



Communities of Excellence 2026 Application

2024

Excelsior Springs, Missouri

INTRODUCTION

The community excellence group (CEG) of Excelsior Springs, Missouri is known as Thrive Excelsior. The CEG began its community performance excellence journey in 2017, with no infrastructure or existing organizational structure. Today it has evolved to an organization with a formal leadership system and governance structure that engages more than 40 residents and community leaders in its work.

The leadership structure of the CEG is a distributed leadership model represented in Figure 0-a. Additional information about the leadership system of the group can be found in P1b(3).

The meeting cadence of the CEG has been established to increase its efficiency and effectiveness. The CEG conducts these meetings to support its work:

Individual Task Force Meeting: Bi-monthly meetings for each task force to address their action plans.

Joint Task Force Meeting: Bi-monthly meetings for all task forces to meet together and hear updates from one another. This approach fosters collaboration between the task forces so that strategies are deployed as an aligned and integrated plan. This meeting is also used for ongoing professional development on topics that impact the CEG as a whole.

Meeting of the Minds: Monthly meeting of all task force co-chairs with the community coach. This meeting provides another opportunity to support cross-sector integration and alignment with the CEG and the community at large. Task force co-chairs share updates, best practices, and have an opportunity to share challenges and seek solutions from the group.

Steering Team Work Sessions and Annual Meeting: The steering team convenes monthly for a work session to carry out the ongoing operations of the CEG. This meeting is guided by an annual work plan that is developed to address the priorities of the group. In addition, many steering team members participate in monthly sessions with their Communities of Excellence mentor. The steering team functions as the board of directors and also has a business meeting each fall to conduct the official business of the organization.

Annual Leadership Retreat: The steering team and task force co-chairs meet each summer for a leadership retreat. During this retreat, leaders conduct an environmental scan (typically a modified SWOT analysis) to review progress and challenges from the previous year and outline priorities for the upcoming year.

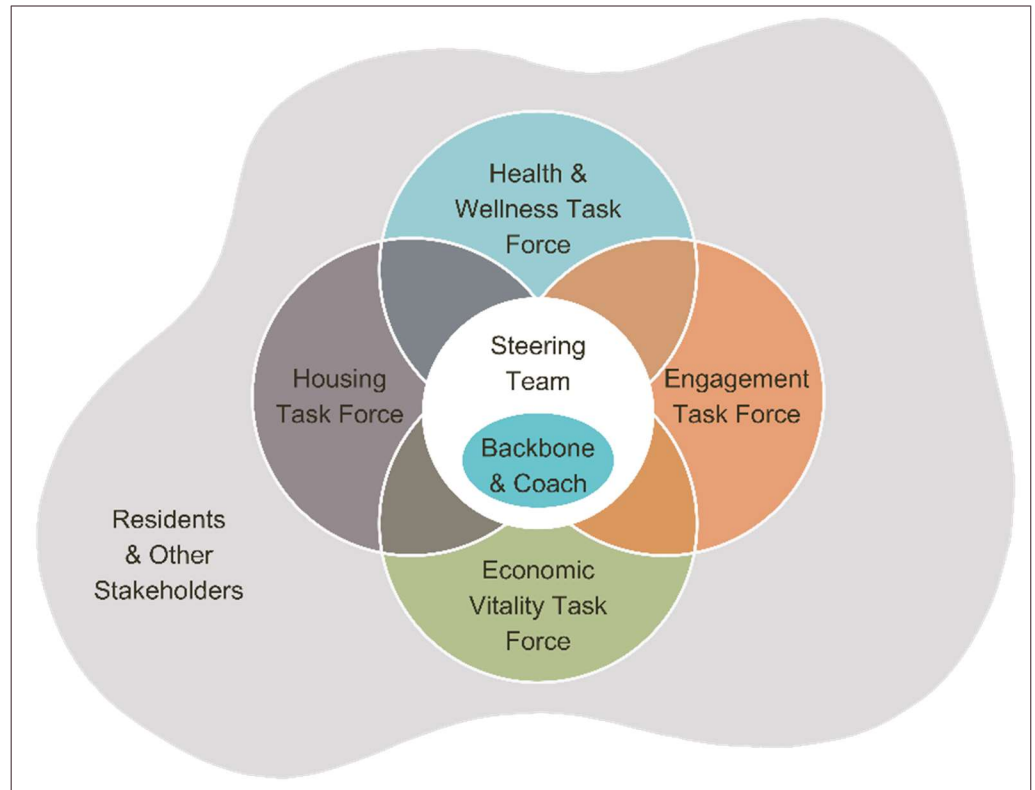


Figure 0-a: Leadership System of Thrive Excelsior

P.1 COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

a. Community Environment

(1) Community Definition and Identity: Excelsior Springs (ES) is approximately 30 miles northeast of Kansas City, Missouri. The geographic area of the community is defined by the boundaries of the Excelsior Springs School District (indicated by the dashed yellow line in Figure P-a) which span portions of Clay and Ray Counties. The population of this area is closely reflected by the zip code population of approximately 15,000¹. The population growth within the community trends slower than that of neighboring communities, which is desirable to ensure that growth aligns with the City’s master plan. It is also important to note that although official population estimates show a population decline, local housing demand data is contradictory. Excelsior Springs is bordered by the larger metro Kansas City area to the south, suburbs to the west, and rural areas to the north and east.

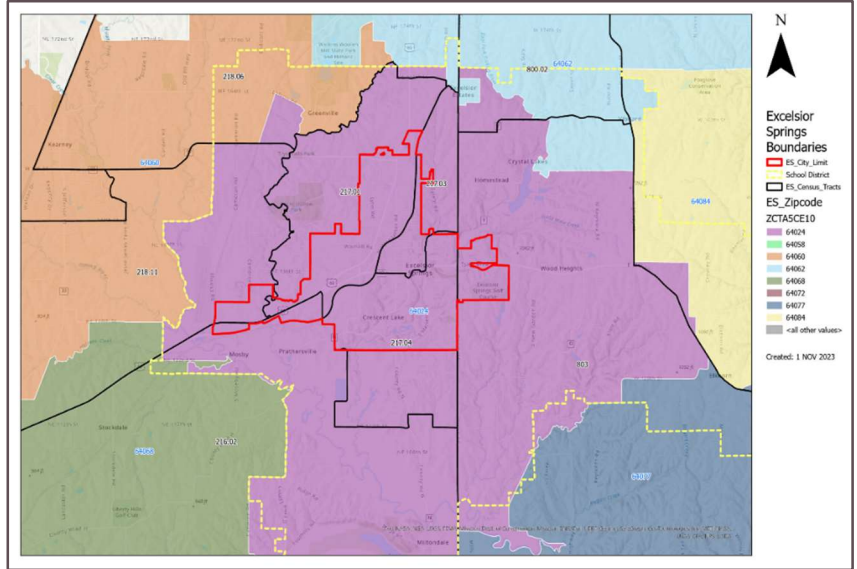


Figure P-a: Excelsior Springs Community Map

residents travel within the region for work, play, education, medical services, and commerce. The community’s identity is characterized by a strong sense of pride in the community. We are proud of our town’s heritage and eager to meet the challenges that the future will bring. The median age within the zip code is 37.6 and the population is 89% white, 3% Hispanic or Latino, and less than 2% Black or African American.²

	Excelsior Springs (city limits)	Excelsior Springs (zip code)	Kearney (city limits)	Liberty (city limits)	Smithville (city limits)	Clay County	Ray County	Missouri	US
2022	10,546	15,158	10,491	30,299	10,416	253,085	23,122	6,154,422	331,097,593
2021	10,595	15,146	10,260	30,129	10,211	250,134	23,080	6,141,534	329,725,481
2020	11,688	15,989	10,460	31,761	10,269	246,480	22,900	6,124,160	326,569,308
2019	11,640	16,517	10,095	31,328	9,884	242,516	22,875	6,104,910	324,697,795
2018	11,731	16,972	10,858	32,100	10,795	249,948	22,825	6,090,062	322,903,030

Figure P-b: Excelsior Springs Population Growth Comparison³

(2) Community Offerings: Excelsior Springs’ heritage is centered around health and wellness. Although our proximity to the Kansas City metro area provides a wide range of health, education, economic, and quality of life offerings in the region, key local offerings are vital to ensuring our residents can access the amenities and services needed to live full, healthy lives.

Key Offerings: Health

Community health is anchored by Excelsior Springs Hospital (ESH), a 20-bed critical access hospital (affiliated/owned by the City of Excelsior Springs) with many clinical services including: specialty and primary care clinics, pediatric and adult psychiatric services, minimally invasive robotic surgical system, home health services, and hospice care. Other key offerings include:

- Wrap-around services offered by ESH include financial assistance to access benefits, transportation, affordable nutrition and food services, and community wellness education
- Additional facilities include: two skilled nursing facilities, VA Clinic, clinics embedded within schools through Swope Health Systems, and independent primary care clinics
- City operated advanced life support ambulance service for city and Eastern Clay Ambulance District (located to the east of our city limits) provides services to nearest hospitals

¹ The population within the city limits is approximately 10,500.

² 2020 Decennial Census, Table P9

³ American Community Survey 5-Year Population Estimates by Year, Table B01003

Key Offerings: Education

The Excelsior Springs School District (ESSD) includes three elementary schools, a middle school, and high school as well as the Excelsior Springs Area Career Center (grades 10-12) and Early Childhood Center. Of these facilities, three are new and all others have received significant updates within the past four years. Other key offerings include:

- Adult and community education programs
- Proximity to higher education within the region
- Job Corps, federal residential job training program

Key Offerings: Economy

The local economy is comprised of 991 businesses, which employ approximately 5000 people (2019).

- Diverse employment offerings with the highest concentration of businesses found in these sectors: healthcare, retail, accommodations and food, financial and insurance, and manufacturing
- Significant manufacturing industry which contributes to a high percentage of our overall property taxes
- Retail sales are based predominantly on necessities such as grocery and general merchandise
- Westside CID to promote business growth, marketing, and tourism
- Thriving historic downtown anchored by The Elms Hotel and Spa and Downtown Excelsior Partnership (DEP)
- Mineral water heritage

Key Offerings: Quality of Life

Excelsior Springs offers a quality of life that not only supports residents, but also attracts tourists. Key offerings include:

- The Excelsior Springs Community Center which offers a variety of wellness, aquatic, fitness, and social activities for members of all age, including meals and social activities for senior citizens
- 5.5 miles of trails and 15 parks within the city limits
- \$32 million in RAISE grant funding for pedestrian traffic safety, which will increase access to community resources and services
- Frequent community-wide events
- Positive protective factors to reduce the likelihood that youth will engage in substance use and other risky behaviors

Key Offerings: Housing

- Higher rate of affordable housing compared with other KC Metro area cities
- 353 Incentive Program that allows tax forgiveness to businesses and individuals that are removing blight from their property
- New multi- and single- housing units under development

COVID-19 caused disruptions in nearly every key area. However, since 2022, demand for services in these areas has increased, as well as financing to support the needed growth and development. Population is also anticipated to grow. With the projected growth in future population, the supply of affordable workforce housing will increase above the current demand.

(3) Residents and Other Stakeholders: There are three primary resident groups in Excelsior Springs defined by geography. Although outcomes vary widely among these groups, [7.1(1)], their expectations and requirements do not. These groups can be further segmented by age.

There are several other stakeholder groups that make important contributions to Excelsior Springs including:

- Tourists and visitors who visit for an overall experience and typically use multiple amenities; they may or may not require overnight accommodations
- Employees who work but do not reside in the city
- Investors, defined as internal and external stakeholders who financially invest in Excelsior Springs
- Business owners, which can be further segmented by franchise and small-business owners
- Users of recreational facilities or amenities, defined as anyone who visits to utilize a singular, specific amenity

The requirements and expectations of residents and other stakeholders are summarized in Figure P-c.

	HOUSING					HEALTHCARE					ECONOMY			EDUCATION			QUALITY OF LIFE					
	Affordability	Curb Appeal	Overnight Availability	Rooftops	Universal Design	Convenient Access	High-Quality	Emergency Access	Primary Care	Specialized Services	Professional Affiliation	Favorable Patient Reviews	Variety of Retail & Dining	Profitability	Unique Traditions	High Speed Internet Access	High-Quality	Neighborhood K-5 Schools	Well-trained Workforce	Safety	Community Events	Recreational activities
<i>X indicates this is a priority among the stakeholder group</i>																						
Residents	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	X			x			x	x	x		x	x	x
Tourists		x	x					x					x		x	x			x	x	x	x
Employees		x		x				x		x			x		x	x			x	x		
Investors													x		x	x			x	x		
Franchises				x									x		x	x			x			
Small-business owners		x		x				x					x	x	x	x			x	x	x	
Users of rec facilities & amenities		x						x					x						x	x	x	x

Figure P-c: Resident and Stakeholder Requirements and Expectations

(4) People Resources: These individuals, organizations, groups, and segments are involved in delivering our key offerings.

Health	Education	The Economy	Quality of Life	Housing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ES Hospital (ESH) City of ES Medical professionals Aspire Nursing and Rehab Valley Manor & Rehab Center Advanced Life Support services Swope Health Systems VA Clinic Clay County Public Health Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excelsior Springs School District Job Corps (federal program) Metropolitan Community College and other area higher ed institutions Parents Teachers & administrators Students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business owners Investors Tourists Residents Chamber of Commerce Downtown Excelsior Partnership (DEP) City of ES Employers and employees CIDs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nonprofit including faith-based and civic organizations ES Community Center ES Parks, Recreation, and Community Center Dept. SAFE City of ES DEP Chamber of Commerce Neighborhood groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Real Estate Agents City of ES/Community Development Developers Landlords Historic Preservation Commission Rebuilding Together KC ES Housing Authority

Figure P-d: Suppliers of Key Community Offerings

As the demand for services increases the need for individuals with the correct skills and abilities increases proportionally as well. For example, the youth mental health services provided by ESH struggle to meet demand because of the difficulty in acquiring skilled providers. The organizations, groups, or segments have not necessarily changed but the required number of individuals has.

(5) Regulatory Environment: The City government is regulated by local ordinances legislated by the mayor and city council and enabled by state statutes. Environmental resources (air, water, and land) are protected by federal regulatory agencies, which mandate ongoing improvements. These improvements require the cost to be passed on to the consumers. The school system is largely funded by state revenues, in addition to community property taxes. Local education decisions are influenced by the state funding model for K-12 education in order to garner the most revenue from the state. Healthcare providers structure programs and services that provide more reliable state and federal medical reimbursements. All health service providers in the community are subject to similar DHSS, state, and federal guidelines, based on the level of certification.

b. Community Excellence Group

The community performance excellence initiative operates under the brand of Thrive Excelsior. All references to Thrive Excelsior herein after refer to the community excellence group (CEG).

1) Mission, Vision, Values, and Culture:

Mission: Working in harmony to create a thriving, sustainable community for all generations

Vision: To become your favorite place to live, work, learn, and play

Values:

Pioneering: Open to innovative and creative solutions

Generosity: A desire to give for the greater good

Hospitality: Going the extra mile to welcome others

Can-do attitude: With hard work, success is possible

Pride in heritage & traditions: Celebrate our history

The culture of the CEG is defined by these **characteristics**.

Pioneering: Open to innovative and creative solutions

Agile: Respond quickly to leverage new opportunities or address unexpected challenges

Collaborative: Committed to working together to achieve our collective goals

Close-knit: Values and fosters healthy relationships with one another

Honesty: Willingness to be forthright with one another, even when there are divergent opinions

The CEG’s **core competencies** support the shared mission to create a thriving, sustainable community for all generations. These assets are vital to current and future success as a community. These core competencies are:

- Collaboration: We seek to share ideas and resources for the greater good.
- Creative problem solving: New ideas and innovation drive our community initiatives.
- Inclusion and diverse perspectives: Many perspectives that represent the diverse groups in our community are required to ensure we achieve our mission.

(2) Composition: Our community excellence group includes representation from many sectors and organizations including:

- Excelsior Springs Hospital
- Healthcare providers
- County health department
- ES Senior Center
- ES Community Center
- SAFE
- Housing Authority
- Real estate
- Landlords
- Small business owners
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Nonprofit and human services
- City government (employees and elected officials)
- Mainstreet America (DEP)
- Tourism/hospitality
- Chamber of Commerce
- School district
- News publications
- MU Extension
- Residents

The key drivers of engagement within the CEG are opportunities for collaboration and the desire to create meaningful change within the community.

The City of Excelsior Springs serves as the backbone organization for the community excellence group.

(3) Leadership System: The CEG leadership system includes these components.

- **Backbone Organization:** City of Excelsior Springs, provides funding and administrative support for Thrive Excelsior efforts.
- **Community Coach:** This position is funded by the backbone organization to provide process management and facilitation services and implement communication plans.
- **Steering Team:** Sets strategy and also provides governance and oversight for the overall effort. The composition of the steering team is defined by the bylaws of Thrive Excelsior.
- **Housing, Health & Wellness, Economic Vitality and Engagement Task Forces:** Teams charged with ensuring that strategic goals related to increasing life-span and quality of life are achieved through collaborative efforts or new programs and services. Led by two co-chairs and comprised from sector representatives with vested interest in the topic.

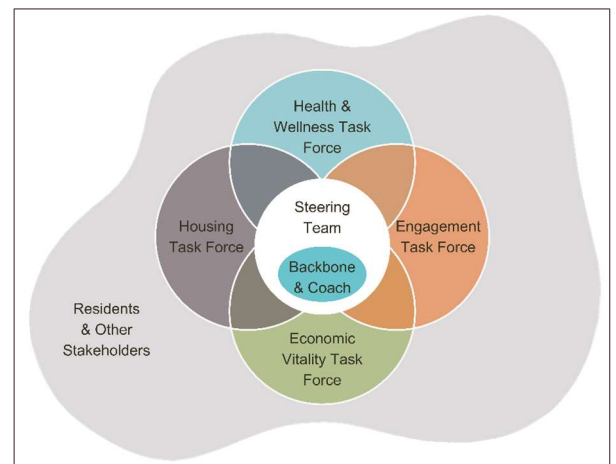


Figure P-d: Leadership System

- (4) **Programs and Services:** Due to the nature of our community excellence leadership structure, most programs and services that are developed under the auspices of Thrive Excelsior are owned by partner organizations. The following programs and services are offered by Thrive Excelsior [7.1(2) & 7.2(1)].
- **Convening:** The primary service of Thrive Excelsior is to act as the convener of organizations across many sectors of the community. This service directly serves the business, health, nonprofit, education, and housing sectors and indirectly serves residents and other stakeholder groups.
 - **Citizens Leadership Academy (Engagement Task Force):** This 3-month program allows Excelsior Springs residents and other stakeholders to learn about key community work systems and develop knowledge needed to serve in elected or appointed community leadership roles.
 - **Curb Appeal Award (Housing Task Force):** This program recognizes homeowners who go above and beyond to maintain their homes and properties, contributing to the overall beautification of the community.
- (5) **Partners and Collaborators:** These partners and collaborators are key to the success of Thrive Excelsior.

		Convening	CLA	Curb Appeal
Partners	City of ES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admin support • Meeting space • Funding • Leadership support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admin support • Meeting space • Funding • Instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admin and Operations Support • Promotion
	ESSD40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting space • Instruction 	
	ES SAFE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Instruction 	
	Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction 	
	Excelsior Citizen		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Promotion
	ES Hospital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting space • Leadership support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting space • Instruction • Funding 	
Collaborators	Local businesses		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding
	ES Standard		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Promotion 	

Figure P-e: Partners and Collaborators Who Support Thrive Excelsior's Programs and Services



Figure P-f: Performance Improvement System

(6) **Performance Improvement System:** The CEG utilizes Plan, Do, Study, Act as its performance improvement system. The steering team oversees the performance improvement system as a whole, while also utilizing it to manage performance of the group's operations and governance functions. A task force was appointed to work towards improvement on each strategic challenge. Each task force uses the model to manage performance of their strategic activities.

The data we collect through the *Community Scorecard*, *bi-annual community survey*, and *task force member surveys* are all key tools used in the performance improvement process. In addition, qualitative data collected through activity debriefs also provides important information.

P.2 COMMUNITY SITUATION

a. Competitive Environment

(1) Competitive Position: These key offerings provide a competitive advantage for the community of Excelsior Springs.

Offering	Competitive Position	Communities with Similar Offerings	Differentiation
Excelsior Springs Hospital	Advantage	Liberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary Care, OP Specialty services, Surgery, Rehabilitation Services available close to home, ED services 24/7 with Board Certified ED Physicians More access to psychiatric services than available in nearby communities More access to home health than available in nearby communities
Excelsior Springs Hospital Wrap Around Services	Advantage	Liberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater assistance removing barriers
Additional Healthcare Facilities	Advantage	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close to home
Excelsior Springs School District	Advantages	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career Center and new buildings provide a significant advantage
Job Corps	Advantage	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available in nearby communities
Retail sales are based on necessities	Advantage	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protects tax base in times of economic downturn
Westside CID	Advantage	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted tax revenue to promote growth
Historic district and The Elms	Advantage	Smithville Liberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The mineral water history and built environment are unique
Community Center	Advantage	Liberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newer facilities
Improvements to pedestrian safety	Future advantage	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easier access to services and amenities
Community wide events	Advantage	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More frequent and diverse offerings
Higher rate of affordable housing	Advantage	Varies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall rate of affordable housing is higher
353 Incentive Program	Advantage	Liberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not offered in nearby communities

Figure P-g: Competitive Offerings

(2) Community Changes: Competitive changes that the City government is working to address include: strengthening reserve funds by ensuring utility rates produce sufficient revenues for operation; long-range financial planning to identify critical items left out of annual budgets such as deferred maintenance; focus on community attractiveness to increase property values and reinvestment using a mixture of incentives and enforcement; streamline internal processes to ensure customer needs are met; marketing our newly designated Opportunity Zones to internal and external investors; conversations with existing businesses to address community needs; tax incentives for substantial rehabilitation of property in the downtown area; and expansion of the Community Center to continue to improve community wellness and quality of life.

The Excelsior Springs Hospital and its affiliated service lines continue to adapt to new challenges, and are successfully recruiting and retaining staff, medical professionals and developing new programs to be able to meet the needs for healthcare in the community. The addition of the psychiatric service unit has provided unprecedented access to children, adults, and families in the community.

The school district's implementation of a new strategic plan and updated long-range facility plan are setting new standards for educational excellence and safety. The strategic plan, with its emphasis on improving literacy, is not just about enhancing teaching and learning; it's a catalyst for economic growth and a competitive edge. This synergy between our strategic educational plan and the long-range facility plan represents a bold step forward in our mission to enhance the well-being and prosperity of our community. By equipping students with critical thinking and problem-solving skills, we're preparing a workforce that attracts businesses and industries, fostering an environment of opportunity and improved quality of life for all residents.

The construction of new schools and the renovation of existing ones, coupled with significant safety enhancements, underscore our commitment to creating safe, modern learning environments. These infrastructural improvements are pivotal in realizing our educational goals, ensuring that every child has access to the highest standards of education in a secure setting. This comprehensive approach to education and safety is our investment in the future, promising a stronger community that stands as a model of innovation and excellence. These initiatives illustrate our unwavering commitment to creating a community where education and safety go hand in hand with economic growth and competitive advantage. Other changes that will impact the competitive situation in the community are:

- Westside Community Improvement District (CID)
- Addition of a year-round outdoor pool at the Community Center, which will allow the high school to form a swim team
- Additions of sports marketing and physical therapy/sports medicine programs at the Career Center
- Increased event offerings from DEP and Chamber of Commerce to support tourism
- 86 new housing units under development and new interest in rehabbing older homes
- RAISE grant funding for new sidewalks and infrastructure to increase pedestrian safety
- New public safety training facilities under development

(3) Comparative Data: The community excellence group (CEG) conducts an annual community survey to determine the priorities and satisfaction levels of resident and other stakeholder groups. This data is comparative from year to year, and a portion of the survey questions on quality of life align with a regional survey so that local results can be compared with a regional survey. Other key sources of data which are comparable and help the community excellence group understand the community's competitive position are: Census data including the American Community Survey, state health data from the Missouri Health Atlas, Missouri DESE data, and CDC Places data.

State and national data sources are not published in real-time making it a challenge to use the information for timely decisions. Very little secondary data, except for Census tract data, is segmented out beyond the zip code level, which is also a challenge. Beyond that, the CEG is comprised of individuals serving primarily in volunteer roles. Managing data requires a significant amount of capacity, which is a limitation for the group.

b. Strategic Context

(1) Challenges, Threats, Advantages, and Opportunities

STRATEGIC CHALLENGES	THREATS	ADVANTAGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of workforce housing inventory • Limited public transportation • Limited options for healthy groceries in downtown and eastside areas • Chronic disease • Lack of workers • Perception of availability of living wage jobs • Self-efficacy of students • Lack of connectedness/decline in community engagement • Lack of behavioral health providers/resources • Lower life expectancy than adjacent Census tracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad economic opportunities across the Metro (competition) • Declining infrastructures and cost-prohibitive repairs • Legislative changes to payment and funding for healthcare reimbursement • Payment delays and increased "red-tape" from commercial health insurance companies • Leaders entering retirement • State public schools funding model • Teacher shortage • Public opinion towards school curriculum and standards • Low home appraisal values • Polarization and lack of connectedness • Rising cost of living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAFE and other community protective factors • CIDs • Thriving historic downtown • The Elms • Improvements that will come from RAISE grants • Proximity to KC Metro • Lower cost of housing comparatively • Psychiatric Services at ESH • Comprehensive, acute and post-acute healthcare services at ESH • Community events • Community Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens Leadership Academy • Declining infrastructures that can be repurposed • Neighborhood Specialist position • Exploration of community land trust • Entrepreneurial ecosystem • Healthcare system partners and affiliations • Grant funding

Figure P-h: Challenges, Threats, Advantages, and Opportunities

The mission and vision of Thrive Excelsior are centered on the opportunity for residents, along with other stakeholder groups, to live full, thriving lives in our community. This mission and vision will be greatly impacted by the ability to leverage the advantages and opportunities above, while minimizing and/or overcoming the challenges and threats.