



Embargoed for release until 12:01 a.m. Wednesday, October 8, 2008

Contacts:

Van Williams, Public Information Officer, City Manager's Office,
Tel. 316.268.4351; vwilliams@wichita.gov,
John Schlegel, Director, Wichita-Sedgwick County Metropolitan Area
Planning Department, Tel. 316.268.4421; jschlegel@wichita.gov,
Denny Johnson, APA, Tel. 202.349.1006; djohnson@planning.org

**American Planning Association Designates Old Town Wichita
One of Top 10 Great Neighborhoods For 2008**

Planning, Collaboration, and Innovation Key to Area's Revitalization

Wichita, KS – The American Planning Association (APA) announced today that Old Town Wichita has been designated one of 10 Great Neighborhoods for 2008 through APA's *Great Places in America* program. APA Great Places exemplify exceptional character and highlight the role planning plays in creating communities of lasting value.

"We are thrilled and honored to receive such a prestigious designation," Wichita Mayor Carl Brewer said. "It recognizes the tremendous partnership between the city and the private sector which made the transformation of Old Town possible."

APA has singled out Old Town because of Wichita's bold vision, astute and innovative planning and collaborative partnerships that transformed this derelict warehouse and light industrial district into a successful mixed-use quarter.

"Late Wichita city manager Chris Cherches, former mayor Bob Knight and Marketplace Properties, LLC developers David Burk, Richard Vliet and others had the vision and drive to revitalize Old Town," John Schlegel, Wichita-Sedgwick County Metropolitan Area Planning Director said. "This designation demonstrates how careful planning, collaboration and vision can come together to create great places like Old Town."

APA Great Places offer better choices for where and how people work and live. They are enjoyable, safe, and desirable. They are places where people want to be — not only to visit, but to live and work every day. America's truly great neighborhoods are defined by many unique criteria, including architectural features, accessibility, functionality, and community involvement. Through Great Places in America APA recognizes the unique and authentic attributes of essential building blocks of great communities — streets, neighborhoods, and public spaces.

"We're excited to select Old Town Wichita as one of this year's Great Neighborhoods," said APA Executive Director Paul Farmer, FAICP. "The city faced many obstacles when revitalizing this area, including cleaning up years of industrial



pollution,” he said, adding that the city’s commitment to carry through with its plans provides an inspiring model for other communities.

Old Town began as a collection of warehouses during the 1870s. The Atchison Topeka, Santa Fe and Frisco rail lines were located throughout Old Town, connecting the city to St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago and points east. By 1911, Wichita was the nation’s second-largest distribution point for agricultural implements.

As the country’s transportation industry shifted from rail to interstate trucking, new warehouses were built beyond Wichita’s city limits. As a result, many of Old Town’s historic buildings were boarded up, and vacancy rates reached 70 percent.

Planning efforts to revitalize the 50-block Old Town area started in the 1970s and ultimately led to the *Old Town Development Plan* in 1983. This comprehensive plan addressed urban design, opportunity sites, marketing, parking and funding. Five years later, the city selected Marketplace Properties as the preferred developer to begin redeveloping Old Town.

In 1991, the city adopted the Old Town Overlay District that permits residential uses within the underlying Limited Industrial zoning. It also established design criteria that allow modern, high-density, mixed-use development to occur within the historic character of Old Town.

That same year, routine tests found a six-square-mile area of groundwater contamination in downtown Wichita, including Old Town. Rather than seek assistance through the federal Superfund program, the city took financial responsibility for the cleanup by creating an environmental Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district. Until then, no U.S. city had used this approach, which earned Wichita the 1992 Innovations in American Governments Award, by the Government Innovators Network at the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government.

After the clean-up, several new restaurants and businesses opened in Old Town. By 1996, the first mixed-use residential project was completed--a three-story apartment conversion called Mosley Street Place. It was followed by approximately 40 condominiums and more than 160 apartment conversions, 84 of which are available at below-market rental rates.

By 2004, the 33-acre Warehouse and Jobbers Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places, containing over 60 historic warehouse and industrial buildings in Old Town. Today there are more than 130 businesses located in the neighborhood, where property values have grown more than six-fold since the early 1990’s.

The nine other APA 2008 Great Neighborhoods are: Echo Park, Los Angeles, CA; Greater Park Hill, Denver, CO; North End, Boise, ID; Downtown Salem, Salem, MA;



Charles Village, Baltimore, MD; Greater University Hill, Syracuse, NY; Village of Mariemont, Mariemont, OH; Society Hill, Philadelphia, PA; and Downtown Sheridan, Sheridan, WY.

For more information about these neighborhoods, as well as the lists of the 2008 APA 10 Great Streets and 10 Great Public Spaces, visit www.planning.org/greatplaces.

This year's Great Places in America will be celebrated as part of APA's National Community Planning Month in October 2008, designed to recognize and celebrate the many residents, leaders, officials, and professionals who contribute to making great communities. For more about National Community Planning Month, visit www.planning.org/ncpm.

The American Planning Association and its professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners, are dedicated to advancing the art, science and profession of good planning -- physical, economic and social -- so as to create communities that offer better choices for where and how people work and live. Members of APA help create communities of lasting value and encourage civic leaders, business interests and citizens to play a meaningful role in creating communities that enrich people's lives. APA has offices in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Ill., and Shanghai, China. For more information, visit its website at www.planning.org.

###