

Memo

To: Mayor Russell and Council Members

From: Mark Latham, City Planner

Date: September 27, 2023

Subject: Approval of Crafton Tull Contract for Heritage District

The updated Comprehensive Plan passed by Council in June identified several desires the citizens wanted in the community. When the citizens were asked about what their biggest concerns were, the lack of a downtown area was at the top. (See attached information)

The Comp Plan includes several goals of which I am working on, and the Heritage District is one that will continue to create the small-town feel, a sense of community, and keep the heritage strong as directed by our citizens.

I have in the Community Development 2023 budget funds to complete the proposed contract for the Heritage District.

I selected Crafton Tull based on my experience working with this firm and the work they did in the downtown area of Siloam Springs.

Staff identified an area between 112/Harber and North Barrington and have had discussions with owners. The services identified in the contract are street master plan (identifying corridor between 112 and Barrington) and a comprehensive site plan.

I am asking the Council to approve the contract with Crafton Tull to complete the plan for \$37,500.

4.4 Town Center- Heritage District

Like all cities, Tontitown is a dynamic place where, among other elements, economic and cultural changes greatly affect the community. The community that exists today is not the same community that existed thirty years ago or the one that will exist thirty years from now. As such, it is important to carefully and responsibly identify and plan for areas of potential change.



This area serves as the cultural, governmental, and institutional hub of the community. Further defining this area by the addition of retail, entertainment, more dense housing types, and additional institutional programming could help provide Tontitown with a much needed City Center.

Tontitown is currently lacking a true downtown or town center. However, for many the “heart” of the community revolves around the St. Joseph church grounds (and Grape Festival area) and the governmental hub directly across 412 containing the new City Hall, Fire Department, Historical Museum, and City Park. The Tontitown Winery and US Post Office lie north of the St. Joseph church/school campus and the site of a future elementary school lies to the south of the Park area. This general area serves as the governmental, cultural, and institutional hub for the community. In a literal sense, it is also the heart of Tontitown, being centrally located in the community.

The plan encourages the creation of a “Heritage District” within this area of the City. Tontitown could begin to define very specific aesthetics and building patterns for this portion of the City that could be very effective in building a strong mixed use neighborhood and city core. Plan goals and objectives recognize the role of the Heritage District as becoming a district of diverse uses. This diversity should include a wide array of uses, including governmental offices, churches, banks, loft apartments, professional offices, shops, restaurants, and boutiques.

What ties these uses together is creating the urban fabric of a downtown- like area, the uniqueness of its building patterns, and its pedestrian friendly scale. Future development and redevelopment in the Heritage District should carry forward the unique heritage of the City and create a much needed City core.

A key in creating the Heritage District within Tontitown is nurturing its status as the hub of the community. This will involve working to keep and encourage additional community institutions such as banks, churches, and government offices in the

Heritage District area. These institutions drive traffic to the area and are critical to providing a foundation for supporting businesses to thrive. For example, keeping government offices in the district means other supporting professional offices may follow. With a critical mass of government uses and offices, other downtown-like uses are more viable. For example, a restaurant can bring additional traffic that helps support retail businesses. As you can see, a virtuous cycle of economic growth can result from encouraging and retaining important community institutions in the heritage district.

There is currently no library, community center, or Senior Center within the City. All of these uses can be key elements of a thriving community and would be great future elements of the Heritage District. Once the City becomes a City of the First Class, a library may be pursued. Community Centers and Senior Centers might be partially funded through grants. The City could even co-house one or more of these uses within a shared space for a length of time.

Zoning and Development Codes

Improved zoning and building codes are actions the city can use to help create specific character types within the City's fabric. Within the Heritage District the city should use its zoning code to allow and encourage mixed-use occupancy. Often this means commercial retail uses on the bottom floor of a structure where street activity can support business and residential or office uses on the floors above.

The plan proposes the creation of minimum design standards for Heritage District buildings. These standards would generally govern new construction, but could also be designed to guide rehabilitation of existing structures. The goal would be to ensure new buildings are designed such that they are compatible with the charming form and character of downtown-like structures. This would mean restricting the types of building materials used, requiring structures be built up to the back edge of the sidewalk, directing parking to the side or rear of a structure, and guiding design of the building's front façade. While possibly controversial, these regulations will be critical to ensuring the Heritage District remains viable in the long term.

Identity and Heritage District Projects

Listed below are several projects and programs that could be used to build a stronger City identity, City Core, and Heritage District:

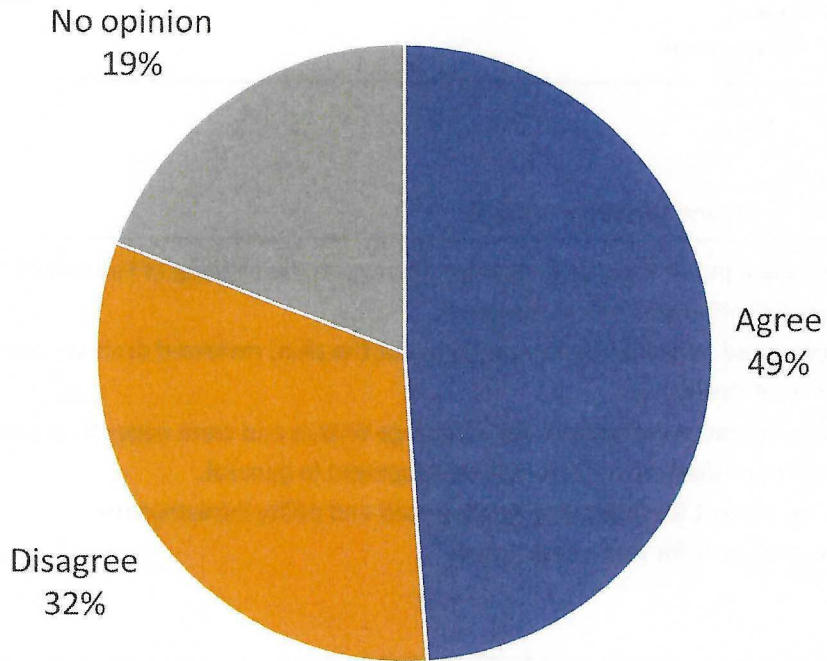
Streetscape Improvements Creating a specific Aesthetic for the District –

Suggested Future Project:
Creation of a Heritage District Overlay District to help create a City Center, Character Identity, and City Cohesion



The Heritage District should specify on-street parking within the district and provide for pedestrian movement throughout the area; including a safe and comfortable crossing of HWY 412 at Barrington to connect the northern and southern portions of the District and City.

Agree or Disagree: There are enough housing options available for my current income level and family size.



What do you see as Tontitown's biggest strength? – common themes

- A great small-town feel
- Proximity to large scale developments in the greater Northwest Arkansas area
- Sense of community
- A comfortable residential community with deep historic roots
- Great area to raise a family
- Natural Beauty

What is your biggest concern for Tontitown's future? – common themes

- Additional traffic – particularly on Highway 412
- Lack of a downtown area
- Aging infrastructure
- Affordability
- The landfill's effect on the city
- Growing too fast without a plan

What is your vision for Tontitown's future? – common themes

- Small town pride with large city amenities
- Careful, measured growth
- More restaurants
- To create a town center

February 2023 Public Input and Visioning Session

- The City held a public input and visioning session on the evening of February 9th, 2023.
- Approximately 40 attendees at the event.
- Attendees listened to a short presentation about the plan, reviewed draft version of maps, and filled out comment cards.
- Attendees indicated enthusiasm for a heritage district and were eager to see more specifics.
- There was opposition to multi-family development in general.
- There was support for improving existing road and utility infrastructure.
- There was support for more park space.