

FORWARD THINKING & PLANNING PROTECTS STREET'S COMMERCE

BY MEGAN GILLILAND AND DENNY JOHNSON

The American Planning Association (APA) announced the designation of Massachusetts Street in Lawrence, Kansas as one of "10 Great Streets for 2010" under the organization's Great Places in America program. APA Great Places exemplify exceptional character and highlight the role planners and planning play in creating communities of lasting value.

APA singled out Massachusetts Street for its forward thinking and commitment to comprehensive planning since the 1970s. Comprehensive plans positioned businesses along the street as central to the area's economy, thereby focusing further retail growth away from proposals that would have hurt the vitality of downtown. Through street art and historic architecture, Massachusetts Street celebrates its rich past as an anti-slavery haven in a turbulent part of 1860s America.

"Massachusetts Street is a shining example of a classic downtown that remains both viable and vibrant. Not only is Massachusetts a hub of retail activity in Lawrence, it is also the center of social and entertainment activities," said Mayor Mike Amyx. "I am proud the City's planners and leaders capitalized on the opportunities available for redevelopment in downtown Lawrence and that the resulting area is now home to an eclectic mix of retail shopping, service-oriented businesses, restaurants and drinking establishments, and many residential opportunities for local residents."

Through Great Places in America, APA recognizes unique and authentic characteristics found in three essential components of all communities—streets, neighborhoods, and public spaces. APA Great Places offer better choices for where and how people work and live every day and are defined by many things including planning efforts, architectural styles, accessibility, and community involvement.

*A view of the north end of historic Massachusetts St.
Photo provided by the City of Lawrence.*



"We're very excited today to name Massachusetts Street as one of this year's Great Streets," said APA Chief Executive Officer Paul Farmer, FAICP. "An unsuccessful court challenge in the 1980s by developers wishing to build nearby retail malls confirmed the importance comprehensive plans play in helping protect established downtowns and their businesses," he added.

Since APA began Great Places in America in 2007, 40 Neighborhoods, 40 Streets and 30 Public Spaces have been designated in 47 states and the District of Columbia.

Municipal leadership and two comprehensive plans have guided the Massachusetts Street's growth for the past four decades. In 1974, the City secured a \$300,000 grant to transform Massachusetts Street into a picturesque, pedestrian-friendly corridor. The 1977 Plan '95 and 1982 Comprehensive Downtown Plan underscored Massachusetts Street as the community's primary business district.

"You cannot replicate the uniqueness of Massachusetts Street," said Mayor Mike Amyx. "Our community and our planning processes have actively sought to respect and enhance Massachusetts Street's history and prominence as the region's social and business district."

Tremendous foresight saved the street during the "Mall Wars" of the 1980's. Plan '95 and the Comprehensive Downtown Plan formed the basis of a federal district court's ruling to deny a developer's request to build mega retail malls in close proximity to Massachusetts Street.

Four buildings are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including the Romanesque Revival Douglas County Courthouse, built in 1904 and designed by famous Kansas architect John G. Haskell and Frederick Gunn. The Lawrence Preservation Alliance, established in 1984, was instrumental in encouraging the City to adopt the Downtown Conservation Overlay District and Guidelines in 2001, National Register District in 2004, and updated guidelines in 2009.

Lawrence was founded prior to the Civil War in 1854 and was a direct result of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. As a free state that was bordered by a pro-slavery state, Lawrence was the site of many skirmishes with pro-slavery ruffians prior to the Civil War. Locally-owned shops and restaurants on Massachusetts Street, such as Free State Brewery and Liberty Hall, reflect the town's history and firm abolitionist stance, as do two permanent sculptures, *The Flame* and *Freedom*.

The nine other APA 2010 Great Streets are: 5th Avenue in San Diego, CA; Wydown Boulevard in Clayton, MO; Broadway Street in Red Lodge, MT; Spring Street in Eureka Springs, AR; Washington Street in Hoboken, NJ; Bank Street in Wallace, ID; Middle Street in New Bern, NC; Washington Street in Middleburg, VA; and Liberty Street in Franklin, PA.

☀ *Megan Gilliland is the Communications Manager for the City of Lawrence. She can be reached at mgilliland@ci.lawrence.ks.us or (785) 832-3406. Denny Johnson works Public Affairs for APA. He can be reached at djohnson@planning.org or (202) 349-1006.*

