabled lay members to participate meaningfully in evaluating nonconforming and special-use proposals.

W. FLORISSANT CORRIDOR DISTRICT USE MATRIX							
KEY: P = PERMITTED // S = SPECIAL USE // BLANK = PROHIBITED							
USE	NG	GB	DTC	RA	SG (A)	SG (B)	SG (C)
Art Dealers (45392)	P		P		P	P	
Automobile and Other Motor Vehicle Dealers (4411, 4412)	S		S		S	S	S
Automotive Parts, Accessories, and Tire Stores (4413)	P		P		P	P	
Book Stores and News Dealers (4512)	P		P		P	P	
Clothing and clothing accessories stores (448)	P		P		P	P	
Commercial Banking (5221)	P		P		P	P	
Commercial Banking with a drive-through facility (5221)			S				
Commercial parking facilities and parking structures not associated with multiple-building and mixed-use planned development					S	S	
Convenience stores of not less than 5,500 square feet of gross floor area with gasoline sales (44512)					S	S	
Cosmetics, Beauty Supplies, and Perfume Stores (44612)	S		S		S	S	S
Credit Unions (52213)	S		S		S	S	S
Daycare centers (6244)		S		S			
Dry-cleaning and laundry service (8123)	P		P		P	P	
Duplex or two-family dwelling		P		P			
Electronics and Appliance Stores (4431)	P		P		P	P	
Fitness center, gym, or private enclosed or open recreational uses (71394, 71395)					S	S	
Florists (4531)	P		P		P	P	
Funds, Trusts, and Other Financial Vehicles (525)	P		P		P	P	
Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores (4421, 4422)	P		P		P	P	
Garden supplies (4442)	P		P		P	P	
Gasoline Stations (447)	S		S		S	S	
General Merchandise Stores (452)	P		P		P	P	
Grocery stores, Delicatessens and Specialty Food Stores (4451, 4452)	P		P		P		
Group home (623990)		P		P			

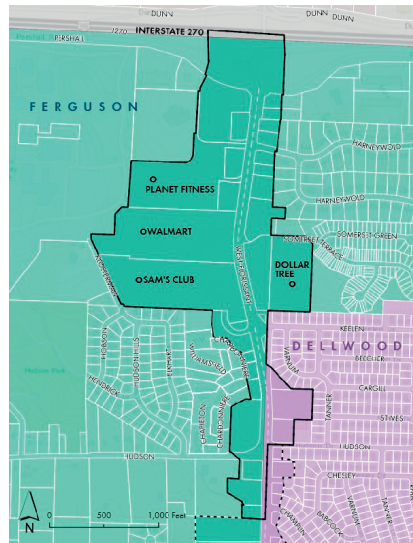
Figure 11: West Florissant Corridor District Zoning Ordinance User Guide, prepared by the City of Ferguson in coordination with the cities of Dellwood and Jennings, explains that the use matrix is organised to identify permitted, special, and prohibited uses by corridor segment, with uses listed alphabetically and cross-referenced to NAICS codes

By reducing reliance on specialised zoning expertise, the User Guide helped democratise the advisory process and reinforced the intergovernmental intent of the corridor framework. It supported consistency in recommendations across jurisdictions, while increasing transparency and confidence among panel members. As a result, the Advisory Panel functioned not only as a technical checkpoint but as a deliberative body capable of aligning individual development proposals with the

shared corridor vision articulated in the WFGS Plan and the IGA.

Economic development incentives

The IGA also acknowledges that land-use regulation alone cannot achieve revitalisation. Considering this, it requires panel review of any special taxing incentives implemented ‘along the entire Corridor’. The Advisory Panel would review the incentives for



NORTH GATEWAY

The North Gateway of the West Florissant Corridor District is intended to protect and enhance the regional retail center. The North Gateway represents the main entrance to the Corridor from I-270 and acts as a draw to customers from surrounding areas. The North Gateway includes properties with frontage on the east or west side of West Florissant Avenue between the I-270 interchange to the north and Hudson Road to the south, including just south of Hudson Road on the west side of West Florissant Avenue. The entire North Gateway is located in the boundaries of the City of Ferguson and a portion of the City of Dellwood.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the North Gateway is to provide design standards to guide future development and create a cohesive overall West Florissant Corridor, *not* to alter the uses allowed by the base zoning districts.

GOALS

- 1) Enhance the visual appearance through streetscape design improvements to create a more visually appealing gateway;
- 2) Enhance mobility, access and safety for alternative forms of transportation including pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders;
- 3) Encourage new development and re-development that supports or expands the existing retail-commercial development.

IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES, the Zoning Administrator can determine a use to be permitted if it is similar to one or more of the permitted uses which conforms with the intent and purpose of the North Gateway.

Figure 12: Excerpt from the West Florissant Corridor District Zoning Ordinance User Guide summarising the North Gateway district, illustrating how each corridor segment is presented in a concise, standardised format for use by the multi-city Advisory Panel

KEY DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS		
	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Lot Area	10,000 sf	
Lot Width	100 ft	
Lot Coverage		40%
Front Setback	5 ft	25 ft
Side Setback	10 ft *	
Rear Setback	25 ft *	
Building Height		45 ft

**only if side/rear yard abuts residential property*

alignment with the WFA Consolidated Zone, the WFGS Plan, and any other adopted redevelopment plans. This ensures cities cannot use incentives in ways that undermine corridor-wide goals or create intercity competition for development.

Financial penalty provisions

The IGA contains unusually strong enforcement tools for city cooperation defined in the Material Default Provisions. A city is in 'material default' if it:

- approves a prohibited use without submitting it to the panel;
- approves a use after the panel issues a disapproval recommendation;
- fails to adopt the district or consistently enforce its provisions; or
- replaces the shared code with a different zoning regime.

The financial penalties for a defaulting city include:

- US\$30,000 to each non-defaulting city, increasing by 1.5 per cent annually.
- Additional damages for lost revenue or opportunity costs.
- Attorney's fees for the prevailing party.

These penalties are not symbolic. They provide a rare level of enforceability for an intercity zoning agreement and ensure that political shifts or development pressure cannot easily unravel the district's integrity.

The IGA transforms what could have been a loosely coordinated corridor effort into a durable, enforceable, governance-rich framework for shared land-use decision making. It provides the structural backbone for the unified zoning ordinance, ensures consistent enforcement across jurisdictions, and embeds corridor revitalisation within a multigenerational, collaborative governance regime. The IGA stands out as a strong example of legally binding intercity zoning coordination, particularly within a racially segregated and politically fragmented metropolitan region.

Community engagement and co-creation of the corridor vision

Community engagement has been a defining feature of the corridor's redevelopment. Building on engagement activities dating back to the WFGS Plan in 2013–2014, the zoning ordinance's development included:

- public workshops;
- virtual and in-person forums;

- business owner roundtables;
- pop-up engagement along WFA; and
- planning charrettes facilitated by EPA technical assistance providers.

These participatory processes produced clear community priorities: walkability, safer crossings, senior housing, childcare, small business support, and the transformation of vacant lots into active community-serving uses.

This sustained engagement also led to the incorporation — and eventual formal establishment — of One West Florissant,¹⁷ a resident-led non-profit Community Development Corporation designed to support ongoing corridor revitalization, community stewardship, and accountability.

Integration with environmental, brownfields, and infrastructure strategies

The zoning ordinance was not developed in isolation. It aligned closely with environmental assessments and technical assistance delivered by the EPA Brownfields Program, which provided:

- environmental site assessment on priority redevelopment sites;
- design charrettes and visioning workshops;
- market analyses;
- reuse scenarios and interim-use recommendations; and
- demolition and debris removal coordination via local partners.

This environmental due diligence and concept planning positioned the corridor to secure major federal infrastructure investment, including the US\$18.2m federal RAISE grant, which will deliver multimodal improvements and streetscape enhancements across all three cities, as outlined in the WFGS Plan.

A coordinated, multijurisdictional implementation approach

By aligning zoning, land-use planning, environmental remediation, infrastructure investment, and community engagement, the zoning ordinance provides a holistic, implementation-ready framework for the long-term revitalisation of WFA. It establishes:

- shared rules and shared governance;
- predictable development outcomes;
- context-sensitive design;
- alignment with multi-agency investment strategies; and
- community-centred redevelopment priorities.

This coordinated approach represents a significant departure from the fragmented, reactive planning practices that historically shaped the corridor and instead positions WFA as a model for equitable, collaborative, corridor-scale regeneration.

NEW COMMUNITY-SERVING AMENITIES AND ANCHORS

Throughout this period of stabilisation several major developments have advanced.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater St. Louis Teen Center of Excellence: Completed 2019¹⁸

- 26,856ft², three-level facility.
- Serves 1,500 youths.
- US\$12.4m project.

Mercy Clinic: Completed 2021¹⁹

- 5,500ft² facility.
- Improved access to healthcare with expanded hours.
- US\$2.8m project.

Urban League Senior Housing Center (Dellwood): Completed 2024²⁰

- Forty-four fully leased affordable senior apartments.

- EPA Phase I assessment confirmed redevelopment readiness.
- Funded through New Market Tax Credits (NMTCs), local investments, and philanthropy.

Urban League Centene Connected Community Center: Completed 2024²¹

- Building of 45,000ft² that will house 'Head Start' programme for children, workforce development, education, housing re-entry programmes, and also have a regional food distribution centre.
- Expected to create up to 100 new jobs.
- Worth more than US\$25m.

Urban League Plaza: Groundbreaking 2024²²

- Anchored by First Bank, addressing long-standing disparities in access to capital.
- Including small business incubator space.

Refuge and Restoration Marketplace: Phase I completed 2024, initiating Phase II²³

- US\$13m NMTC-financed project.
- Early childhood education, workforce training, recovery services, and retail.
- Projects to add more than 100 new jobs.

These projects demonstrate that the combination of regulatory alignment and community engagement has created a development climate capable of attracting diverse public, non-profit, and private investment.

SECURING THE US\$18.2M RAISE GRANT²⁴

A central outcome of the corridor's unified planning framework is the region's successful award of a FY21 US\$18.2m US Department of Transportation RAISE grant, which funds:

- pedestrian and bicycle improvements;
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant crossings and sidewalks;
- roadway reconfiguration for safety;
- transit access enhancements;
- green infrastructure integration; and
- corridor-wide streetscape improvements.

The RAISE award represents national-level validation of the corridor's multijurisdictional approach. Federal reviewers specifically cited the coherence of the zoning framework, the corridor-wide planning strategy, and community engagement as strengths in the application's competitiveness. Construction on this major project is expected to begin in 2026.

GOVERNANCE, CAPACITY, AND ALIGNMENT: LESSONS FROM CORRIDOR-SCALE ZONING

The WFA experience offers several transferable lessons for practitioners pursuing corridor-scale, multijurisdictional zoning and redevelopment in historically disinvested contexts. While the coordinated zoning framework represents a significant policy achievement, its development and early implementation also raised structural and operational challenges that merit reflection.

Institutional capacity and continuity matter as much as policy design

One of the most significant lessons is the importance of dedicated staffing to support corridor governance. Although the IGA established shared authority and clear procedural expectations, the absence of a jointly funded staff position that was responsible for corridor coordination limited consistency in interpretation, enforcement, and implementation. In practice, city staff

capacity was constrained by turnover, competing priorities, and uneven technical expertise, conditions common in lower-income jurisdictions. More consistent training in corridor-specific zoning provisions is needed to ensure cities do not risk misinterpretation and inconsistent application of the zoning ordinance. Without a designated corridor representative embedded across cities, institutional memory and day-to-day alignment proved difficult to sustain over time.

Political cycles introduce volatility that policy alone cannot eliminate

Changes in elected leadership across the three cities periodically shifted priorities, timelines, and levels of engagement. While the zoning ordinance and IGA provided a stabilising framework, political turnover affected momentum and required repeated education and recommitment to shared goals. This underscores the need for governance structures that are resilient to electoral change and supported by administrative mechanisms that transcend individual administrations.

Market outcomes require attention to fiscal balance, not just activity

Another emerging lesson concerns the composition of new investment along the corridor. In the years following adoption of the zoning ordinance, a notable share of new activity took the form of non-profit and institutional uses. While these entities have played a critical role in stabilisation, service provision, and community trust building, their concentration has also raised concerns about long-term erosion of the city tax base. Moving forward, corridor strategies must more intentionally balance community-serving uses with revenue-generating, tax-paying enterprises to ensure fiscal sustainability for participating cities.

Multijurisdictional governance is difficult but achievable with structure and trust

The process confirmed that cross-boundary zoning coordination is feasible, even among cities with differing political cultures and resource constraints. Success depended on clear procedural rules, shared decision-making mechanisms, and sustained facilitation by a neutral regional intermediary; however, the experience also demonstrates that formal agreements alone are insufficient. Ongoing coordination, technical assistance, and relationship maintenance are essential to making shared governance functional over time.

Strong alignment between objectives and outcomes strengthens durability

Importantly, the outcomes of the consolidated zoning effort closely reflect their original qualitative objectives. Pedestrian orientation and multimodal access are reinforced through development standards addressing access management, lighting, streetscape design, and internal circulation. The unified use matrix supports commercial diversity and enables a sustainable mix of retail, institutional, and mixed-use development.

The coordinated adoption of the ordinance across all three cities directly fulfils the objective of multijurisdictional consistency, while standards related to façade design, massing, and landscape integration advance the corridor's visual identity and sense of place. Collectively, these elements demonstrate a high degree of alignment between the WFGS Plan and its regulatory implementation.

FINANCING AND GOVERNANCE FOR LONG-TERM REVITALISATION

While the unified zoning framework and corridor-wide design standards represent critical steps towards revitalisation, successful implementation requires more than regulatory alignment. Best practices

suggest that communities must also address underlying market dynamics, cultural and social conditions, and establish a dedicated management entity to sustain progress. Health and Homes, a local non-profit actively developing sites along the West Florissant Corridor, has engaged a consulting company to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of a potential Transportation Development District (TDD), which could provide a stable revenue stream for corridor improvements.

One West Florissant, a resident-led non-profit focused on beautification and capacity building, may serve as the entity to manage public revenue-generating mechanisms, including a possible TDD.

By pairing governance structures such as the Intergovernmental Agreement with a corridor-focused management organisation, stakeholders can ensure that revitalisation efforts move beyond planning to delivering long-term economic and social transformation.

Taken together, these lessons suggest that corridor-scale zoning can be a powerful tool for regeneration when paired with adequate institutional capacity, fiscal awareness, and long-term governance support. The WFA case illustrates that zoning reform is most effective not as a standalone intervention but as one component of an integrated strategy that addresses planning, infrastructure, governance, and market realities simultaneously.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools were used for general editing purposes during the preparation of this paper. Specifically, Co-Pilot was employed to improve sentence structure, enhance clarity, and refine grammar. No AI tools were used to generate original research content, analyse data, or create figures. All substantive ideas, interpretations, and conclusions are the authors' own.

We have reviewed and edited the content produced by the AI tools and are fully responsible for the information contained in the paper.

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