**SLI Visioning Story**

Over the course of the next generation, the Saline community sees much change but the foundation of togetherness and community spirit remains intact. The faces and places may have changed over the years, but wise and longterm planning have set up the downtown for a bright future in perpetuity.

The downtown community bears witness to many improvements over time as local leaders continually strive to attract residents and commerce to the sleepy hamlet of Saline.

Let’s take a look at what may be...

After years of noisy and polluted truck traffic, downtown regulars and visitors alike now enjoy the quiet amiable environment of sidewalk dining and/or shopping. Wide infrastructure improvements to U.S 12 have not only slowed down commuter traffic, but gravel haulers and semis are now using an alternative route to flow around the downtown commerce area.

Leaders at the local and state level at the Michigan Department of Transportation were able to work collaboratively to find creative ways to efficiently move traffic flow along the heavily debated U.S. 12 downtown corridor while also making downtown a nicer place to walk around.

A centralized parking garage erected at a vacant lot at 147 W. Michigan Ave. allowed planners to redevelop Parking Lot 1 (situated behind Dan’s Downtown Tavern and the Saline Downtown Diner) into a bustling, mixed-use commercial shopping plaza featuring dining, nightlife and retail. The new development’s centerpiece is a small community stage in which local music and theatre is performed.

The northern expansion of walkable downtown created more opportunity for business growth along North Ann Arbor Street. Entrepreneurs were further enticed by developing community amenities such as community Wi-Fi, added bike lanes to U.S. 12 and an expanded public transit system further reducing the town’s carbon footprint. The buses also provide courtesy shuttle service to the many summertime festivals. With more things to go and do, city leaders sought cost-effective means for improving the downtown’s way-finding lighting and street signage.

A comprehensive streetscape plan in 2016 greatly boosted curbside appeal for residential development and home sales. The Saline community has worked fervently over the years to capture a small-town feel while all the while growing its local commercial and residential tax base.

Public spaces are also more connected by an expanded network of non-motorized pathways and a pedestrian bridge linking Mill Pond Park to Curtiss Park stretching in grand fashion across Michigan Avenue.

With expansion of greenspace in the area, community events such as the Celtic Festival and Summerfest were able to expand their footprint thereby giving Saline even more of an identity as a destination for out-of-town visitors. And with the help of federal grant funding, the city was able to construct an all-abilities park serving disabled people.

With strong, civic-minded leadership in place for Saline and its taxpayers, the future is bright for the community. And watching the evolution of a modern, American small town was none other than - Earl, the traffic-calming police dummy.

Earl was brought out of retirement from the dusty confines of the Saline Police Department basement and given a spot in the sun perched on a lawnchair with a glass of iced tea in his rubber hand. He sat atop the hill at Mills Road and Michigan watching over the sleepy hamlet and its inhabitants.

Seeing Earl propped up in that lawnchair was a sight equally weird yet comforting for regulars and visitors alike.

Written by Austen Smith 10/15/14