



revitalizing

MAIN STREET



A practitioner's guide to
comprehensive commercial
district revitalization

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commercial district revitalization**

Main Street

NATIONAL TRUST FOR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

National Main Street Center
Washington, D.C.

About the National Main Street Center

Established in 1980, the National Main Street Center helps communities of all sizes revitalize their traditional and historic commercial districts. The Main Street Center leads the preservation-based community revitalization movement and has proven that historic preservation and community-driven economic development effects lasting change.

For more information about the Main Street program and its widespread successes over the years, visit www.MainStreet.org.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a nonprofit membership organization bringing people together to protect, enhance and enjoy the places that matter to them. By saving the places where great moments from history—and the important moments of everyday life—took place, the National Trust for Historic Preservation helps revitalize neighborhoods and communities, spark economic development and promote environmental sustainability. With headquarters in Washington, D.C., nine regional and field offices, 29 historic sites, and partner organizations in all 50 states, the National Trust for Historic Preservation provides leadership, education, advocacy and resources to a national network of people, organizations and local communities committed to saving places, connecting us to our history and collectively shaping the future of America's stories.

For more information visit www.PreservationNation.org.

Revitalizing Main Street: A practitioner's guide to commercial district revitalization

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For all of our readers who are involved in community revitalization, always remember that your tireless work to save irreplaceable buildings, encourage stronger civic engagement, assist local business owners, and the countless other things you do every day to revive America's hometowns, safeguard our heritage and sustain our historic communities. Good luck to you all.

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chapter 1

WHY MAIN STREET MATTERS

By Mary Thompson and Doug Loescher

Main Street—the term is evocative.

For some, it conjures nostalgic images, such as barber shops and five and dimes, movie theaters, post offices, diners, and parades. For others, it epitomizes the democratic ideals of openness, accessibility, and civic discourse. For everyone, it symbolizes a place where friends and neighbors can cross paths and come together.

We all know where our Main Streets are. They may be named First Avenue, or Water Street, or Martin Luther King Boulevard, but they all represent the center, the core of our communities. They are the economic engine, the big stage, the community’s living room. Main Streets tell us about who we are and who we were, and how the past has shaped us. We do not go to gated communities or enclosed shopping malls to learn our stories. The Main Streets of America are places that matter because they are places of shared memory where citizens still come together to work, live, and engage with one another. In an age of indistinguishable strip centers and homogenous culture, they are more important and compelling than ever.

At a time of shrinking resources and unchecked sprawl, Main Streets—and the compact, dense traditional cities they anchor—have taken on a new importance, as a critical component of any sustainable community initiative. In the most fundamental way, Main Street is smart growth. Finally, Main Streets offer places of authentic character and opportunity, where the independent spirit of entrepreneurialism and innovation can thrive. It is no accident that creative ventures are so often seeded in the midst of the “messy vitality” of our community centers... where new ideas and businesses can experiment and take root.



Because Main Streets are places that matter, the revitalization and comprehensive management of these districts have become essential to the health and vitality of every community. While a growing number are making great progress, many continue to struggle. Economic and social forces have—over the past 50 years—forced the centers of our cities into a spiral of decline, as business practices and public attitudes have shifted.

Main Streets Fall and Rise

Economic transformation is nothing new to Main Street districts. Scores of business types have come and gone over the years, from blacksmiths and liverys to typewriter shops. These have been replaced with new establishments as savvy business owners adjusted to ever-changing markets or left to be replaced by the next wave of entrepreneurs. The transformations of the second half of the 20th century, though, have been unusually challenging for Main Street districts. Several profound series of changes nudged established commercial districts into a downward spiral of disinvestment and decay:

- The creation of the interstate highway system, that transformed the ways in which Americans lived;
- The establishment of land-use regulations which separated residential areas from commercial areas, effectively “outlawing” the kind of mixed-use development found along Main Streets; and most importantly,
- The almost ten-fold explosion of retail space between 1960 and 2000—from four square feet of retail space per capita to 38, flooding the market with far more commercial space than American spending could support.

With such a glut of retail space and so many changes taking place, it was inevitable that some commercial centers would suffer—and Main Streets, whose merchants and property owners had never before needed to work collaboratively as an organized shopping area, were the least prepared for the changes taking place. Emptied of middle-class



An example of a “lifestyle center” in Arlington, Virginia.



© Linda S. Glisson

Several coordinators gather during the annual National Main Streets Conference.

shoppers and poorly equipped to work collectively, Main Street began losing businesses, and its economy plummeted. “Big box” retailers or “category killers,” Internet commerce, and New Urbanist “lifestyle centers” pose significant new competition to the mostly independently owned, smaller businesses on Main Streets, which must work harder to distinguish themselves from strong competitors.

A Movement Is Born

The Main Street Four-Point Approach® has transformed how communities think about their commercial district’s revitalization and management. As a comprehensive, incremental approach that has been proven city by city, and state by state since 1977, this strategy has forged an important nationwide movement. When looking at the benchmarks for progress, the numbers are impressive, and the stories compelling. What seems obvious today was radical only a few years ago.

The idea of a comprehensive methodology for preservation-based economic development grew from a humble experiment. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a national nonprofit chartered by Congress in 1949, had been receiving calls from people asking for ways to save their vacant, deteriorating downtown buildings that were facing demolition. In 1977, the National Trust launched a three-year Main Street Project to reverse the deterioration of downtown buildings—an effort born out of necessity, not out of careful planning and analysis.

The National Trust tested out ideas for addressing this problem in a pilot project (see sidebar “The Main Street Project”). Emerging from this demonstration program was an innovation in the field of historic preservation—an understanding that in order to keep historic buildings intact and vital, a comprehensive program was needed to improve the economic health of downtowns. That innovation became the Main Street program.

To apply the Main Street Project’s lessons learned to more communities, the National Trust created the Main Street Center in 1980 (today called the National Main Street Center®). The Center has helped launch a network of more than 2,000 communities that share information and best practices and build a nationwide community. Hun-

The Main Street Project

Realizing that traditional preservation methods weren't enough to revive entire communities, the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched a pilot project to learn how to preserve a downtown's heritage while sparking reinvestment. The Main Street Project selected small towns and cities hard hit by the advent of suburban shopping malls but that had an intact historic building stock. Three managers were placed in three Midwestern towns (Galesburg, Illinois, pop. 38,000; Hot Springs, South Dakota, pop. 5,000; and Madison, Indiana, pop. 13,000) to learn how communities could strengthen their downtowns and why so many revitalization attempts/strategies throughout the nation seemed to be failing.

The downtown managers worked with design and economic development consultants to provide three years of technical assistance. Going beyond working with typical city stakeholders and officials, the managers involved the local community in the process and established a vision for each downtown.

This project taught the National Trust that the key to saving Main Street's historic buildings was to strengthen and diversify the district's businesses and find new uses for secondary spaces, such as upper floors. After three



The first three downtown managers of the Main Street Project: Tom Moriarty, Scott Gerloff, and Clark Schoettle.

years, the project participants showed remarkable turn-arounds. In Galesburg, for example, 30 new businesses opened, raising the occupancy rate to 95 percent, while in Hot Springs, sales tax revenues increased by 25 percent. Moreover, for every dollar spent managing the local Main Street project, \$11 was invested by private businesses in building rehabilitation and adaptive-use projects. The National Trust created a replicable model using the lessons learned from this project. Its Main Street Four-Point Approach® showed that a holistic strategy was necessary to save historic buildings and that establishing a volunteer-based organization to become downtown's advocate yielded big successes.

dreds of thousands of buildings have been rehabilitated and as many more businesses started. A corps of Main Street professionals has been trained and empowered.

The process the National Trust for Historic Preservation developed—codified in four broad areas of simultaneous, incremental activity known as the “Main Street Four-Point Approach®”—stimulated new businesses, generated new investment in building improvements, and rekindled a sense of optimism. From the beginning, the four points of the Main Street approach focused on retail promotion, business recruitment, and other traditional economic development strategies as much as they did on saving old buildings. At its core, Main Street has always been a preservation initiative, however. Its success lies in building a base of support by focusing on the immediate interests of business and property owners, while bringing preservation “in the back door,” turning structures once viewed as obsolete into assets.

The Building of a National Network

Realizing early on that it could not help every community directly, the Main Street Center designed a second demonstration project to test the idea of working with state-level partners, seeing them as the key to expanding its revitalization program through the delivery and coordination of technical services. For three years, the Center worked with six states—Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas—to build their capacity and to deliver technical services to 30 local communities.

Gradually, the Main Street movement saw the development of a nationwide network of coordinating programs that today includes statewide programs in almost every

state as well as several citywide urban neighborhood programs (see below) and other regional/countywide programs. Most statewide coordinating programs are housed in state government agencies and serve as conduits for bringing state resources to participating communities. Main Street coordinating program staff members help build the capacity of local programs, grow the network, mobilize resources, and work in partnership with the Center to explore new solutions to revitalization challenges and respond to emerging trends throughout the nation. Coordinators also provide advocacy at the federal, state, and city level to encourage the support of “pro-Main Street” policy.

Not Just for Small Towns

While the roots of Main Street are firmly planted in the rural small communities that still represent the core of the movement, the methodology proved enticing to urban communities as well. In 1985, the Center launched a new three-year demonstration project in eight cities to test the Main Street approach in urban neighborhood business districts. With some adaptations, the approach worked—and, by 1988, the seven programs that completed the demonstration project (Albuquerque, New Mexico; Boston, Massachusetts; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Dubuque, Iowa; Joliet, Illinois; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) in total generated more than \$100 million of new investment, created 1,700 new jobs, and completed 635 building rehabilitations.

Lessons learned from the early urban demonstrations pointed the Center toward a specific type of district—the neighborhood commercial corridor rather than the central

Boston Main Streets

One of the seven sites participating in the citywide three-year demonstration project was Roslindale Village, a neighborhood in Boston. Thomas Menino, at that time a Boston city councilor for the district that included Roslindale Village, was instrumental in encouraging the neighborhood's successful application for the demonstration project and exploring ways the city could help neighborhood commercial districts revitalize.

When Menino became mayor of Boston in 1993, he partnered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to create the nation's first citywide, multi-district Main Street program. By institutionalizing the program at the city level, Menino and the National Trust believed the city could more effectively provide resources to individual neighborhood commercial district programs—in essence, creating a structure similar to that of statewide Main Street programs. Since Mayor Menino began the citywide program, more than 20 Boston neighborhoods have participated in Boston Main Streets. Baltimore, Washington D.C., and Orlando, Florida, have followed suit. In countless cities, individual neighborhood district programs have successfully applied the methodology of Main Street to good results.

business districts of larger cities—and an entirely new type of management structure—the “citywide coordinating program” model. See sidebar, “Boston Main Streets.”

As an illustration of the flexibility of the Main Street approach, the past several years have seen an interesting adaption of the organizational model for Main Street work, outside the classic independent nonprofit that has been the backbone of rural community programs. Community Development Corporations, (CDC) as well as business improvement districts (BID), have integrated the four-point approach in a variety of ways. One such experiment led to a unique collaboration of the National Main Street Center with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a national affordable housing resource group, to explore ways in which neighborhood community development corporations could integrate Main Street revitalization into their ongoing services. The LISC collaboration focused on six demonstration programs, which laid the foundation for expansion of Main Street programmatic ideals in other cities.

Several excellent examples of CDCs and Main Street programs working as combined entities already existed. Pittsburgh's “Main Street on East Carson” neighborhood Main Streets program, for example, had been working in tandem with the South Side Local Development Corporation (SSLDC). By crafting a work plan that balanced housing development with commercial district revitalization, provided a range of resources for flexible needs, and engaged neighborhood residents in the planning, the Main Street on East Carson partnership helped turn the district into one of Pittsburgh's most culturally vibrant and economically healthy neighborhoods.

Since 2000, the Main Street approach has continued to diversify organizational models to include county-wide programs, such as Oakland County, Michigan,

which is the only coordinating program that deals strictly with suburban downtowns. Other innovative initiatives include regional programs, such as the Western Erie Canal Alliance in western New York State, which worked with the Center to develop a regional Main Street coordinating program to support communities along the Western Erie Canal Corridor. Regardless of how they are structured, all these programs use the Main Street Four-Point Approach® as a framework for action. And regardless of the issues and challenges, (such as crime, parking, diversity, growth, etc.), the model continues to provide a straightforward structure for organizing groups, work plans, and volunteer engagement.

The Next Main Street

The world has changed dramatically since Main Street was conceived. Our world is constantly being transformed by technology and information. Economic and cultural globalization has reached even the smallest village. Originally, “green buildings” might have referred to a paint color and sustainability wasn't a term on everyone's lips. The owner of the Main Street store today is just as likely to be a first-generation immigrant from Southeast Asia as a third-generation “native” of a rural community.

Technology has forever changed retailing. Issues facing our downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts today are different and complex, and the challenges have grown exponentially as businesses grapple with new realities of e-commerce and residents who no longer work where they live.

Out of this diverse landscape of growth and evolution, Main Street will still matter, because the physical place will be more important than ever as a “touch point” of continuity and connection in a dynamic world. And the simple and elegant framework of the Main Street Four-Point Approach® will continue to absorb new ideas and strategies for the emerging issues and opportunities in and on the “next Main Street.”



** Andrea L. Dono*

A snapshot of Baltimore, Maryland, which is home to several urban Main Street districts.

chapter 2

HOW THE MAIN STREET APPROACH WORKS

By Doug Loescher

Downtown and commercial district revitalization is nothing new.

As long as traditional business districts have been challenged with decline, an endless stream of ideas and methodologies has been proposed, tested, and employed. No single approach works everywhere, and many strategies have enjoyed limited to substantial success, depending on where and when they have been implemented.

The Main Street approach, as noted in the previous chapter, has proven to be overwhelmingly effective in places where community residents have a strong emotional, social, and civic connection and are motivated to get involved and make a difference. This approach works where existing assets—such as historic buildings and local independent businesses—can be leveraged. Both small-city downtowns and urban neighborhoods throughout the nation have renewed their community centers with the Main Street methodology.

So, what are the fundamentals of the Main Street Four-Point Approach®? The Main Street approach is a historic preservation-based economic development tool that volunteer-driven organizations—often in stand-alone private nonprofit structures—can use to revitalize their commercial districts. Members of the community, or stakeholders, are engaged and empowered as volunteers who serve on the board of directors and committees or as financial and political supporters of the revitalization effort. The board provides governance; and the four standing committees, which usually correspond to the four points, implement the revitalization work. The four points of the approach are:



- **Organization** establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups who have a stake in the commercial district. By getting everyone working toward the same goal, your Main Street program can provide effective, ongoing management and advocacy for the district. Through volunteer recruitment and collaboration with partners representing a varied cross section of your community, your program can incorporate a wide range of perspectives into your efforts.
- **Promotion** takes many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that will rekindle community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence in your district. Advertising, retail promotional activities, special events, and marketing campaigns help sell the image and promise of Main Street to the community and surrounding region. Promotions communicate your district's unique characteristics and offerings to shoppers, investors, business owners, and visitors.
- **Design** means getting Main Street into top physical shape and creating a safe, inviting atmosphere. It takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in a commercial district by directing attention to all of its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising, displays, and promotional materials. Its aim is to stress the importance of design quality in all of these areas, to educate people about design quality, and to expedite improvements.
- **Economic Restructuring** strengthens your community's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. This is accomplished by retaining and expanding existing businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, converting unused or underutilized space into productive property, sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of business people, and attracting new businesses that the market can support.
- **Comprehensive.** No single project or focus—such as lavish public improvements, name-brand business recruitment, or endless promotional events—can do the job. For successful, long-term revitalization, a multifaceted approach that applies all four points is essential.
- **Incremental.** Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help develop skills and resources so that the program can tackle more complex problems and implement more ambitious projects.
- **Self help.** Local leaders must have the will and desire to mobilize local resources. That means convincing public and private stakeholders alike of the rewards for their investment of time and money in Main Street—the heart of their community.
- **Partnerships.** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the commercial district and should work together to achieve shared goals. Each sector has a role to play and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations to forge an effective partnership.
- **Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets.** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has special qualities, such as distinctive historic buildings and great businesses. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program. There is economic value in authentic heritage and architecture.
- **Quality.** Emphasize quality in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies to all elements of the process—from storefront designs to promotional campaigns to educational programs. Concentrate on the quality rather than the quantity of your projects and activities.
- **Change.** Skeptics turn into believers. Changes in attitude and practice are necessary to improve current economic conditions. Public support for change will build as your program grows and consistently meets its goals.
- **Implementation.** Activity creates confidence in the program and ever-greater levels of participation. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way.

While the Main Street Four-Point Approach® provides the framework for revitalization, success is achieved by adhering to eight principles that apply to all areas of the revitalization effort:



Four-Point Approach®

Working simultaneously, volunteers for each committee and the board tackle all areas of revitalization. By engaging in an inclusive, community-led process, your Main Street organization can achieve broad-based support for its efforts and gather input from diverse groups to make sure that the heart of the community is one that makes everyone proud.



Large, national retailers offer a level of selection and discount prices that pose a challenge to Main Street businesses.

Challenges Facing Main Street Organizations

Main Street programs have proven to be powerful advocates for their commercial districts and effective agents of change throughout the nation. With each successful project, your organization will increase its visibility and credibility in the community and leverage your successes to build a sustainable program that will have a dramatic impact on your district over time. However, there are going to be significant challenges along the way. For example:

- Many cities are burdened with the legacy of a community development paradigm that focuses more effort and resources on recruiting big businesses and developing new buildings than on retaining and strengthening small businesses and reusing old buildings.
- Political support from elected officials and city staff is critical to success, but sometimes difficult to attain. Changes in administrations and budget shortfalls can also diminish support for Main Street programs.
- Conflicts can arise in districts with established organizations and/or city departments that are already working on various revitalization or economic development issues if they do not understand the collaborative nature of a Main Street program. Some groups may feel that their “turf” is being threatened. Development organizations frequently find themselves competing against each other for the community’s resources and attention.
- Economic development is often viewed as the exclusive domain of professionals who discount the value of grassroots, volunteer-driven efforts.
- Finding and retaining enough volunteers to implement Main Street initiatives and serve on the board and committees can be difficult as volunteerism trends change and other organizations compete for valuable volunteer time.

- Institutional ownership of major buildings—and, in some instances, blocks of buildings—can exacerbate efforts to upgrade the business mix and make physical improvements within the district.
- Socio-cultural challenges, such as crime, often seem so overwhelming that communities believe they must solve these problems before attempting any other changes.
- Financing mixed-use development can be difficult, as there are usually different sources of backing for business development—typically on the ground floor of a Main Street building—and housing development—usually on the upper floors, above the storefront.
- Corporations and governments often underestimate the economic muscle of downtown and neighborhood commercial districts, particularly those serving disadvantaged residents of modest means. This makes it more difficult to attract investment.
- Relatively few resources exist for cultivating independently owned businesses—an important component of strong Main Streets.

Endless Opportunities

Every year, the Main Street movement continues to grow and strengthen, improving the quality of life and protecting treasured historic assets and local heritage throughout the nation. Main Street communities shape their own destinies and carve out their own niches in the marketplace as exciting places to live, visit, work, and play. Malls, retail “category killers,” and Internet shopping may continue to be popular retail options, but Main Streets have endless opportunities to go beyond creating strictly retail environments and can define a new role for themselves in a community. Whether your community becomes known as an authentic historic downtown steeped in local heritage or a hot restaurant row, your program has numerous options to shape a special place. Main Street districts have many significant advantages:

- Main Street districts are attractive to entrepreneurs; they are home to many new innovative and independent businesses, thanks to the availability of smaller commercial spaces with cheaper rents. This environment is an incubator of new ideas and is able to reflect local character.
- According to the Travel Industry Association of America, more than half of travelers who shop say they seek items that represent the destination they are visiting. Main Street districts with unique businesses and attractions are poised to welcome travelers and their shopping dollars.

- Main Streets generally have more independent businesses than national retailers. Independent businesses usually invest more of their profits back into the community. For example, a 2003 study of mid-coast Maine found that local businesses spent 44.6 percent of their revenue within the surrounding two counties, while big-box retailers returned just 14.1 percent to the local economy¹.
- Severely distressed districts or communities just starting their revitalization programs may not have enough businesses to meet all of local consumers' needs. This untapped market creates opportunities for intrepid entrepreneurs to meet this demand.
- Most Main Streets are pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use districts that offer retail stores, housing, offices, governmental uses, entertainment and cultural venues, service businesses, and light industry. Consequently, the people who live and work in and around Main Street can satisfy many of their needs by walking—this creates a built-in customer base, improves quality of life, promotes smart growth, and reduces reliance on cars.
- Main Street districts have a unique visual identity and distinct sense of place that can offer a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Uniqueness is one of the forces that create economic value, and many Main Streets offer historic authenticity and a distinctive heritage.
- Main Street's historic buildings can usually be adapted for a variety of uses. Unlike structures in contemporary shopping centers, which may have a lifespan of only 30 years, many historic buildings were designed and built to last for centuries.
- Main Street districts represent substantial public investment in infrastructure and municipal services. It makes good fiscal sense for the local government to protect its investment in established areas and support smart growth by revitalizing those places and fully utilizing existing infrastructure instead of building sprawling new communities.
- Owners of Main Street's historic buildings can become eligible for federal historic rehabilitation tax credits. Investors may also be eligible for special incentives, such as federal New Markets Tax Credits, which are designed to stimulate activity within certain depressed and blighted areas. (See page 50 for more information.)
- Main Streets are often home to rich cultural traditions and generations-old crafts and skills. By improving the economic viability of historic Main Street districts, communities protect the nation's diverse cultural heritage and preserve these traditions for future generations.

The Main Street program taps into these—and many other—assets and helps downtowns and neighborhoods overcome barriers to revitalization. It stabilizes older commercial districts by helping community leaders, business owners, civic groups, residents, and property owners identify the best economic options for the future and provides the training and advice necessary to achieve that vision. By strengthening an established business district's overall economy, the Main Street program significantly reduces risks for developers and investors, thereby attracting new capital to historic commercial districts.

Main Street offers practical solutions to many of the problems facing traditional commercial districts. With its solid, demonstrated track record of creating new jobs and businesses, rehabilitating older and historic buildings, attracting new investment, strengthening community identity, and improving safety, the Main Street program has become one of the most successful economic development strategies in the nation. By creating a comprehensive framework for incremental transformation; drawing on the skills and vantage points of a wide range of community partners; and providing full-time, professional management, Main Street has attracted billions of dollars in new investment to older and historic commercial centers and created tens of thousands of new businesses and hundreds of thousands of new jobs. The Main Street movement has galvanized thousands of volunteers and changed the way governments, planners, and developers view preservation. Just as importantly, it has forged a network of revitalization practitioners who constantly share best practices, success stories, and ideas with each other—a community in itself.



* Andrea L. Dono

Main Street businesses, such as this store in Franklin, Tennessee, are often owned by independent merchants who sell items that reflect local heritage and can meet local needs.

1. *The Economic Impact of Locally Owned Business vs. Chains: A Case Study in Midcoast Maine*, New Rules Project, September 2003.

chapter 3

PLANNING MAIN STREET'S WORK

By Lauren Adkins, with additional writing by Andrea L. Dono

Strategic plans, master plans, work plans, vision plans.

Can't we just get to work?

Fortunately, planning is work, and important work at that. Planning Main Street's work is an inclusive process that gets people thinking about the community's goals for the district's future and how your Main Street program can effectively help in achieving those goals.

Most Main Street organizational planning is composed of three parts—a vision plan, a mission statement, and an annual work program. This chapter will discuss the vision plan, which will help your community establish a common goal for the district, as well as the mission statement and annual work plans, which will guide your program and keep everyone on track. Finally, we will discuss the importance of tracking your actual progress through benchmarking as your plans successfully come to fruition.



Mission Statement

The mission statement is a short description of your organization's purpose stated clearly and simply. It should state who your group is (the name and type of agency), what you do and where you do it, and distinguish your organization from others in the community. Keep the statement flexible so it will stay relevant as your organization evolves. Mission statements should be only a few sentences. A good mission statement is the organization's "elevator speech," a short answer about what your organization does that you can recite during an elevator ride. Post your mission statement to your website and include it in your annual report, newsletters, press releases, and other materials.

While your mission statement won't list projects or initiatives, it will serve as the starting point for developing an annual work plan and will prevent your organization from taking on work that exceeds your program's purpose. If someone proposes taking the organization in a new direction or tackling a major new project, board members can refer to the mission statement to see if the new project or direction adheres to the mission. See the sidebar below, "Sample Mission Statements," for examples.

Developing Your Vision

Once you know who you are, you need to decide where you are going. All program leaders must have a clear vision of their "destination." Vague goals, such as "to achieve a vibrant commercial district," leave room for unfocused revitalization efforts. Visioning has become the standard practice to determine a community's physical and economic future as well as to manage change in a meaningful way.

Through a comprehensive visioning process, your community can develop consensus on a variety of social, economic, and physical development goals, and then decide on strategies and benchmarks to achieve these goals. The consensus is then summarized in a vision statement. The issues explored by visioning projects can be quite broad, such as education, economic development, transportation, tourism, citizen involvement, and housing, among others. Visioning projects can also focus on specific issues, such as a new riverfront development project or plans for outlying development that would not hurt downtown. Municipal governments, chambers of commerce, large employers, civic groups, economic or community development corporations, school dis-

Mission Statement
States who you are.

Vision Statement
Tells where you want to go.

Work plans
Show how to get there.

tricts, and revitalization programs are some of the typical groups who participate in visioning initiatives.

Vision plans can vary widely but the National Main Street Center recommends they be at least several paragraphs long and be written as if the writer were compiling the program's accomplishments 10 to 30 years from now. The vision statement is a glimpse into the future to see how the revitalization effort paid off, what the Main Street district is like, and how the Main Street program helped transform the district. You can think of this document as being similar to those created by developers for new projects to get investors on board, sell the idea to a zoning or other municipal board, or appeal to prospective renters or buyers.

The Main Street program can use its vision when selling the community's dream to potential investors, business owners, volunteers, partners, and others. Your statement will coalesce a dream, and the work going on behind the scenes will be geared toward achieving that vision. The Main Street organization can use the vision statement as a means not only to motivate its staff and volunteers but also to see if its annual projects and initiatives will help you realize this dream. If not, your program should reassess how it allocates its resources and change its plan of action.

Vision plans can also be part of a community master plan. While this is discussed in depth in Chapter 16, Master Planning, a master plan is a document that guides how the community grows and manages change over the years. It is generally a process led by the municipality, but ideally it should also engage the public's input and participation and bring the Main Street program to the table in some way. Depending on your community, a community-wide master plan may already be on the books, as well as a downtown or neighborhood business district master plan. There might be an existing vision statement associated with one of these plans that your program may want to use. Because planners don't necessarily start a master planning process with

Sample Mission Statements

Ripon, Wisconsin

The purpose of Ripon Main Street, Inc., is to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Ripon, Wisconsin. Main Street will work with both the public and private sectors to restore the vitality once common in the downtown by enhancing our community identity and heritage, fostering a center of activity, and ensuring economic stability through concentrated efforts in organization, promotion, design, and business development.

Elgin, Illinois

The Downtown Neighborhood Association of Elgin is a not for profit 501(c)(3), volunteer-driven coalition that represents the interests of the individuals and organizations with a presence in downtown Elgin, Illinois. The Association's purpose is to foster a center of activity and ensure economic stability for the heart of Elgin through historic preservation, communication, education, promotion, and economic revitalization.



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a visioning exercise, there might not be a vision statement. This presents an opportunity for your organization to lead a community visioning process. You are strongly encouraged to work as a team with the municipality on this effort. Your program can lead the visioning process itself or encourage the municipality to set aside funds to lead the initiative (along with a master planning process if one hasn't been created yet or if the current one is outdated). If the local government is not planning a visioning process, lead one of your own as it will be beneficial for your future work.

A number of Main Street programs have created vision statements and formally submitted them to their municipalities for review and endorsement as an official statement for downtown or the neighborhood business district. Often times they are approved at a public ceremony and incorporated into the existing commercial district master plan.

Although the actual document is useful, the process of creating it is just as important. Consensus building among stakeholders will create higher levels of commitment and enthusiasm for community revitalization. If citizens have a forum to provide their input, they will be more inclined to support revitalization initiatives. Extend personal invitations to key stakeholders and send a general invitation asking the public to participate in your visioning meetings or to submit their ideas in advance. Your staff, board members, and committee chairs should be required to attend and all volunteers should be strongly encouraged to actively participate. While it is best to solicit the input from the public in this process, if that doesn't happen and your vision statement only reflects the views of your volunteers and staff, make it clear that your document is the Main Street program's vision statement.

The Visioning Process

The time, money, and energy that your community spends on implementing a visioning process depend on the scope and scale of the visioning exercise and the ultimate use of the results. If your goal is to create a comprehensive vision statement that will guide overall community planning and address a breadth of issues, the process should involve all segments of the community and will most likely take six months to a year. In that scenario, it is likely the

municipality will be leading the effort as well as paying for it. Less comprehensive or smaller visioning activities will obviously require less time and fewer resources. Most visioning projects are facilitated by outside consultants, such as specialists from coordinating Main Street programs or the National Main Street Center, vision planners, design professionals, and community organizers.

Generally, a visioning process has four steps:

1. Preliminary/Initiation Phase. If your Main Street program is running the show and you have the budget, you can hire a trained meeting facilitator to guide these discussions or pick a Main Street staff or board member to lead them. If the local government is leading the effort, offer your assistance. At the first meeting, explain to the participants what a vision statement is, what a visioning process involves, and how the statement will be used. The first step is to determine the logistics and timeline of the process. Set up a steering committee made up of individuals and groups representing broad segments of the community to guide and implement the process. When a Main Street program undertakes a visioning initiative, the board of directors should represent the different interests of the commercial district. It is also during this phase that target areas are identified and a timeframe of 10, 20, or 30 years is established for the visioning project.

2. Facilitated Discussions. Every meeting facilitator has his or her own technique for guiding interaction. There is no right or wrong way as long as everyone has an opportunity to be heard. To get you started, here are the questions the National Main Street Center has used to promote productive dialog.

- ◉ Why is Main Street special to you personally?
- ◉ How do you wish Main Street were better?
- ◉ What will revitalization success look, sound, smell, and taste like?
- ◉ What will revitalization success feel like emotionally?
- ◉ How do you want Main Street to be viewed in 10 years?
- ◉ What activities and businesses do you hope to enjoy on Main Street in 10 years?

Another technique is called a "SWOT" analysis. The facilitator asks participants to name the commercial district's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as the first steps toward building a vision. Regardless of your chosen technique, assign someone to keep track of comments and ask the group to vote on ideas to confirm consensus. Present the results of the vote to the group and ask for reactions. If the results need to be amended slightly, do it while the group is still together.

3. Writing the Vision Statement. Next, draft a preliminary

vision statement narrative using keywords from the public meeting(s). Distilling the many ideas from the visioning meetings will be tricky and you'll need to enlist the most gifted writer among your staff or volunteers. Writing the vision statement should be the job of a single person. The statement should be written in the present tense and approached as though the community has achieved all of its goals. For example, "It is 10 years from [today's date] and we have created our most desirable district." See the sample vision statement below for an example. The draft should then be reviewed and edited by each board member. Now is not the time to introduce new concepts—the statement and the board's edits must respect the community's input. If your program wishes to submit the statement for formal endorsement by the municipality, you can do so once the board approves it.

The final vision statement should be presented publicly. Hold another meeting to unveil the statement, discuss next steps, and generate excitement for the years ahead. Be sure to post the vision on your website, e-mail it to stakeholders and partners, and highlight salient concepts in press releases to local media. Make sure the public has access to the statement and understands the consensus-building process used to develop it.

4. The Vision and Implementation Plan. After the vision statement is approved, your Main Street organization needs to develop its work plan. Work plans are the guiding implementation documents that boards of directors and committees use to carry out the program's activities. In the case of community-wide visioning projects, short- and long-term implementation strategies are developed and responsibilities assigned to those delegated to carry out the vision. These strategies may include timetables for achieving specific objectives as well as integrating the vision into current community planning activities. Large-scale,

community-wide visioning and master planning processes will include implementation strategies for many entities in the community, not just your organization.

Other Elements to Consider. The use of graphics, such as architectural renderings and site plans, are especially useful if the vision process is focused on physical developments, such as a streetscape project. Design charrettes can be incorporated into the visioning process to help members of the community visualize future changes. Graphics can also be used to market the visioning process and final product through a report, posters, banners, and other communications.

Most Main Street programs find that the original vision plan can guide their work for several years. Every five years or so, your board members may want to review the plan to see whether it is still relevant or if it needs modifying. Small changes are normal but a wholesale rewrite should not be necessary.

Work Plans

Every year, each committee will outline its work for the next 12 months. In younger programs, this work plan is often a list of projects the committee can realistically complete within a year. More mature programs will outline objectives and strategies that guide a series of projects. For example, market studies during the early years of the revitalization effort may reveal that the commercial district has strong potential as an arts and entertainment district. Consequently, the next work plans will outline how each committee will work to establish this market niche. After the first year or two, programs become better at estimating how much they can accomplish during a year.

The work plan should reflect the organization's major

CASE STUDY

Elgin, Illinois

Vision Statement for Downtown Elgin



Our vision for a preferred downtown Elgin is a destination where the community works, lives, and enjoys the arts, quality entertainment, outstanding restaurants, and delightful shopping experiences in the unique atmosphere of historic Elgin on the Fox River. It is a place where people desire to live in renovated loft residences and new up-scale condominiums.

Property owners enjoy 100 percent occupancy of office, retail, and residence space. They prosper with the demand for space at market rates and reinvest their profits in their properties. The infrastructure is "tech ready." All Internet and computer connections and power are more than adequate to handle the growing number of tech businesses locating downtown.

Those who work downtown enjoy a real sense of community and the conveniences of a downtown location. Many travel on Metra from Chicago and other suburbs. Parents kiss their children goodbye as they bring them to a first-rate child care center one block from their office. Others drop clothing at the dry cleaners and get in a 20-minute workout at the local recreation center before starting their day. Workers settle into workstations that are the envy of any Internet/computer-based business in the world.

priorities and be realistic in its scope. It should exclude items that cannot be accomplished in one year. Remember that the Main Street program cannot be everything to everyone; to be effective, it must focus its efforts. Don't take on activities that do not fit your purpose. Don't attempt projects for the wrong reasons, e.g., because a grant is available to conduct the project, because the activity will put someone on the payroll, or because the project will generate publicity. That said, don't turn down good opportunities when they come along, but be sure that any changes in the Main Street program's agenda are made for sound reasons. Scrutinize every proposed activity and be sure it makes sense for the program. Your organization's leaders and volunteers will likely have many good ideas that will have to be temporarily "parked" on a list until resources and time permit revisiting them.

How to Write a Work Plan

A work plan should include:

- Goals for the standing committees;
- Specific objectives necessary to accomplish each goal; and
- A list of activities with an appropriate time frame for accomplishing each objective.

Goals, objectives, and activities define the projects your organization will implement to fulfill the directives in its mission statement. Your goals broadly state what your organization wants to accomplish within each of the Main Street four points. Your objectives should outline what your board and committees need to do to accomplish your goals. And, finally, a list of activities should outline



the specific tasks needed to accomplish your objectives.

Goals. Board members create the goals for each committee. The board is responsible for the Main Street program's direction and thus is accountable for its activities. It also must make sure that the work of each committee dovetails with the others and fits within the mission. Committee members must clearly understand their responsibilities and look to the board of directors for direction and management. With experience comes the opportunity for committee members to take a stronger leadership role in developing work plans and establishing their own goals. When committees are ready to "fly solo," a board member should mentor the committee chairs so they can take charge of the process, but the board should provide guidance and support as needed.

Objectives. The objectives for each goal should be developed by the standing committees, in conjunction with the board. A board that dictates too much to the committees risks driving away volunteers. You can motivate volunteers more by giving them a role in creating the work plan. Each committee should brainstorm various objectives that will help it achieve its goal. After listing a dozen or so objectives, see if any can be combined and then ask volunteers to prioritize them. Board members can help ensure that committee objectives don't overlap and prevent a committee from taking on too much. When committee leaders are ready to develop their own objectives, board members should mentor them in this process as well.

Activities. Committee members must brainstorm ideas

They have 24-7 access to the Internet and clients from around the world.

During the noon hour, the streets are filled with people on their way to the bank, bookstore, and drug store or to lunch. They wait in a short line to be seated at fabulous restaurants that provide quick lunchtime service. Regulars ask for their favorite server and greet the owner and other familiar patrons. Some get their lunch "to go" and sit in the park, enjoying the open spaces and taking in the sun.

Youth breathe life into the community while attending the performing arts high school and college at downtown campuses.

The arts are an integral part of people's daily lives. Workers and visitors attend an artist's workshop and see new and unique statues in the attractive sculpture garden. Families congregate at weekly events and monthly festivals. They enjoy an outstanding library and a stroll along the riverfront. They meet with friends for summer concerts under the stars or listen to symphonic music. On bright winter days, parents sip hot cocoa as they admire their children's skill on the ice rink.

Bicyclists travel into downtown along the bike path and park their bicycles next to others in front of a small cafe. They order beverages and catch up with old friends. They go for a short walk and browse the windows of boutiques, vowing to return the next day to shop. They get back on their bicycles and head off into one of the surrounding neighborhoods on a historic bike tour.

The nighttime brings excitement, music, dancing, and dining. A little jazz, a little blues, a little Cajun, a little Italian. Anything you desire. A foreign film, the latest flick, old-time favorites, late into the evening, entertainment for everyone.

There is no fear, there is no crime, and parking is just around the corner. The short walk from your car to your destination is a delightful experience of sights, sounds, and smells. You pass a boutique, a bakery, a coffee shop, friends sipping tea and discussing a new author at an outside café, and the riverboat sounds its horn. You observe a "citizen guide" giving directions to a visitor. The local beat officer passes by, smiles, and greets you with a "good afternoon." You think to yourself that coming downtown is always such a pleasurable experience. You can't wait for the holiday season to see how vendors will light up the downtown.

for activities that will meet their work plan objectives. Once they decide on activities for the year, they will need to write up work plans for each activity.

For each project, the committee should generate a list of steps, which will become tasks that can be assigned to volunteers. By defining all the steps necessary to complete a project, setting a timeline and budget, and assigning volunteers to be responsible for every step, each committee will have a clear idea of the resources it will need that year. For example, if you are putting together a business directory, you know that the steps include contacting all the businesses; compiling information; and then coordinating the directory's design, printing, and distribution. Because the work plan reduces all projects to incremental tasks that volunteers can complete in a specific period of time, the task of contacting business owners can be delegated to several volunteers. Be careful not to overload a single volunteer or staff member. If the committee doesn't have someone to handle every task, such as finding someone to design the directory or work with the printer, those unassigned jobs become volunteer recruitment priorities. That is why a work plan is so crucial for recruiting volunteers. Taking the time to plan ways to complete each project can save time later in the year when projects are already under way. The work planning process is important—every person who participates in the process will offer his or her own creativity and unique perspective.

Adopting the Completed Work Plans

The board of directors should review the completed project plans, looking for duplication or overlap among the committees and using the committee budgets to establish the program budget. After determining whether committee projects can be accomplished in one year, the board also approves timelines for each activity. The timing of projects is important, especially for activities that rely on other tasks being completed first—such as a façade improvement program that will not be announced until the low-interest loan pool is established.

Once projects have been adopted, committees should be free to complete them without seeking approval from the board on every matter. As long as work progresses according to the plan, board members don't need to become involved in the details; instead, they should be available for support or mentoring. Any amendments to the plan should be taken to the board for approval. Each year, the board should examine the committees' goals to see if they need to be modified as the program matures.

Share the final work plans with the members of all committees so that they know what everyone is working on. The work plans should also become tools for guiding all committee and board meetings. At committee meetings, the agenda should include discussion, or at least reports, of progress and deadlines coming up in the work plan.

Work Plans with a Purpose

When developing annual work plans, remember the purposes they serve:

- *To manage the wide range of activities that must take place for a revitalization effort to succeed.* From a project management perspective, work plans get committee members on the same page so they understand clearly what needs to be accomplished during the year. The board can also use work plans to ensure integration of the four points among all committees.
Understanding how many steps it will take to complete a project can help you realistically plan what can be done each year and create a timeline for pacing incremental activities. A detailed work plan that breaks down big projects into volunteer-sized tasks will divide the workload into manageable pieces and help the committee identify additional volunteer needs for the year.
- *To develop a budget for activities.* Work plans are crucial budgeting tools. Committee members need to assign costs and revenues to all portions of their work program. The board of directors then compiles all of these individual budgets into a full organizational budget. As previously stated, work plans should drive the budget, not the other way around.
- *To explain the organization's purpose and activities to the public.* Good work plans have benefits beyond organizing work. They are also useful public relations

An Example of a Work Plan Element

Goal for Economic Restructuring Committee:

Research and analyze the downtown's economic conditions.

Objective #1: Understand the retail market conditions that affect the downtown.

Activities:

- Gather the most recent Census data.
- Conduct customer and merchant surveys.
- Obtain copies of market studies from city planning department.
- Conduct preliminary market analysis.

Objective #2: Gather information about downtown real estate.

Activities:

- Develop a base map that shows all downtown buildings.
- Conduct a building inventory and note vacant lots and abandoned buildings.
- Collect real estate data from tax office.
- Collect historical data (maps, photos, directories).

Organizational Phases of a Main Street Program

Successful Main Street programs go through three distinct organizational phases:

Catalyst Phase

In this phase, during which the revitalization program is created, the organization builds collaborative partnerships; develops basic revitalization skills; builds a strong volunteer base; and establishes a credible presence in the community. Characterized by enthusiasm, high hopes, and some skepticism, this phase is frequently marked by misconceptions about the commercial district's true problems and opportunities. Because the new organization doesn't have a track record yet, its initial revenues have probably been raised through pledges, and the district's constituents will watch carefully to see if the new organization lives up to their expectations. These are the years during which program leaders must lay the organizational groundwork for the reinvestment that will follow. It is important to achieve some highly visible "victories" during the program's early days as a way to signal that changes are taking place, while working diligently to discover economic opportunities for the district and make decisions about the best path to pursue.

Indicators that a Main Street program is moving from the catalyst to the growth phase include: design management system, strategic thinking, organizational credibility, and a good understanding of the district's economic role.

Growth Phase

These are the years in which the program begins tackling tougher problems and sees major reinvestment in the district: facade improvements grow into more substantial rehabilitation projects; unused (or underused) upper floors become apartments, offices, or other small businesses; and new buildings rise on vacant lots. Along with the visionary risk-takers who started the program, the Main Street organization now needs seasoned volunteer leadership—individuals who possess the technical skills and expertise to provide the development financing, political access, and marketing direction necessary to stimulate major reinvestment in the commercial district.

The major challenges of the growth phase are to:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive economic development strategy for the commercial district—a strategy based on a firm understanding of the region's market opportunities and limitations;
- Raise the capital required to complete major building rehabilitations and, if necessary, public improvement projects; and
- Identify and take steps to overcome the regulatory, financial, and perception barriers that prevent or deter full utilization of the commercial district's buildings.

Unlike the transition from the catalyst to the growth phase, which is marked largely by the skills the members of the organization have learned and by the way the program is perceived by the public, the shift from the growth to the management phase is marked by tangible benchmarks:

- At least 70 percent of the buildings, both public and privately owned, that needed major physical renovations at the beginning of the revitalization effort have been renovated;
- The ground-floor vacancy rate ranges between 5 and 8 percent;
- The upper-floor vacancy rate is less than 20 percent;
- The public is aware of the commercial district's importance to the community and quality of life is high; and
- The organization has made some headway in overcoming the regulatory, financial, and perception barriers that have impeded full utilization of the district's commercial buildings.

Management Phase

During the management stage, the Main Street program's role changes. In many ways, it functions like a shopping mall management office, ensuring that businesses adapt to changes in the marketplace; that the district's physical infrastructure, both buildings and public spaces, is in good condition; that the district is as safe as possible; that the district's marketing strategy is targeted and effective; and that potential threats to the district's economic vitality are kept in check.

Typical characteristics of the management phase include:

- The program sometimes serves as a contractor to the municipality, delivering or augmenting specific services such as maintenance, parking management, and security;
- The program's staff often grows during this phase, with staff members assuming greater responsibility for management of the organization;
- Program leaders sometimes redefine the organization's mission to reflect the progress that has been made and the shift from revitalization to ongoing management of the district;
- The commercial district is no longer perceived by the general public as being in economic distress or danger; and
- The district supports a broader range of uses than it did at the beginning of the revitalization process.

The catalyst phase typically lasts from two to four years; the growth phase, about eight to 12 years; and the management phase is ongoing. Main Street programs sometimes cycle back and repeat certain aspects of earlier organizational phases as they mature, as the marketplace changes, and as the program's staff and leadership change over time.

Excerpted from "How Main Street Programs Evolve and Change," by Kennedy Lawson Smith, Main Street News, March 1996.



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tools. Post the work plans on your website so people can follow the projects your organization is tackling.

- **To show quantifiable results.** Nothing builds more credibility for a community organization than reporting back in a year to show that much of the annual plan was accomplished. Summarize each committee's accomplishments to show what Main Street has achieved during the year. Committee activities are quantifiable: activities and objectives can be measured so you can gauge progress, set standards for future initiatives, and clearly demonstrate success. Your track record in completing work plan activities can offer a persuasive argument when you make funding requests, appeal for support from the municipality or other stakeholders, and launch volunteer recruitment campaigns.

Benchmarking Progress¹

Main Street programs can be measured in a variety of ways; thus, it's important to chart your accomplishments. Try to collect as much data as you can while your program progresses—it will come in handy in impressing people who seek numbers, like elected officials, the media, and funders. One of the most effective tools for systematically collecting data to quantify success is through the reports designated Main Street communities must submit to their coordinating programs. Most coordinating programs require local Main Street programs to submit information on new businesses, new jobs created, private reinvestment for design improvements, volunteer time, public improvements, buildings sold, etc.

The following is a comprehensive list of statistics that can be used to measure the progress of your commercial revitalization program.

Organization

- Estimate the number of volunteers annually involved in the program. To aid in evaluating volunteer impact, many Main Street programs set up a database, maintained either by program staff or the chair of the organization committee, to keep track of the number of people who volunteer and the activities they're working on. Keeping an accurate tally of the people who donate their time and skills to Main Street is especially impor-

tant when it comes to recognizing volunteers at the end of the year.

- Estimate the number of new volunteers recruited.
- Estimate the number of volunteer hours contributed to the program by estimating the number of hours volunteers spend on Main Street activities. This is typically done at monthly committee meetings.
- Calculate the amount of volunteer hours converted into dollars. Independent Sector, a nonprofit coalition of charitable groups, calculates the hourly value of volunteer time, which in 2007 was \$19.51. Using that amount, if a Main Street program has 100 volunteers who give 10 hours of their time per month, those hours can be counted as an in-kind donation of \$19,510 for that year.
- Measure increases in the number of contributors as well as the level of funding. This number can indicate that the revitalization program is reaching a larger and/or broader constituency.
- Document the source and the number of grants received.
- Quantify the dollar value of all media exposure. Track all articles and stories run in all media outlets and multiply the inches/time by the average advertising rate.
- Document the number of successful partnerships. Track collaborative efforts with other civic organizations; school groups; and local, county, and state organizations.

Promotion

- Estimate attendance at promotional events. See Chapter 21, Promoting Excitement, for ways to do this. Be sure to calculate the percentage change from the previous year so that you can publicize an event's growth.
- Document the number of vendors at events. Calculate the increase or decrease in percentage every year.
- Document the number of participating retailers. Be sure to calculate the change in percentage from year to year and use increases in participation to convince business owners to take part in your promotional events.
- Estimate the impact of promotional events on sales. When evaluating your promotional events, take the time to survey participating business owners. Ask them to calculate the percentage that sales have risen or dropped or to rate the change in sales by using a scale, such as dramatically decreased, slightly decreased, no change, slightly increased, dramatically increased. Always ask retailers to compare last year's sales to the present year—but respect the wishes of those who don't want to share this information.

1. This section has been excerpted from "Benchmarking Your Program's Progress," by Matthew Wagner (Main Street News, January 1998).

- Main Street’s impact on tourism takes place primarily through marketing campaigns, tourism advertising, and special events. Many programs work with the city’s convention and visitors’ association to monitor the number of requests for information about the community. Other methods include checking with retailers to get the zip codes of shoppers and contacting hotels to determine occupancy rates during events designed to attract tourists. Many states have departments of tourism or university extension offices that can help you estimate the impact of tourism on your community.

Design

- Compile a list of private design improvements and their costs, including new signs, building rehabilitations, facade renovations, and interior renovations. To make sure the list is completely up to date, track the number of building permits issued during the year, then get in touch with the business or property owner to gather accurate information about each project.
- List the number of public improvement projects and their costs. Include street furniture, tree plantings, street and/or sidewalk improvements, utility burials, parking spaces, new light poles, etc.
- Track the number of design workshop participants.
- Determine the amount and value of in-kind design assistance the Main Street program provides to business and property owners. Types of assistance can range from facade renderings to help with interior design. A dollar figure can be attributed to these services.
- Calculate the increase in property assessments. This is an important baseline figure to calculate at the beginning of the program. Calculate the percentage increase from year to year.

Economic Restructuring

To accurately measure Main Street’s impact on the economic growth of the commercial district, determine a number of baseline figures at the beginning of the revitalization process. The list includes:

- Number of current businesses in the district. You can walk or drive through the district and count the businesses or you can check with city offices that have business permits/licenses on file.
- Number of net new businesses. Once you’ve determined the baseline list of businesses, monitor new store openings in your district. The “net” figure is important because it reflects businesses losses as well.
- Number of jobs in the district. This baseline statistic is usually determined as part of a business visita-

tion program in which the number of employees is one of the questions asked during the interview. Interview or survey business owners each year and look for increases and trends in employment.

- Number of housing units created in the district. Residents provide additional nighttime activity, a new customer market, and intensified use of properties.
- Average rental rates on ground and upper floors. This information is best accessed through local real estate offices or an informal survey of property owners.
- Vacancy rate. You can calculate the vacancy rate in a couple of different ways. First, determine the amount of square footage available for businesses in the district. Next, locate the vacancies and calculate the square footage of this space. To find the vacancy rate, divide the vacant store space by the available store space. For example, if your commercial district has 200,000 square feet of available space and 10,000 square feet of that space is vacant, the vacancy rate is 5 percent. Another method is to count the total number of storefront or office spaces in the district and then determine how many are unoccupied. For example, if your district has 150 storefront spaces and only five of them are empty, there is a 3 percent vacancy rate. Calculate three categories of vacancy rates: first-floor rate, an upper-story rate, and an overall rate. These rates should be tracked every year to determine real estate trends.
- Reinvestment ratio. One final calculation you should make every year is the program’s “reinvestment ratio.” This is done by tallying the number of total improvements during the past year (including volunteer hours converted to dollars as well as private and public reinvestment) versus the amount of money spent on maintaining the program annually (the annual budget). Private and public reinvestment can include building and facade rehabilitations, streetscape improvements, building purchases, improvements to building interiors, new business signs, etc. This “reinvestment ratio” is used by the National Main Street Center to showcase the program’s impact on a national basis.

Conclusion

By developing clear, inspiring mission and vision statements with the help of multiple stakeholders, your Main Street program will be ready to accomplish significant projects in an incremental and strategic way. A detailed annual work plan that includes timelines and assignments for each activity, an itemized budget, and an evaluation procedure will improve the program’s success rate by keeping the program organized and by offering benchmarks to measure progress.

RESOURCES

Website

Independent Sector: Provides hourly value of volunteer time each year. This nonprofit has an array of advocacy and lobbying resources, including information on tax status and lobbying restrictions. www.independentsector.org/programs/gr/advocacy_lobbying.htm

Articles

“Vision Planning: Charting the Future for Main Street Communities,” by Nick Kalogeresis. *Main Street News*, November 1999. Ways Main Street programs can use visioning exercises to chart their community’s path toward the future.

“Ultimate Work Planning: The high-performance organizational tool for the next decade,” by Kennedy Lawson Smith. *Main Street News*, December 1999. Strategies for developing effective Main Street work plans that meet your organization’s goals.

Books

The Main Street Board Member’s Handbook, by Suzanne Dane, et al. (National Main Street Center, 2003). This handbook was developed especially for Main Street board members who are new to their volunteer position as well as for the leadership group working to establish a new Main Street program.

Promotion: Main Street Committee Members Handbook; Organization: Main Street Committee Members Handbook; Economic Restructuring: Main Street Committee Members Handbook; and Design: Main Street Committee Members Handbook, by Doug Loescher and Teresa Lynch (National Main Street Center, 1996). This series of handbooks was developed especially to help Main Street committee members understand the Main Street approach, the committee’s purpose, and the basics of their respective subject matter.

Guide to Community Visioning: Hands-On Information for Local Communities, by Steven C. Ames (APA Planners Press, 1993). How to design and implement a visioning process and develop policies that support your community’s vision.

Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A practical guide and workbook, by Michael Allison and Jude Kaye (John Wiley & Sons: 2007). Concepts taken from the for-profit world to guide your organization’s work.

Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations, by Bryan W. Barry (Wilder Publishing Center, 2003). Tips for developing or updating your organization’s strategic plan. Includes suggestions for boosting teamwork, managing people better, and working effectively despite funding cutbacks.

Images, left and right: © Linda S. Glisson. Center image: © Mindy Wendele



RUNNING A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROGRAM

By Lauren Adkins, with additional writing by Teresa Lynch

It is very exciting to see neighbors, coworkers, officials, and other stakeholders in your community get inspired to make positive change happen.

Lots of great ideas will be put on the table and wonderful dreams captured in your vision statement. But who in your Main Street program is going to get all this work done?

Don't panic. It is important to remember that Main Street programs are true public-private partnerships, so various pieces of the work will be done in partnership with other agencies and organizations. For instance, perhaps your organization will team up with the nearby university or chamber of commerce to offer business assistance seminars. Or your program might work with the city to facilitate a streetscape project.

Also, your committee and board structure is set up in a way that shares the work load. Each member of the organization has distinct duties to fulfill and must work with others to ensure their efforts don't overlap and to prevent overburdening individuals. This is true of your staff as well. Typically, most Main Street programs have a full-time, paid executive director. As funding allows, many programs hire administrative assistants, event planners, and other employees. The executive director should be viewed as the communicator, facilitator, and instigator of projects, not the sole implementer. The Main Street approach relies on creating community-driven, not staff-driven, programs in order to encourage the support and involvement of local stakeholders.

This chapter will explore the roles of the organization's leadership; show how revitalization work is apportioned among staff, the board of directors, and committees; and look in-depth at working with volunteers.

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Sharing the Workload

The only way to lead a community-wide, volunteer-driven effort is with the support of others. Broad-based support and public/private partnerships form the foundation of a commercial district revitalization program. Building support among a variety of public- and private-sector stakeholder groups is essential because these people can serve as future volunteers, members, financial contributors, donors of in-kind services, advocates, event participants, and customers. There must be philosophical and financial support for the commercial revitalization effort from both the private and public sectors. For example, because the local government plays a major role in directing the community's economic growth and other policies, it must actively participate in restructuring the commercial district's economic base and developing innovative solutions for the district's issues. The local government benefits from a strong community-based revitalization program; and, thus, the two groups are natural partners.

Private individuals and groups are also vital partners. By including them, you ensure that people who care about the community or profit from its prosperity can make a difference by becoming avid supporters through volunteerism or financial and in-kind donations. Their participation in the Main Street program provides different perspectives and ideas and helps represent the community more broadly than a homogenous organization filled with people from the same background could.

Much of the early organizing that takes place when a Main Street program is just getting started sets the stage for sustaining an organization that has broad-based support.* Many Main Street programs form when a core group of concerned citizens decide that the four-point approach will help them meet their revitalization goals. Early program organizers identify the boundaries of the Main Street district, open an office, raise funds, write organizational by-laws, and hire an executive director. Meanwhile, they contact various stakeholders to get their support and build initial partnerships with key groups. Oftentimes, the early organizers are the people who become board members and committee chairs. These people work with the executive director as the program's leadership. The following section will outline each group's responsibilities and show how they form the backbone of a sustainable organization.

Board of Directors

Main Street board members aren't figureheads—they're busy! Board members are charged with policy administration, finances, public relations, setting program direction and evaluation, fund raising, leadership, and short- and long-term planning. Board tasks include meeting legal obligations, administering bylaws, autho-

*Note: This publication does not walk the reader through the process of establishing a new Main Street program. The National Main Street Center's **Board Members Handbook** and the online document, **Revitalizing Main Streets: Getting Started**, www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet, are available for readers who are seeking information to help them start new Main Street programs in their communities. We encourage you to contact your coordinating program (which is listed on our website) and research the aforementioned materials as you get started.



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Main Street staff, volunteers, and board members must respect the roles and responsibilities of each member of the organization.

rizing an annual audit, ensuring the organization has sufficient revenue, serving as advocates of preservation-based economic development, reviewing and approving the annual budget and committee work plans, setting program goals, and giving direction to committees. The board is also responsible for hiring and evaluating the executive director, recruiting new board members, and approving personnel administration policies. Each board member should serve as a committee chair, board officer, or active committee member, and should give between four and 10 hours a month outside of meetings.

Large boards can be unwieldy so try not to exceed 13 voting members. There will be plenty of opportunities for individuals to serve as members of a committee or as project volunteers if they are not able to give the time and effort necessary to serve on the board.

Your organization might invite a variety of *ex officio* board members to sit at the Main Street table by virtue of the position they hold with an organization or office. They should participate in the board meetings, often as non-voting participants, when there is an opportunity to discuss how their organizations' projects can intersect with, or support, Main Street's activities.

Executive Director

One could be glib and suggest that an executive director can "walk on water." Still, it is true that a Main Street executive director must do it all—he or she must be adept at managing and assisting in the implementation of a comprehensive work plan that covers every aspect of a volunteer-driven commercial district revitalization process. The executive director's job includes:

- Coordinating activities of committees and volunteers;
- Facilitating work planning;
- Supporting and upholding decisions made by the board;

- Handling public relations for the program;
- Working with business and property owners (getting out of the office and interacting with people regularly);
- Handling administrative tasks with the officers of the board;
- Building coalitions with local officials, chamber of commerce, and other entities;
- Educating stakeholders on the importance of the Main Street Four-Point Approach®;
- Motivating, developing, and managing volunteers.
- Regularly communicating with the board president and other staff members;
- Attending all board and committee meetings, as well as relevant public meetings; and
- Providing technical assistance.

Committees

Most Main Street programs set up four standing committees—design, promotion, economic restructuring, and organization. Main Street organizations usually name their committees after the four points, but in truth, you can use any name. For example, the organization committee could be called the “outreach committee” because its responsibilities can be seen as reaching into people’s minds (through public relations), into their hearts (through volunteer development), and into their wallets (through the fund-raising plan).

Some communities create additional committees to deal with a major issue, such as parking. In general, however, it is better to set up a subcommittee that reports to one of the standing committees. A parking subcommittee would be under the purview of the design committee. However, there is no need to create subcommittees to deal with the responsibilities assigned to each committee. For example, there shouldn’t be a membership subcommittee, because that is clearly a task of the organization committee.

Committees are responsible for developing and implementing projects that fall within the Main Street four points. As with the board, committee members should be recruited for their skills and interests. Consider all of the stakeholder groups that you identified while developing your program and discuss volunteer opportunities with them.

Accomplishing Projects Through Committees

Typically, volunteers should be expected to attend committee meetings and work about three to five hours a month outside of meetings. Usually, the committee chair is also a board member, which helps facilitate organizational communication and transfer the board’s vision to the committees. Each of the four standing committees will:

- Meet regularly;
- Develop work plans;
- Implement projects;
- Report to the board; and
- Keep records and meeting minutes.

Each committee member should:

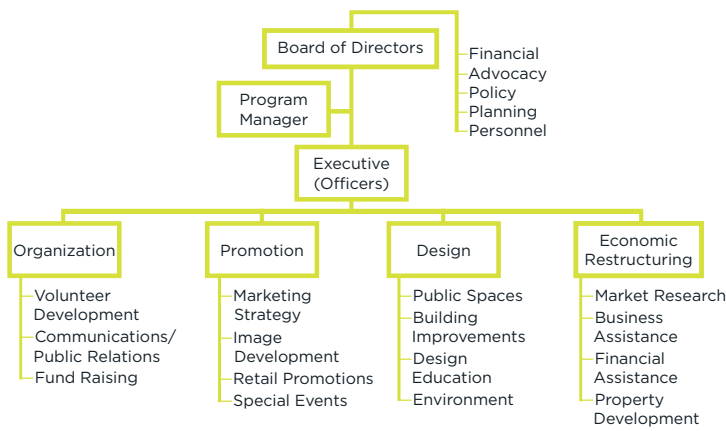
- Commit to at least one year of service;
- Attend training sessions;
- Learn the Main Street approach;
- Help recruit and orient new members;
- Take responsibility for projects;
- Represent the organization positively to the public; and
- Support the organization’s activities.

Every project a committee undertakes will have some connection to another committee’s work. Thus, it’s essential to keep the lines of communication open—particularly between committee chairs and board members so the left hand knows what the right hand is about to do. The board reviews all committee work plans to make sure that each committee sticks to its own responsibilities and doesn’t assume another’s work. On certain projects, however, two or three committees might work together; developing the district’s business and building inventory, for example, is a joint design and economic restructuring committee project.

The executive director helps manage and coordinate each committee’s work, not take responsibility for implementing committee projects and activities. While the executive director will offer advice on revitalization issues and will participate in the planning and many aspects of implementation, committee members must understand that they make the projects happen and complete work plan objectives. Tasks must be delegated to volunteers, not staff.

So, how does that work? If the promotion committee is producing a festival, for example, those volunteers are responsible for organizing and running the event. The executive director can help coordinate the production of promotional materials. Or if the organization committee is starting a fund-raising campaign, those members raise the funds, but they can ask the director to help coordinate the campaign and communicate with volunteers.

Refer to the organizational chart on the next page to better understand how work is divided among the committees, staff, and the board. For a more detailed list of the types of tasks each committee handles, refer to the online document “Revitalizing Main Streets: Getting Started,” by Teresa Lynch at www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.



Working with Volunteers

Main Street programs emphasize grassroots support, which is a different philosophical underpinning than most community or economic development strategies. By accepting the challenge of creating a community-based, volunteer-driven program, your organization must engage people through outreach and volunteer service. Unlike most other nonprofit organizations, your board of directors and committee volunteers must take a “hands-on” role in running the organization and implementing its activities.

Although changes in civic involvement and volunteerism trends have made it more challenging to build a cadre of volunteers, a strong volunteer recruitment and development program is a critical component of a sustainable organization. Part of what we learned from the urban renewal program in the 1960s is that a volunteer-driven approach to community revitalization is better for long-lasting change. Losing touch with local voices led to the development of unrealistic plans that couldn’t be implemented after the federal representatives left town. Instead, the Main Street approach leverages local resources, leadership, and perspectives so that ideas for change come from within the community and the entire process seeks to involve diverse stakeholders.

Even as your organization grows and secures funding to hire additional staff, there should never be a shortage of volunteers. The staff’s role is to ensure that your volunteers are put to their best and highest use—not to replace them. A key component of the Main Street approach’s success is building broad-based, community support.

Main Street programs have three types of volunteers: the visionary leaders who have the connections and experience that make them effective board members, people who have the right skills and dedication to plan and implement projects through committees, and the occasional volunteers who help when needed.

The number of volunteers you have depends on your recruitment efforts and the size of your community. Staunton (Virginia) Downtown Development Association, a community with a population of 23,853, reported in 2002 that approximately 70 volunteers contributed 2,500 hours annually. Barracks Row Main Street, an urban neighborhood program in Washington D.C., counted 171 volunteers in 2005. And the Asheville (North Carolina) Downtown Association, whose community has a popula-

tion of 70,000, regularly attracts 150 volunteers for its annual clean-up day alone.

It is a major, and necessary, job to recruit, train, motivate, manage, and reward the individuals who give their time to your organization. A shallow pool of volunteers will cause too much work to fall on the shoulders of the same people—which will likely cause burn out and prompt them to leave. Turnover can damage an organization.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of your program and you need to spend a lot of time working with them. Including a line item in your budget can help make volunteers a priority. All volunteers, regardless of their backgrounds, need strong management and a clear understanding of their purpose. Management is more than telling people what to do; it involves getting the right people to do the right jobs and using their skills in the most effective ways possible. A good volunteer program involves:

- Defining your volunteer needs;
- Creating a volunteer recruitment program;
- Interviewing and placing volunteers;
- Orienting and training volunteers;
- Providing supervision and evaluation; and
- Recognizing their achievements.

Creating a Volunteer Recruitment Program

A volunteer recruitment plan begins with understanding your need for volunteers. Your annual work plans reflect your organization’s goals and define specific jobs and skills needed to complete projects that will achieve these goals. Use your work plans to predict how many volunteers you will need to complete the projects planned and figure out



Volunteers staff the Main Street program’s booth during an event in Ellensburg, Washington, to promote the program and recruit more volunteers.

which skills will be needed. Recognizing the timing of the work plan projects will help you recruit volunteers early so they will have enough time to get trained and become acquainted with the organization before performing tasks.

Once you have defined your program's needs, you can start searching for the right people to get the job done. To get the right people, your organization may need to be flexible in order to accommodate volunteers' schedules and work styles. Frequently volunteers, especially younger people, seek ad-hoc roles—tasks they can complete on their own—and prefer communicating electronically rather than at meetings. You might find that you can recruit more volunteers by breaking down projects into smaller tasks, distributing them among more volunteers, and allowing people to work on tasks outside the Main Street office.

Once you know what you need, write a job description that includes:

- Job title;
- Purpose;
- Tasks/activities;
- Qualifications or required skills;
- Timeframe/time commitment; and
- Benefits of volunteering (free admission to events, social events, etc.).

Ask for feedback on your job description from individuals outside your organization. Does it sound exciting? Is it clear? If you get stuck, look for good volunteer postings from other organizations or volunteerism websites. If you were a time-pressed but socially conscious individual, which volunteer ad would prompt you to respond?

With your job descriptions in hand, think about how you will reach your “dream” volunteer candidates. Think about where you might find the right people—if you are looking for a specific skill, you might recruit from professional organizations, area businesses, or schools.

Typically, the stakeholders involved in a Main Street program come from the immediate community but, sometimes, as can be the case with urban neighborhood districts, they can be from the larger metropolitan area. The following list includes some of the types of people typically recruited as volunteers:

- Residents;
- Business owners and employees;
- Property owners;
- Realtors and property managers;
- Representatives from large institutions, such as banks, universities, and foundations;

- Representatives from regional businesses, such as manufacturing companies and corporations;
- Leaders or members from other community organizations, such as community development corporations and economic development organizations;
- Leaders or staff members from regional governmental authorities, such as transit or redevelopment authorities; and
- Leaders or members of civic groups, such as community service clubs or religious institutions.

Don't wait for people to come to you...ask them! Ask friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Ask various stakeholder groups and ask members of social and civic clubs (either as individuals or the group as a whole). Recruitment is all about spreading the word, making it easy to say “yes” to volunteering, and getting people excited about becoming involved. The two most important things to remember: ask people to do a specific job and don't say “no” for them. Amazingly, we come up with better excuses for people not to volunteer than the individuals themselves. If you decide someone is too busy to ask, he or she will never get the opportunity to say yes or no.

Most volunteers report that they were recruited by people who are already active volunteers. Take advantage of this and involve current volunteers in recruitment. Chippewa Falls Main Street in Wisconsin once recruited new board members by making a list of the skills possessed by current board members, then identifying the skills that were still needed. From this list, the group filled the gaps by contacting people they identified as having the right skills and invited them to sit on the board.

You can also get volunteers to recruit other people by making it a friendly competition or offering a prize to those who successfully recruit others. Another strategy is to match the recruiter with the audience. For example, ask a college student to recruit other students and a Rotary Club member to recruit other Rotarians. Make sure your recruiters are strong ambassadors for your organization. They should be able to briefly describe the organization's goals, accomplishments, current projects, and volunteer opportunities.

Charitable or service organizations are good sources of volunteers. Working with groups such as the Lions Club or the Jay-Cees on joint projects is an excellent way to leverage your community's volunteer resources to achieve similar goals. Start by inviting these groups to collaborate on a fun event and build the partnerships from there.

Person-to-person requests are effective, but there are other recruitment outlets that can help increase your chances of finding the right people. Announce volunteer positions in multiple places, including:

- Main Street and partner newsletters and websites;
- Local media—efforts to promote the Main Street program will have a direct impact on volunteerism;

Effective Board Member Recruitment and Retention

Many of the same strategies that you use to recruit committee members are effective for recruiting board members. You must develop a plan to strategically recruit new board members and mentor committee volunteers who are interested in becoming leaders. A board member recruitment plan is crucial to ensure continuity of leadership and identify people who have the skills and connections your board needs.

Some tips:

1. Appoint a nominating subcommittee of the board of directors to analyze current needs and prepare new member nominations.
2. Analyze the skill sets current board members possess.
3. Write clear board member job descriptions. Make sure candidates know exactly what their commitment entails.
4. Cultivate new board members among your current volunteers.
5. Ask candidates to serve on the board and put interested individuals on a waiting list if there are more candidates than vacancies on the board.
6. Make recruitment a high priority that is included in your board's or organization committee's annual work plan. Outline tasks, timelines, and responsibilities for each person.
7. Don't lose board members by failing to give them proper orientation and training. Put together an in-depth training program so they can get up to speed quickly and hit the ground running. Educate them about the Main Street approach, current projects, board member roles, and current issues.

Excerpted from "Recruiting the Right Board Members," Kathy La Plante, Main Street News, February 2008.

Directors and Officers Insurance

Main Street organizations, and their volunteer board members, face unique liability exposures that are not included in a standard general liability policy. While a general liability policy is designed to respond to actual physical damages, such as slipping and falling, it will not defend your organization from lawsuits involving:

- Alleged misuse and/or abuse of funds and contributions;
- Discrimination;
- Harassment;
- Wrongful termination of employees;
- Misrepresentations;
- Libel and slander;

- Websites dedicated to volunteerism (idealist.org, PreservationNation.org, volunteermatch.org) as well as local community websites;
- Presentations to service clubs, corporations, business or neighborhood associations, schools, senior groups, and preservation organizations;
- Intermediaries—Americorps, America's Promise, city volunteer offices, etc.;
- Schools—grade school to college (especially high school community service programs, college intern programs, sororities, and fraternities);
- Religious institutions;
- Community service sentences—usually best for big projects like clean-up days;
- Community center or library message boards;
- Information kiosks; and
- Booths at festivals, information fairs, and other events.

Take the apprehension out of recruitment by reinforcing the benefits of volunteering. Remember: you aren't begging for help; you are giving people rewarding opportunities to transform their communities. When you ask people to join in this work, you are inviting them to take responsibility for their community, to build or learn new skills, and to have fun!

Interviewing and Placing Volunteers

This really isn't a formal interview, but, rather, a casual conversation about your organization, the volunteer job, and the potential volunteer's availability and talents. Ask open-ended questions to learn about the person's strengths and interests, and then suggest several ways he or she could

- Acts beyond granted authority; or
- Other claims related to governance or management of the organization.

The best way to protect your organization and volunteers is to obtain a directors and officers liability insurance policy, which should include employment practices liability. While no two policies are identical, these two forms of coverage are often combined in a single policy for nonprofit organizations. The policy not only protects the organization itself; it also provides protection for the directors, officers, committee members, trustees, employees, volunteers, and even spouses against lawsuits related to the management and governance of the organization.

Excerpted from "Are You Covered: Protecting Your Directors and Officers," by Genny Dill, Main Street News, May 2006.

help the program. If necessary, modify the volunteer job description or offer the person a different assignment. Don't assume that a public relations specialist will want to volunteer for the organization committee or that an architect will want to work on design projects.

If you find during the interview that the person will not be a good fit, don't be afraid to gracefully say no. But if you decide to place the volunteer, do so quickly. If you let too much time lag between volunteer interviews and assignments, you risk appearing unprofessional and possibly losing them to another volunteer opportunity.

Keep track of your new recruits by recording contact information, skills, and hours served in a spreadsheet or database. There are a variety of information management systems, so pick the one that works best for you and keep it updated. Contact your coordinating Main Street program, Main Street Member Listserv, or the National Main Street Center for recommendations on information management software packages.

Orientation and Training

The best strategy for retaining volunteers is making sure that they have a positive experience. Giving them the tools, knowledge, and support to do a good job is the best strategy for achieving this. Orientation training is your chance to make sure people know what they are doing and can get things done. It is also your opportunity to make a good impression with new volunteers and build their confidence in the revitalization effort.

We all remember how frustrating the first day at work can be when we don't know what to do or where things are. Since we depend on our jobs for income, we find out what we need to know. Volunteers don't have to waste their time standing around feeling awkward and confused...they can just leave. Train all volunteers before they actually show up to work by explaining the project or event and everyone's roles in advance.

Match the orientation to the volunteer's role or assignment. Even day-only event volunteers should be considered ambassadors for your organization and should be able to communicate the revitalization program's mission and explain why the event is being held. Don't let an untrained volunteer become a lost opportunity for public outreach.

Volunteers assigned to leadership roles, such as board members, committee chairs, and project leaders, will need in-depth training. They should be quickly brought up to speed on:

- History of the organization and its accomplishments;
- Mission and vision statements;
- Current projects and initiatives;
- Partners;
- Main Street Four-Point Approach®;

- Overview of the work plan and the volunteer's particular area; and
- Descriptions of volunteer procedures (who they report to, time keeping, etc.).

You should provide an orientation session to teach volunteers about the Main Street approach. Basic Main Street training is offered by the National Main Street Center and Main Street coordinating programs throughout the year.

Ask the board president or a board member mentor to take new board members out to lunch and get acquainted. Committee chairs should also get to know their new committee members before their first meeting. Some Main Street programs use the buddy system and assign experienced volunteers to train new people; this frees up staff time as well as gives a seasoned volunteer a vote of confidence by recognizing his or her importance to the program.

As part of a formal orientation program for new board and committee members, create notebooks containing information such as:

- Welcome letter from the board president;
- Brief history of the program;
- Explanation of the Main Street Four-Point Approach;
- Mission and vision statements;
- Descriptions of each committee and list of members;
- Work plans (full copy for board members; abbreviated copy for new committee members);
- An organizational chart;
- Board and staff directory with full contact information and organizational affiliation (if any), committee assignments, and how many years they've been involved with the organization;
- Budget and monthly financial reports from the past year;
- Brochures about the organization;
- Last annual report;
- Map of the commercial district with Main Street boundaries clearly marked;
- Guidelines for volunteers, especially on how to get reimbursement and record their hours;
- Emergency procedures and contact information;
- A list of reading materials (including the handbooks produced by the National Main Street Center

specifically for Main Street volunteers; see the Resources section on page 36);

- Minutes from the past year;
- Recent staff reports;
- Calendar of committee and board meetings and events;
- Bylaws and policy statements;
- Articles of incorporation;
- A copy of the tax exemption notification from the IRS; and
- A letter of agreement or MOU with the coordinating Main Street program.

Lynch's Landing, in Lynchburg, Virginia, holds extensive training for volunteers for its weekly Friday Cheers™ event so that they are prepared and feel confident in their duties. During training, volunteers learn what happens when and what each supervisor's responsibilities are throughout the event. Supervisors are provided with an easy-to-use guide that contains phone numbers and information on ways to deal with a variety of situations, from weather evacuations to lost children.

Effective Supervision and Evaluation

Don't let the word "supervision" conjure up images of punching a time clock. The *One Minute Manager* by Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson is a great resource on managing and supervising people. The basic premise of the book is that it takes only one minute to give feedback—people don't want or need long sermons. Additionally, the "one minute" after someone does something great or improper is the best time to offer that feedback.

The work plan is the best tool for managing volunteers. Board and committee chairs should check the work plan weekly to see what tasks are due and then contact those volunteers a few weeks before their deadlines. This



The Friday Cheers summer concert series in Lynchburg, Virginia, can attract more than 3,000 people, which makes volunteer support critical for ensuring the events run smoothly.

will give them enough time to act if they find that a volunteer is having difficulty completing the task.

One way to set your volunteers up for success is to assign them specific tasks rather than asking them to handle an entire project. Here's how: Let's say your organization is developing a business directory and the project's manager decides that it is reasonable for each volunteer to contact 10 business owners. Since your district has 100 businesses, 10 people must be assigned to this task. The project manager would also assign other individuals specific tasks such as working with the printer or distributing the final product to 10 specific locations, etc.

A good manager does not make volunteers stay longer than they have agreed. When the time is up, thank them and let them leave. Another way of respecting volunteers' time is by making sure meetings are organized, efficient, and end on time. Meetings should include only the people who need to be there and should only be convened when the committee or a project will benefit from collaborative group work: planning, coordination, and making decisions.

Supervisors or mentors should keep an eye out for aspiring volunteers who would like, and can handle, more responsibilities and thus climb the "volunteer ladder." Volunteers who want to advance can start by working at events and then move up to managing projects, chairing a committee, and possibly serving on the board. Rather than looking for board officers all the time, program leaders need to be watching for great volunteers who they can "promote." This can be a great way to reward volunteers, as well as build the strong leaders the community needs. Support dedicated volunteers by helping them attend training and conferences when possible.

Volunteer Performance Reviews

If a volunteer program is relatively structured, then an annual review for key volunteers may be appropriate. Keep the sessions confidential and one-on-one. Ongoing feedback throughout the year, however, can be just as productive and is how most Main Street programs address this issue. Whether the review is formal or informal, be sure to maintain a positive, motivational tone.

Annual reviews should be two-way conversations that first recognize what the volunteer is doing well and then share ideas to help the person become more effective. The supervisor should listen carefully to the volunteer's ideas for improving the organization. Using an evaluation form, which coordinating programs can share with you, will help give structure and guidance to this process.

What happens if a volunteer must be fired? Although it's difficult, it's sometimes necessary, especially when the difficult volunteer is driving away other people. Your first step is to ask a peer to talk to the volunteer about the problem and suggest a means to correct the situation. If a particular volunteer is not productive and efforts have been made to help the person work more effectively, tell project or committee leaders that the volunteer isn't reliable. When you need to let a person go, the board president and executive director should talk to the volunteer together, so that no one can misrepresent what was said later. Keep the

conversation brief, with a short list of what is not working and a request that the volunteer step down.

Board members are volunteers, too, and they should evaluate their own performance each year. Annual evaluations will help the group focus its efforts, see if it is on track, and assure potential funders and other supporters that your organization is credible and professional. Search the Internet for sample “nonprofit board assessment tools,” to help you structure an evaluation.

Recognition

Management also means making volunteers feel necessary and appreciated. Main Street programs have always been creative in the ways they thank and recognize volunteers. Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance in Virginia keeps a line item in its budget for volunteer appreciation. One year it planned a reception to honor its volunteers at a local brewpub. Free food and drinks, a slideshow highlighting past accomplishments, and a list of upcoming volunteer activities made people feel appreciated and showed them the big picture of their contributions.

The Durant (Oklahoma) Main Street program has a Century Club that recognizes volunteers who have logged 100 hours. Volunteering with the group has been so satisfying that the program has started celebrating its 1,000-hour volunteers! MainStreet Libertyville in Illinois always makes a point of honoring volunteers during its annual meeting. Recognition has ranged from handing out engraved Academy Award-style statues to making framed award certificates with gold foils and blue ribbons. The program follows up with press releases highlighting volunteers and articles about them in the newsletter. In fact, many programs write volunteer profiles for their newsletters and websites. Some also nominate important volunteers for local and statewide awards.

Try to recognize volunteer contributions immediately. A simple thank-you as soon as the job is done means more

Evaluation of the Volunteer Program

Once a year or so—perhaps during the drafting of the annual work plan—program leaders should explore what is working well and what is not. Identify overall and specific problems affecting volunteer management. Determine whether current assignments are making full use of everyone’s talents. You can also seek input from people outside the program. Most coordinating programs provide annual program reviews as a condition of continued official Main Street designation.

than an ad in the newspaper weeks later. The Barracks Row Main Street program in Washington, D.C., hosts an annual Dine Around event, a four-hour restaurant tour during which people sample food at participating establishments. Once their shift is over, volunteers get to participate in the event for free. By the end of the event, volunteers are well-sated and rewarded for their time! Immediate thank-yous can also be delivered at the wrap-up meeting at the end of the day, through notes mailed that week, or by board members circulating and thanking volunteers during big events.

Don’t forget that how you treat volunteers is another way to reward them. Make office equipment accessible for people working on Main Street assignments. Hold meetings in comfortable places and offer refreshments. Remembering volunteers’ names and keeping them updated on projects and the impact of their work makes a big difference. Sharing information that keeps volunteers in the loop not only helps build a cohesive organization but will make them feel like valued members of the team. While not all information is appropriate to make public or share with the entire organization, withholding information diminishes trust and can lead to confusion about your organization.



Cheers to Volunteers!

Recognition of volunteer efforts does not have to be extravagant. It’s simply important to offer thanks for hard work and acknowledge that you value your volunteers’ time.

The volunteers and board members of Barracks Row Main Street toast a successful taste-of event with the owner of a local liquor store who participated with a champagne tasting.

© Leslie Hatfield



Multicultural Main Streets

By Josh Bloom

In downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts fortunate enough to have a rich cultural heritage or to be the place where a new (to the neighborhood) culture has recently settled, diversity is often an economic strength. The specialization of people, products, and services serves to differentiate the district from other places in the region, and especially from the typical retail offerings available everywhere.

“New Americans” have always been a source of innovation and reinvention for us as a nation. Today, in an age where many traditional business districts struggle to find an economically viable niche amidst big-box stores, lifestyle centers, and e-commerce, ethnically distinct commercial districts often create their own market. The think tank Center for an Urban Future states in its February 2007 report titled *A World of Opportunity*:

“During the past decade, immigrants have been the entrepreneurial sparkplugs of cities from New York to Los Angeles—starting a greater share of new businesses than native-born residents, stimulating growth in sectors from food manufacturing to health care, creating loads of new jobs, and transforming once-sleepy neighborhoods into thriving commercial centers.”

But how does the Main Street approach work in these communities?

In some ways, the Main Street model is uniquely American: few other nations or cultures have traditions of volunteer-based community development. This presents a particular challenge (in addition to any language barriers that may exist) when trying to involve recent immigrants in a Main Street program. For some, the concept of community-based economic development may prove difficult to understand. For others (especially those who may come from places with repressive governments), it’s natural to be a bit skeptical of an organization like Main Street—an organization that may sound governmental or, in some cases, may even be a part of local government.

Your work to make your Main Street program reflect the diversity of your district should be part of everything you do—and be integrated into all four points.

Organization

You may not speak all the languages of your district, but you can still build strong relationships with business owners and residents.

If you are the Main Street director, visit every business frequently so you become a familiar face. Engaging the children of your community’s New American population, especially through Junior Main Street programs, can help you build relationships with business owners: teenagers are likely to be straddling two worlds and, by virtue of their age, they probably adapt quickly. Your goal should be to build trusting, communicative, professional relationships while recognizing that not everyone will volunteer to serve on a committee—or even participate in various events.

If you are a cultural outsider, at times you may become aware of intra-racial or intra-ethnic cultural tensions (e.g. among Spanish-speaking populations from different nations, or among Asian populations from different countries, or between African Americans and other black Americans). If these situations arise, your job requires that you gently but forcefully invite the participation of everyone in your district—Main Street programs should have zero tolerance for prejudice of any kind.

Economic Restructuring

Help all business owners make their stores accessible to other cultures. This should work in both directions—and it can only increase the bottom line for everyone. Anglo customers should feel welcome in specialty ethnic businesses, and non-English speakers should feel welcome in “non-ethnic” businesses. Bilingual (or multi-lingual) signs or menus with pictures and descriptions are a start. To help multi-cultural entrepreneurs, Main Street programs should team up with various community organizations to help business owners overcome language barriers, become good loan candidates, and expand their businesses when the time is right. The owner of a beauty salon in a traditionally African American Washington, D.C., neighborhood that also has a large elderly population was having a hard time determining what products and services new, younger Caucasian residents would prefer. By working with Main Street volunteers and holding focus groups with these residents, the business owner was able to meet the needs of a new customer base.

In nations with less-developed banking systems, entrepreneurs may be accustomed to less formal sources of capital. Borrowing and lending among family members may be the standard method of capitalizing a new business. Because of this tradition, these entrepreneurs may be uninterested or unwilling to take advantage of matching-grant façade incentives or tax credit programs, given the documentation these programs typically require.

Not all multi-cultural districts involve new immigrants, of course. And there are many communities where the minority is the majority. Leimert Park, in Los Angeles, for example, is a majority African American community. Since the mid-1990s, the community has been working to create an “African village” that will be a retail and cultural destination for African Americans who live in or visit Los Angeles.

Promotion

Multicultural districts have a unique advantage when it comes to promotions, especially festivals and other special events. Geneva, Illinois, still celebrates its Swedish roots (even though there are few, if any, recent Swedish immigrants) with a festival that began in 1925 at local Swedish fraternal organizations. Today, Swedish Days Midsommar Festival—which features Swedish food, music, and dress—is one of the largest community events in the state. Chinatown in Boston hosts the August Moon festival, which is thought to have its origins in the 14th-century overthrow of the Mongol Yuan dynasty. The Chinese supposedly defeated the Mongols with the help of messages hidden in Chinese pastries called “moon cakes.” The festival has become a regional draw for the celebration of Chinese culture and food.

Design

Storefront designs, window displays, signs, and awnings should reflect the occupant while respecting the building. In the Fruitvale district of Oakland, California, Mexican business owners are encouraged to use colorful palettes in their signs and paint schemes. In some cultures, customers expect store windows to display a cornucopia of everything available inside—rather than featuring just a few items. When well executed, both of these design treatments can add vibrancy—and can easily be changed by a future tenant.

Permitting procedures (for signs, construction, food, or alcohol licensing, etc.) may be confusing to immigrant entrepreneurs. The Main Street director should make an extra effort not only to explain the requirements, but also to guide the business owner through the process.

Building Bonds

It may take time to build trust with multicultural stakeholders in your district, but engaging them is well worth the effort as they bring a broad range of perspectives, talents, and resources to your revitalization effort. If your organization does not have someone who is fluent in the languages prevalent in your district, work with area agencies, nearby universities, or local nonprofit groups to find someone who can translate various materials or presentations that might be helpful to your constituents. Get to know the members of multicultural civic groups and churches to find people who can serve as liaisons with specific communities and to facilitate relationships. Consider asking these groups to work with you to produce an event or develop assistance programs that would be helpful to their community members. Your presence, and your regular assistance in small but helpful ways, will quickly build trusting alliances and new bridges. But starting the relationship by letting them know who you are, the ways your organization can help them, and the ways they can become involved in community events and initiatives can generate goodwill and hopefully involve everyone in the revitalization effort.



RESOURCES

Websites

National Main Street Center: Offers an online database with sample documents, case studies, back issues of its monthly journal, trainings, annual conferences, and a consultants directory. www.MainStreet.org

Alliance for Nonprofit Management: “Frequently Asked Questions” offers resources on board development, strategic planning, financial management, and more. www.allianceonline.org

Board Development: Offers checklists on ways to establish a strong board of directors. www.boarddevelopment.org

BoardSource: Supports nonprofit board development through workshops, publications, training, and online resources. www.boardsource.org

Free Management Library: Links to articles and resources on a variety of topics including employee issues, bylaws, board term limits, and much more. www.managementhelp.org

Maryland Nonprofits: Publishes standards of excellence for nonprofit operations and offers guidelines on mission statements, human resources, fund raising, and more. www.marylandnonprofits.org

Nonprofit Good Practice Guide: Provides information on all aspects of nonprofit management, from board development and evaluation to online fundraising software. www.npgoodpractice.org

The Nonprofit Quarterly: Writes online and print articles about current nonprofit development issues. www.nonprofitquarterly.org

USA.gov for Nonprofits: Official information and services from the U.S. government. www.usa.gov/Business/Nonprofit.shtml

Publications

Promotion: Main Street Committee Members Handbook; Organization: Main Street Committee Members Handbook; Economic Restructuring: Main Street Committee Members Handbook; and Design: Main Street Committee Members Handbook, by Doug Loescher and Teresa Lynch (National Main Street Center, 1996). This series of handbooks was developed especially to inform Main Street committee members about the Main Street approach and the committee’s purpose. They explain the foundations of each point of the approach.

The Executive Director’s Survival Guide: Thriving as a Nonprofit Leader, by Mim Carlson and Margaret Donohoe (Jossey-Bass 2002). An insider’s guide to nonprofit leadership, this book provides practical advice and words of wisdom.

Putting the One Minute Manager to Work: How to Turn the 3 Secrets into Skills, by Ken Blanchard and Robert Lorber (William Morrow, 2006). Management tips.

Board Development Books: Secrets of Successful Boards, by Carol Weisman (F. E. Robbins & Sons PR, 1998); **Build a Better Board in 30 Days: A Guide for Busy Trustees,** by Carol Weisman (F.E. Robbins & Sons, 1998); and **The Main Street Board Member’s Handbook,** by Suzanne Dane, et al. (National Main Street Center, 2003).

Volunteer Management Books: The (Help!) I-Don’t-Have-Enough-Time Guide to Volunteer Management, by Katherine Noyes Campbell and Susan J. Ellis (Energize, Inc., 2004) and **What We Learned (the Hard Way) about Supervising Volunteers: An Action Guide for Making Your Job Easier,** by Jarene Frances Lee and Julia M. Catagnus (Energize, Inc., 2004).

Volunteer Management Books: The Volunteer Recruitment (and Membership Development) Book, 3rd edition, by Susan J. Ellis (Energize Inc, 2004) and **Volunteers: How to Get Them, How to Keep Them,** 1st edition, by Helen Little (Panacea Press, 1999).

Articles

“Are You Covered? Protecting Your Directors and Officers,” by Genny Dill, *Main Street News*, May 2006. Discusses the type of coverage your program needs to protect its employees and the organization.

“Building an Effective Board,” *Main Street News*, September 2003. Main Street board member responsibilities and roles, and leadership development.

“Managing and Retaining Your Main Street Director,” by Stephanie Redman, *Main Street News*, July 2002. Discusses how the board of directors can effectively manage and retain the executive director.

“Recruiting the Right Board Members,” by Kathy La Plante, *Main Street News*, February 2008. Outlines a plan for making sure that your organization is prepared for board member turnover as well as steps for strategic volunteer recruitment.

FINANCING MAIN STREET REVITALIZATION

By Kennedy Lawson Smith

Revitalizing a Main Street district benefits everyone.

Business owners reach more customers and increase sales, enabling them to pay higher rents, which in turn, can translate into property improvements. More jobs are available for area residents. The city's tax revenues increase as buildings appreciate in value and businesses earn more money. Overall you create a community that looks more vibrant, is cleaner and safer, and attracts new businesses and residents.

While it is difficult to determine with pinpoint accuracy which of these gains are directly attributable to the efforts of a local Main Street program, it is certain that the district's economy would not make these strides without the ongoing, concentrated focus of a revitalization program. One of the long-term opportunities—and challenges—of revitalizing a Main Street district, therefore, is to capture some of this increased economic activity to support the district's ongoing revitalization needs.

Myths of Main Street Funding

No other aspect of the Main Street revitalization process is more misunderstood or dreaded than funding the revitalization effort itself. Among the common myths and misunderstandings of financing Main Street revitalization:



- **Funding Main Street revitalization is the responsibility of the public sector or private sector.** Actually, Main Street revitalization is the shared responsibility of both the public and private sectors. Neither sector can—or should—support the revitalization initiative single-handedly. Any organization, agency, or individual who might benefit from the district’s revitalization should consider investing in your program.
- **Raising money for Main Street is the same as raising money for any other nonprofit organization.** Well, it is similar in some ways to other nonprofits, but, because Main Street districts have so many different uses, so many different participants, and so many different needs, fund raising for revitalization must be a true amalgam of sources and techniques. Fund-raising techniques that work for affordable housing development or the United Way may work satisfactorily for some aspects of the revitalization effort, but Main Street revitalization might also employ public funds for physical improvements, assess merchants for retail promotional activities, raise venture capital for business development, and utilize municipal service contracts.
- **Funding Main Street revitalization is a staff responsibility.** Raising money is a fundamental responsibility of the organization’s board of directors. If a staff person is given primary responsibility for raising the money to cover his or her salary, fund raising—not Main Street revitalization—will become his or her primary interest. Staff should

help with some of the administrative aspects of funding, but leave the rest to the board.

- **Funding should cover the costs of program administration.** Yes, of course, but “funding” is not limited to program administration. Revitalizing a Main Street district involves funding for specific activities, as well—organizing festivals, offering training programs for business owners, creating incentive programs to encourage property improvements, and much more. A pro rata share of the organization’s administrative costs should be built into each of these activities, of course, as the time and resources the organization invests in each activity represent real costs of implementing that activity. For example, if public improvements or a small business equity fund is part of the revitalization strategy, capital and equity costs should be built into the budget, with administrative costs allocated to each according to the proportion of the revitalization program’s time it will require. Too many revitalization programs set their funding sights too low.
- **The same funding tools that worked in the early years of the Main Street program will continue to work as the program matures.** This is probably the greatest myth of all. In reality, as revitalization programs mature, their funding needs—and opportunities—change, as well. As explained in chapter 3, revitalization programs typically go through three distinct organizational phases: catalyst, growth, and management.

What do these three phases mean for the organization’s fund-raising strategies? During the catalyst

Who Benefits from Main Street Revitalization?

- **Property owners.** Growth of rental income; increase in property values; safer environment.
- **Business owners.** Higher sales; safer work environment; access to business resources.
- **District workers.** Access to a broader range of goods and services; more pleasant work environment; rise in wages.
- **Residents.** Access to a broader range of goods and services; more pleasant living environment.
- **Local government.** Increased property tax revenues; stronger civic engagement.
- **State government.** Increased sales and income tax revenues; reduced burden of state support.
- **Federal government.** Increased income tax revenues; reduced burden of federal support.
- **Social service agencies.** Stronger local employment base; better range of goods and services for residents.
- **Civic groups.** Venue for holding events; partner in strengthening community.
- **Arts organizations.** Strengthened cultural environment; venue for holding events.
- **Financial institutions.** Safer investments; CRA compliance; more/larger commercial deposits.
- **Police.** Reduced crime; greater neighborhood involvement in community policing.
- **Schools.** Living laboratory for civics, local history, architecture, small business development.



* Fay Jacobs

FUND-RAISING NEEDS AND TYPICAL SOURCES, BY PHASE OF PROGRAM ACTIVITY

PHASE	NEED	TYPICAL SOURCES
Catalyst	Unrestricted funds to support the revitalization process.	Private-sector pledges; appropriations from local government.
Growth	Project-related funds (including support for program administration).	Public and private contributions; allocations for specific activities; some earned income.
Management	Both unrestricted funds to support the ongoing management of the district and project-related funds.	Revenues from special assessment districts; earned income; municipal service contracts; sponsorships; ongoing contributions and allocations.

phase, Main Street programs usually raise money by obtaining unrestricted pledges and commitments from both the public and private sectors. Because the new program has not yet established a track record, it gets funding commitments by exciting people about the possibilities—in essence, by selling a vision.

By the time the organization moves into the growth phase, however, it must have something to show for its efforts. Organizations and agencies will want to see tangible progress—more importantly, they will want to see a solid, achievable plan for the next few years—before investing more money in the revitalization program. In other words, they want to see a realistic, achievable business plan.

Finally, when your organization shifts its focus from revitalization to management, you will almost certainly need several sources of ongoing, earned income (or another constant, reliable revenue stream), as people will feel less passionate about contributing to a healthy, vibrant district. At this point, the organization becomes a very different entity. The threatening challenges that propelled the community to take action usually no longer exist, and, for that reason, people may no longer feel as motivated to support the revitalization program as they did at the beginning.

Main Street programs have proven time and again how creativity and innovation help them pay the bills. The Great American Main Street Award winner, Lynch's Landing in Lynchburg, Virginia, supplements its budget with \$200,000 in annual revenues from operating downtown's largest parking garage. And thanks to the Internet, the Ellensburg Downtown Association in Washington State took its "ask" beyond the city limits. By working in partnership with interns from a nearby university and local businesses, the group built a website to solicit \$10 donations online. The idea generated excellent media attention as well as funds.

Tools for Funding Main Street Revitalization

In your program's first few years, you need three primary funding tools:

- **A vision.** Individuals, organizations, agencies, foundations, and businesses give money to support is-

ues that are important to them—and they give money to organizations they believe can resolve those issues. Articulate your organization's vision for the Main Street district in a clear, exciting way and convince people that, with their support, your organization can turn that vision into reality.

- **Start-up funding.** During the catalyst phase, both the public and private sectors usually contribute start-up funds for the program's administration. In economically distressed neighborhoods, it is common for the city government to contribute a larger percentage than the private sector. There's no magic formula for raising this start-up money, just elbow grease and persuasiveness: ask the local government and members of the community for commitments. There may be opportunities for creativity, though. In its early years, Oklahoma City's stockyards pledged one cent to the Stockyards Main Street program for every head of cattle it processed.

If your program is part of a citywide Main Street effort, that program may already have some start-up funding lined up as one of the benefits of Main Street designation. Often

this type of support offers grants to cover administrative expenses of the neighborhood Main Street programs for the first few years, with the grant amount declining over a three-to-five-year period. Some CDC-based Main Street programs offer similar financial support. Whether your revitalization organization is part of a citywide program or is in a



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rural, small, or mid-sized community—all Main Street programs should have public and private partners and should secure some public funding.

Try to secure pledges from private donors for the first four years of your revitalization program. Make sure the revitalization effort makes some highly visible progress during these years, keep your contributors informed about this progress, and diligently collect the pledges.

- **“Future vision.”** It is difficult to believe, but the best time to begin thinking about the Main Street program’s long-term funding is during its first year. Your program’s future funding will depend at least in part on the quality and breadth of the relationships it establishes in its first few years. As you plan program activities, strategically engage other organizations in the process and work with them to explore long-term funding ideas.

The transition between the catalyst and growth phases is one of the most critical moments in the evolution of a revitalization program. Of all those communities whose Main Street programs have failed, almost all have done so at the transition point between the catalyst and growth phases. While causes differ from community to community—one of the primary reasons programs do not succeed is because they fail to build momentum early enough to acquire long-term, sustained funding.

As your Main Street program begins moving toward the growth phase and development of a stable, long-term funding base, it needs four tools. First, it needs a strategic plan that crystallizes exactly what your organization hopes to achieve in the next five to 10 years. Second, it needs a detailed financial plan that translates your strategic priorities into a financial blueprint. Third, it needs a well-organized fund-raising campaign. And, fourth, it needs to determine ways to harness the district’s increased economic strength by reinvesting a portion of that activity (retail sales, commercial rents, property values, etc.) in the district’s ongoing management and, thus, in the revitalization program’s continuing operations.

A Strategic Plan

As a Main Street organization moves from the catalyst to the growth phase, the individuals and institutions who contributed start-up funding will want to know that their investment has paid off and that the organization has a plan to build on the foundation they helped support. You can prove this to them by sharing your organization’s strategic plan.

Let’s say your community’s vision is to make the district a center for environmentally friendly shopping, working, and living. Your program might then identify two or three strategies to realize this vision by: 1) making the district a living laboratory for developing and growing small, innovative green industries, and 2) creating a self-sufficient, “green” village, with jobs, housing, and services. It would then break these strategies down into specific actions for the annual work plans and use the strategies as the basis of a fund-raising plan.

Here are a few basic points to help you structure a strategic plan and determine what you’ll need from it in order to develop a fund-raising plan:

- Use a three- to five-year time frame.
- Distill your priorities into three or four major challenges you want to tackle in that period of time.
- Don’t get stalled in an effort to choose one major “challenge” for each of the four points of the Main Street approach; instead, think of the four points as a matrix for defining the activities necessary to achieve each of your goals.
- Be sure your strategies have an economic development purpose.

A Financial Plan

Once you have your strategic plan in hand, turn it into a budget and then use the budget to create a fund-raising plan.

First, the budget: What will it cost to do everything necessary to advance your Main Street revitalization efforts over the next five years? For each of your major strategies, hammer out a budget that includes not only your program’s operating costs but also capital costs, the cost of consultants, any expenses related to providing financing or financial incentives, and everything else. The budget should determine the amount of funds your program needs to raise; the funds raised should not determine your budget!

At this point, it doesn’t matter if some of these expenses will actually be covered by another entity and therefore don’t really need to be included in your fund-raising goals; put everything in your budget anyway. For instance, if replacing the district’s sidewalks is a priority for achieving one of your goals, and the city is planning to use Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to pay for their replacement, you should

Distributing Program Administrative Costs Among Individual Projects

+	Project cost/year (Administrative expenses X percent of time to be spent on this project)
<hr/>	
	Total project cost
	\$100,000
+	(\$150,000 X 20%)
<hr/>	
	\$130,000

still put this cost in your preliminary budget (it will be an expense for which dedicated funding already exists). This gives you not only an accurate estimate of all the costs involved in the revitalization effort but also helps illustrate the wide range of agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals who can and should play a role in funding the district’s revitalization.

After completing the budget, estimate how much you might reasonably expect each potential “investor” to contribute. You will probably need to ask potential major donors, such as local government, how much they might contribute before you develop the matrix. Start with public-sector contributions, particularly CDBG funds, Certified Local Government funds, and other money that may be available for specific types of bricks-and-mortar projects or other activities that typically rely on public funding. In essence, you can almost shape the future availability of funds and make this part of the fund-raising plan a self-fulfilling prophecy. For instance, if sidewalk replacement is part of your five-year strategy, the city has plenty of time to allocate CDBG funds to cover most or all of the cost, but, if you don’t ask, the city might decide to use that money for other priorities.

It is also wise to preview your strategic plan with potential major contributors—the president of a major local industry, for example, or the chair of an influential civic organization. Visiting with these potential donors will help you find out if the direction your strategic plan lays out for the district is one they are willing to support, and it will give you a sense of how much each of these major sources is willing to contribute.

The Fund-raising Campaign

Now that you’ve established your targets, it’s time to expand your fund-raising team. Your first task is to find a great manager to oversee the campaign, keep everyone moving in the same direction, enforce deadlines, act as a public spokesperson for the campaign and its goals, and twist a few influential arms. Look for someone who is well organized, great at working with people, influential, and respected by the community.

Next, recruit “lieutenants”: the people who will manage specific segments of the campaign. The segments for which you will need managers will depend on how you structure your list of potential contributors, of course; but, in general, you will probably want to select people to manage such segments as:

- Financial institutions;
- Local industries;
- Foundations;
- Civic clubs;
- Main Street businesses;
- Main Street property owners;



- Individual donors likely to make large contributions;
- Individual donors likely to make moderate contributions; and
- Individual donors likely to make small contributions.

Each segment manager should recruit a core team of volunteers. The size of each team will depend, to an extent, on the size of the potential donor pool. If there are only three financial institutions operating in your downtown or neighborhood district, that team can be small, but the team of volunteers required to reach a thousand potential individual donors likely to make contributions of \$100 or less needs to be fairly large. Each team should consist of people who know likely donors in that category.

- *The first task of each team is to develop a list of potential contributors—as long a list as possible.* For each prospect, jot down some thoughts to guide your meeting. What aspects of the revitalization process is the potential donor likely to find most compelling? Which of your planned activities will be most appealing to him or her? And, based on what the team knows about the person’s resources and previous contributions, take a stab at estimating how much he or she should be asked to contribute. Remember that this is a multi-year gift, so you should be asking for a multi-year amount.
- *Next, create campaign materials.* Each team should give the campaign manager and team managers feedback on the major messages they think the campaign should emphasize. Use this information to shape your campaign materials. Also, be sure to combine the lists of potential contributors developed by each team and review them to prevent duplication.

The fund-raising campaign should have professionally produced materials with compelling messages about why revitalizing your commercial district is so important; how the direction laid out in your organization’s strategic plan is the right one for tackling the tough challenges ahead; and how each donor’s contribution plays an important role in making that happen. The campaign materials should outline opportunities for potential contributors to sponsor a specific activity or project, such as “adopting” a bench or underwriting a promotional event, as well as to make an unrestricted contribution that can be used for whatever the organization needs.

- **To do the best job possible, your volunteers need thorough training.** Team members making “cold calls” to ask people for contributions should work with each other to practice starting a conversation, explaining the program’s goals, and asking for a contribution. Insurance agents or stock brokers who make cold calls for a living may be able to provide training or advice.
- **Start with a “quiet” campaign.** Using feedback from each of the segment managers, the campaign manager should finalize the fund-raising targets for each segment. The old adage about 80 percent of the funding coming from 20 percent of the donors really is true, more or less. It’s likely that government agencies, a handful of financial institutions and industries, and several key individuals will contribute the bulk of the money you raise, while you may have several hundred individuals who contribute \$100 or less.
Start the fund-raising campaign *quietly* by visiting a few potential donors who are likely to make major donations. Although there is no hard-and-fast rule about this, it’s a good rule of thumb to raise one-quarter to one-third of your target amount before going “public” with the campaign. This gives the public campaign considerable momentum and an impressive list of influential groups, businesses, agencies, and individuals who have already made a commitment to the campaign.
- **Go public!** When you’re ready to go “public” with the fund-raising campaign, make the campaign kick-off a big media event. Invite key individuals to present the major strategies your organization plans to pursue over the coming years. Stress both the urgent need to strengthen the commercial district and the ways a strong, vibrant Main Street benefits the entire community. Publicly acknowledge and thank those who have already contributed and ask them to say

a few words about why they support both the revitalization effort and the fund-raising campaign.

Now that the public is aware of the campaign, it’s time to send your volunteers out to make contacts. Set clear deadlines, get frequent feedback, and keep them informed on the progress of the campaign.

The campaign, of course, does not end when you reach your target. The most important steps in the fund-raising program lie ahead: collecting your pledges (annually), fulfilling your promises, and keeping all of your contributors updated on the program’s progress and the good work their contributions have made possible. A few additional guidelines:

- People are more likely to give money to someone they know than to someone they don’t.
- Ask all your volunteers to contribute up front to the campaign before asking anyone else to give money; people are more likely to donate to a cause if volunteers also contribute.
- Two people making a personal request for a contribution are generally more effective than one person making that request.
- Anticipate the tough questions in advance. Be sure your volunteers know how to handle them.
- Give your campaign volunteers plenty of feedback throughout the campaign; it increases the chances that they’ll exceed their individual fund-raising targets.
- Thank everyone who contributes. Thank them a lot. And keep them all informed about your program’s progress.

CASE STUDY

San Diego, California

North Park Neighborhood Success!



It took about two years from the time San Diego’s North Park neighborhood launched its Main Street program in 1996 before things really started to turn around, says the program’s former director, Jay Turner. But, in those two years, the foundation was established for expansive growth and some surprising sources of funding.

North Park Main Street (NPMS) received funding for its first three years from the city’s Business Improvement District Council, under the aegis of the city’s Office of Small Business. The program used those years to launch development projects throughout the district and create tools to guide future development. During the first year, for instance, the program adopted an ambitious arts and entertainment plan for the district, including a project to redevelop the neighborhood’s historic theatre. In 1998, the program drafted and implemented its Development Guidelines for North Park Main Street, which won a city planning award.

The ambitious planning and careful groundwork paid off. Just as NPMS’ initial funding began to disappear, the pro-

- If people do not want to contribute, don't be pushy. Thank them for their consideration, give them a brochure on Main Street, and ask for their contact information so you can send them updates on your work.

Long-term Funding Options

As your Main Street program approaches its transition into the management phase, investigate ways to channel some of the district's tangible economic growth into ongoing funding for the program. After all, if buildings improve in value, business sales grow, rents increase, and municipal tax revenues from the district expand, it makes sense for some of that new economic activity to be "captured" in some way and invested in the revitalization program's continuing activities.

The most frequently used tool for capturing and routing increased economic activity back into the district's ongoing revitalization is a special assessment or business improvement district (BID), in which property owners—or, in some states, business owners—pay a voluntary assessment in exchange for district-wide management services provided by the revitalization program. About 20 percent of all Main Street programs in the United States have launched BIDs to support their ongoing revitalization activities.

There are other ways, besides special assessment districts, to capture some of the increased economic activity for the Main Street program's ongoing work. For instance, the Main Street organization might acquire and redevelop one or more key buildings, then use the income from those buildings to cover part of the program's operating expenses. Or the program might contract with the local government to provide certain services, such as managing municipal parking areas. Some neighborhood Main Street programs have also used tax increment financing (TIF) to

gram began getting small grants for streetscape improvements, public arts projects, and development planning. By 2001, the Main Street program was on a roll.

In July 2001, it received a \$56,000 grant for a traffic-calming plan, \$5,000 for the North Park Street Gallery, and two grants totaling \$10,300 for the North Park Spring Festival. In July 2002, it received \$300,000 from the California Department of Transportation for a planning project to improve University Avenue, the district's major thoroughfare. It also received \$450,000 in CDBG funds for streetscape improvements. In February 2004, the city selected the neighborhood as one of its "City of Villages" pilot projects, which gave North Park priority for capital improvement funding; assistance from the city in obtaining state and federal funding for improvements; and support for arts programming. As a result, the district saw \$100 million in development projects, including the theatre rehabilitation, new condominiums, a parking garage, and a public plaza.

support the program. BIDs and TIFs will be discussed in the following Funding Mechanisms for Main Street chapter.

Beyond the obvious benefits of keeping the organization fiscally fit, working to fund your Main Street initiative can be the single most effective tool available to build volunteer and political support. It requires you to make long-range plans, build strategic partnerships, think creatively, and measure and publicize the program's progress.

A few final points to remember:

- **Program funding is different than project funding.** The program itself needs ongoing, annual funding to cover the costs for everything from postage to utilities. The program will undertake many projects over the years: everything from festivals to business assistance workshops. Funding for projects will probably come from government sources, corporations, and foundations, while funding for operating the Main Street program itself will most likely come from pledges, memberships, special assessments, and earned income.
- **Don't let the availability of funding determine your organization's agenda.** It can be tempting to apply for a grant simply because it is available, regardless of whether it fits your program's agenda. The Main Street program's agenda should lead, and fund raising should follow (not vice-versa).

Ultimately, remember that funding Main Street revitalization is an exercise in long-term planning. When the medieval carpenters built College Hall at Oxford University in 1386, they planted seedlings from the oak trees from which they had cut the stone building's oak beams. They knew that, sometime in the future, the oak beams would need to be replaced. Sure enough, the beams were replaced in the 1960s, almost 600 years later—using wood from the oak trees planted just for that purpose.

Turner credited the success in building funding support for both administration and special projects, to a few points:

- **Political support.** From the beginning, NPMS had strong support from its city councilor. "You've got to have stable funding," said Turner, "and you've got to have the political will in back of you."
- **Spreading projects throughout the district.** "People get jealous on every block," said Turner.
- **Sharing credit.** It's important for everyone to feel included and to feel like they've made a difference, too.

RESOURCES

Websites

National Trust for Historic Preservation: Provides sources of funding, categorized by type (funding for income-producing property improvements, funding from federal agencies, and many other preservation-related funding sources). www.PreservationNation.org

Foundation Center: Offers free- and subscription-based information such as foundation and corporate giving directories, Form 990 databases, and giving trends. www.foundationcenter.org

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance: Offers access to a searchable database of all available federal programs. www.cfda.gov

Articles

“Building Support for Main Street: Membership Drives,” by Sheri Stuart, *Main Street News*, June 2001. Creating a membership campaign and developing related materials.

“Funding Your Streetscape Project,” by Donna Dow, *Main Street News*, November 2007. Case study and tips on using multiple funding streams for streetscape improvements.

“Is a BID Feasible in Your Town: 10 Questions to Ponder,” by Donna Ann Harris, *Main Street News*, April 2007. Steps to take when considering the establishment of a BID.

“Make More Money from Members: 10 Easy Ways to Boost Revenue,” by Donna Ann Harris, *Main Street News*, August 2008. Tips for enhancing your membership program.

“Public-Private Development Finance: A Primer for Main Street Practitioners,” by Kennedy Smith, *Main Street News*, May 2007. Benefits of public-private financing and the ways you can help close the financing gap.

“Tips on Membership Drives,” by Mary Helmer, *Main Street News*, January 2006. Creative ideas to make membership drives fun for volunteers and successful for your program.

“Reflections on Main Street Membership,” by Karen B. O’Connell, *Main Street News*, January 2006. Learn about a Boston neighborhood’s membership success.

Books

Business Improvement Districts, 2nd Edition, by Lawrence O. Houston Jr. (Urban Land Institute and the International Downtown Association, 2003). Information on planning, organizing, and financing BIDs.

ABCs for Creating BIDs, by M. Bradley Segal (International Downtown Association, 2003). Practical information for starting and running BIDs.

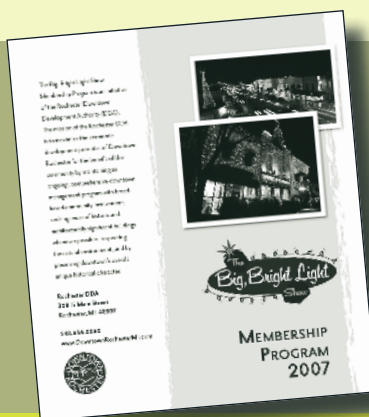
Successful Fundraising: A Complete Handbook for Volunteers and Professionals, 2nd edition, by Joan Flanagan (McGraw-Hill, 2002). Tips for the nonprofessional fund raiser.

Secrets of Successful Fundraising: The Best from the Non-Profit Pros, by Carol Weisman, (F. E. Robbins & Sons PR, 2000). Nonprofit fund-raising advice.

Fearless Fundraising for Nonprofit Boards, by Worth George (BoardSource, 2003). Help for empowering your board members.

Fundraising Basics Set, by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (Preservation Books). This collection of fund-raising resources has been developed especially for nonprofit, historic preservation organizations.

How to Be Successful at Sponsorship Sales, by Sylvia Allen and C. Scott Amann (Allen Consulting, 2002). Learn how to assemble attractive sponsorship packages that provide value to your supporters.



Image, far left © Ron Frantz; image, far right © Steve Cole.

FUNDING MECHANISMS FOR MAIN STREET

By Kennedy Lawson Smith

There are a variety of mechanisms that communities use to fund Main Street revitalization programs and projects.

Sustainable Main Street organizations seek a blend of funding sources. By diversifying funding, your program will be financially stable and able to continue operations even if a funding stream is lost.

Here are some of the most frequently used funding mechanisms:

- **Memberships.** While offering paid membership in the revitalization program is a good way to build volunteer support and community ownership of the district and its revitalization, it is not usually a big money maker. That doesn't mean that memberships aren't important, though; they are great for building support and interest. Your members will be an easy audience to whom you can communicate your message. By asking stakeholders to pay dues, you can elevate their perception of your revitalization program's value. You help them realize that a vibrant, healthy commercial district is not free, and generally people value things they pay for more than freebies.
- **Direct municipal line-item appropriations.** Some Main Street programs receive line-item support from local government during their first few years of operation. As the program matures, municipal contributions often shift away from operational support to project-specific support (e.g. funding for infrastructure improvements or business development



activities). In a 2007 survey, Main Street organizations nationwide reported that 47 percent of their budget came directly from public sources. A large portion of that funding came from city general funds and grants, with additional revenue streams from CDBG funds, state funds, county grants, general funds, and other sources.

- **State historic preservation offices.** State historic preservation offices (SHPOs) aren't usually the wealthiest state agencies around, far from it, unfortunately. But most do have funds available for certain kinds of activities. If your city is a Certified Local Government, for instance (and most major cities are), the SHPO is required to distribute some of the annual funds it receives from the U.S. Department of Interior to the state's Certified Local Governments. The funds are generally used for surveys of historic buildings, for educational purposes, and for other activities that strengthen the community's capacity to preserve historic buildings. Some SHPOs have funds available for other purposes, as well, such as helping to intercede if a historic building is threatened with demolition or providing matching funds for rehabilitation projects.
- **Arts and humanities councils.** State and city arts and humanities councils often have money available to support projects that promote the arts and humanities. Check into funding available from the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities.
- **Corporate sponsorships.** The demographic information your organization collects through market research

initiatives can be used to persuade a corporation to sponsor an event or program so it can reach new customers or solidify its market position with already valued consumers.

Do some research by checking a corporation's website or annual report to find the kinds of events it currently underwrites. Examine the company's advertising to see what kinds of market segments it targets.

Also, keep in mind that corporations give money in several different ways. Their marketing or advertising departments may contribute to activities and events that strengthen the product's market position, but the corporation may also have a philanthropic giving arm that supports a broader range of activities.

- **Grants from foundations.** There are thousands of charitable foundations in the United States—entities tasked with giving away money. Research the foundations whose priorities seem compatible with your organization's goals and then learn about their application process.
 - **Public improvements donations.** A few Main Street districts have successfully raised money for public improvements—benches, street lights, and planters, for example, by asking for donations or sponsorships to offset costs. Individuals and businesses can sponsor items and gain recognition for their contributions, usually through a small plaque attached to the item.
- Durant Main Street in Oklahoma put a creative twist on this idea to get local stakeholders to support its streetscape project. The program sold sponsorships for corner bump-outs, complete with landscaping and

A Closer Look at Memberships



Most membership dues structures follow two formats: either a flat rate for all members or a specific dues structure. Decide on a goal for your membership drive so you have something to work toward and figure out how much of the financial goal should be met by each membership group. Choose a dues structure that is compatible with your local cost of living. Main Street programs that use a dues structure often set up something like this:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| • Individuals | \$25 |
| • Small Businesses | \$100 |
| • Large Businesses | \$300 |
| • Small Property Owners | \$500 |
| • Large Property Owners | \$1000 |

A few Main Street programs have structures that allow people to choose how much to give. Often the names of different membership tiers will correspond to the district's history or something else that people associate with Main Street. For example, Main Street Collierville in Tennessee employed a train theme for its program. Its membership brochure used the tagline, "Tracking the Ties that Bind," and its seven membership levels ranged from "The Platinum Ticket," a \$5,000 category that includes title sponsorship for events, to \$10 for "The Caboose Kids." Members are given a Collierville Passport for savings downtown and a calendar of events.

amenities, for \$2,500. The corners feature a lamp post banner with the donor's name on it and a permanent paver in the sidewalk, also engraved with their name.

- **Special events.** Many revitalization programs earn significant amounts of money from special event entry fees, concessions, sponsorships, or other forms of income. In a 2007 survey, 70.4 percent of 324 Main Street organizations reported that they earned net revenue from special events and sales. Some programs—such as the Main Street organization in Baltimore's Federal Hill neighborhood—raise substantial amounts through special events (see sidebar for more details).

If your organization is a nonprofit, keep in mind that earned income from events that don't specifically further its charitable purpose will probably be taxed by the IRS as "unrelated business income." If too much of your overall budget consists of unrelated business income, the IRS may revoke your organization's nonprofit status.

- **Business Improvement District (BID).** In order to create a BID, you must be in a state that has enabling legislation for this purpose. While most states have this type of legislation, it varies considerably from state to state. Many states require the community to have a local redevelopment plan in place. In most places, the BID can be administered by a nonprofit organization, such as a Main Street program, if the local government formally names the organization as the administrative contractor for that district. Usually, a Main Street program has to be active for several years before attempting to launch a BID.



© Donna Dow

Durant (Oklahoma) Main Street raised streetscaping funds by selling amenity sponsorships.

In general, BIDs require approval by at least half of all property owners in the district or by those who control at least 51 percent of the value of the property being assessed. Before they agree to voluntarily pay an additional assessment, property owners need to be convinced that the Main Street program is improving the district, thus increasing their rental income and the value of their buildings.

BIDs offer Main Street programs several key benefits. For instance, all property owners contribute, and they contribute equitably, which alleviates the "freeloader syndrome" some commercial districts experience when stakeholders reap the benefits from the revitalization effort but don't contribute to it. A BID provides guaranteed annual income, and the funds generated can generally be used for program administration.

Still, there are a few caveats to keep in mind. With a certain amount of funding more or less guaranteed, other contributors may think that the Main Street

As with your local business owners, finding new customers takes a greater effort than retaining existing ones, so your membership program should be focused on retaining members through renewals. Always keep members in the loop and send them print or electronic newsletters so they can track how their "investment" in your program is creating tangible results in the community.

Emporia Main Street in Kansas offers members an "early bird" discount on their dues if they pay a month before the official membership drive starts. This helps Main Street secure 75 percent of due renewals so the organization can focus on wooing business owners who expect more personal attention—and often pay higher dues! Once the early bird drive is complete, the board develops a list of members who haven't renewed yet and businesses they would like to sign as new members. Working in teams, the board members divide the list and contact both target renewals and new members. All targeted members receive information about the membership drive, which is then followed up by a letter stating which board member will be contacting them. To provide extra motivation, board members compete against each other for a prize as well as the prestige of signing up the most members from their target lists. Members receive a hand-delivered packet, which includes a decal, thank-you letter, and a small token of appreciation (like chocolate).

Bowdoin Geneva Main Streets in Dorchester, Massachusetts, made it easy for business owners to say "yes" to Main Street membership. During the program's business networking breakfasts, participants were offered the chance to buy a \$15 ticket or upgrade to a \$50 membership. The group saw a 65 percent increase in membership in three months.

Most Main Street programs provide benefits for participating businesses, such as reduced rates on group advertising, listings in brochures, profile write-ups of businesses in newsletters or on the website, booth space at a Main Street event, discount cards, advanced sales of event tickets, postings of logo and/or links from your website—the list goes on and on.

Allston Village Main Streets in Boston offers its members voting privileges on board membership and by-laws, discounts on website development and hosting services, and special rates at the local YMCA. Depending on what your membership package includes, you may need to check federal tax law restrictions on charitable organizations. Nonprofits with a 501(c)6 tax status will have no issues from the Internal Revenue Service, but organizations with a 501(c)3 may want to consult a lawyer or accountant. Identifying the monetary value of such member benefits and notifying members that a portion of their contribution is not tax-deductible is a good strategy.

CASE STUDY

Baltimore, Maryland

Special Events as a Fund-raising Tool



program no longer needs their support. City government might even cut back its funding; but BID income should not be considered a substitute for general city support because it is actually a direct assessment paid by property owners. Also, your organization will need to determine how to maintain its volunteer-driven nature and continue working within the Main Street approach. One way to deal with this challenge is to set up a subsidiary to your Main Street program.

The best way to get started is to look at state legislation and study all the details about setting up a BID. Then assemble a taskforce to decide if you are ready to move forward. This group needs to assess your district and organizational capacity to determine the feasibility of pursuing a BID. If your taskforce believes a BID is right for your district, review the legislation's assessment formula to see what the gross revenues for your BID could be. The formula could increase property taxes based on the buildings' assessed values, square footage, or other variables. You can use this formula to create a spreadsheet of hypothetical revenue streams by calculating increments of tax assessments from one percent to 10 percent. Will assessments be too much of a financial burden on small property and business owners (to whom property owners will pass down this cost)? How much revenue could you generate?

While your organization is gathering information about creating a BID, find out what your property and business owners need. Determine if a BID will fulfill those needs and help meet their concerns for the district's future and their desire for increased services. If a BID still seems like an appropriate direction for your organization and district, make sure that the board is ready to invest time in adopting a BID and is willing to exercise political muscle to move the initiative forward. Also be sure your organization has enough funds to maintain usual Main Street operations along with BID development during this time.

- **Tax-increment financing (TIF).** Tax-increment financing has become an increasingly popular funding mechanism for district amenities, particularly those connected

Baltimore's Federal Hill Main Street program, knows its special events. The program nets about \$80,000 annually from three events—an October street festival (Street-Beat), a spring block party, and a summer jazz/blues festival. To increase its special events income, the program is adding a new event—a Halloween festival. The events' profitability can be attributed to several factors, including beer sales and the use of more money to hire better, more popular bands.

Bonnie Crockett, the former director of Federal Hill Main Street, recommends block parties as a good way for neighborhood Main Street organizations to launch a revenue-generating special events program. Because they're fun, she says, they attract lots of volunteers. She advises keeping the block parties small and compact at first, then gradually expanding them in successive years.

to specific development projects. In essence, if a property appreciates in value because of a new development or rehabilitation project, the city agrees to dedicate the increased property tax revenue to the project itself. For example, suppose an organization redevelops a historic theater, boosting its value from \$100,000 to \$1 million, and the city's annual property tax revenue increases tenfold. The city might issue bonds to pay for an amenity, such as a parking garage, in conjunction with the redevelopment project and then use the increased property tax revenue to pay off the bonds.

Like BIDs, TIF requires state enabling legislation and a local redevelopment plan. Unlike a BID, tax-increment financing does not increase property tax rates—it generates income only when property values increase—nor does it usually require the approval of the district's property owners. To use TIF, the local government creates a redevelopment district, names a commission to oversee the redevelopment activities, adopts a plan that specifies the types of improvements that will take place in the district and the ways TIF funds will be used, and issues bonds based on its estimates of the tax revenue likely to be generated as a result of redevelopment activity.

TIF has been widely used to pay for items essential to a proposed new development—parking garages, sewer lines, sidewalks, street lighting, environmental clean-up, etc.

- **Business license taxes or surcharges.** Some cities add a tax or surcharge onto business licenses, then dedicate the additional revenue for specific activities. One example is the funding of neighborhood business improvement districts in San Diego through a surcharge on business license taxes.
- **Property development and management.** A growing number of revitalization programs acquire one or more key buildings in the district and serve as a non-profit developer of the property. In many instances, property development can save a threatened building and also generate rental income to support the

revitalization program. There are tax consequences for nonprofit organizations that engage in real estate development; so before pursuing this type of activity, talk with a CDC and/or an attorney or accountant familiar with nonprofit real estate development issues.

Greater Gallatin, Inc., in Tennessee owns and operates the 1913 Palace Theater. The oldest silent movie theater in Tennessee, the Palace was almost torn down to make room for a parking lot when the owner, who bought the building at auction, realized he couldn't rehab it on his own. Instead, he donated it to the Main Street program, which actively sought funds through private, public, corporate, city, and state sources as well as state and federal grants and a loan, that enabled it to invest approximately \$600,000 in the theater. The group rents the space for special events and shows movies on the weekends. The revenues cover the operational costs for both the Main Street program and the theater.

Additional information on real estate projects, including funding, can be found in Chapter 11, Real Estate and the Main Street Business District.

- **Save America's Treasures.** A public-private partnership between the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Save America's Treasures helps communities raise money for the preservation and rehabilitation of significant historic buildings by giving them sizable grants that must be leveraged with other funds. See www.saveamericastreasures.org for details.
- **Utility companies.** Many utility companies have concluded that it makes better economic sense to invest in communities in which they already have substantial infrastructure than to continue expanding to undeveloped areas. Utility companies such as Georgia Power and Pacific Gas and Electric have provided cash and in-kind support for Main Street revitalization for many years.

Federal Programs

- **Community Development Block Grants.** All cities with populations greater than 50,000 receive Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Some cities have used CDBG funds to support neighborhood Main Street programs in their first few years of activity; others have also used them to pay for public improvements, master plans, affordable housing, and energy retrofits. In addition, HUD often makes a small portion of CDBG funds available each year on a discretionary basis for special projects. These funds are usually allocated by Congressional action, at the request of members of Congress.

Projects funded with CDBGs must meet one of three national criteria:

- They must prevent or eliminate slums or blight;

- They must benefit low- and moderate-income people; and/or
- They must meet an urgent need to eliminate a public safety threat for which other funds are not available.

Types of projects that are eligible for CDBG funding include property acquisition, code enforcement, technical assistance, economic development assistance to business owners, economic development activities, and engineering and design costs. The HUD office has published a few booklets to guide people in using CDBG funds for historic preservation projects. Some states, like Kentucky, require that CDBG applications be prepared and managed by a certified CDBG administrator.

Adams County, Colorado, for example, received \$50,000 in CDBG funds to conduct a business training program for small businesses, with training conducted in English and Spanish. More than 250 people participated, leading to the creation of 17 new businesses.

- **SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users).** What a name! SAFETEA-LU is the successor to two previous federal programs: ISTEA (the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) and TEA-21 (the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century). Each of these programs has been a subset of enormous federal surface transportation bills that have appropriated billions of dollars for the construction and repair of highways, bridges, and transportation infrastructure. These subsets provide federal funds for "transportation enhancements," including pedestrian and bicycle facilities, landscaping, scenic easements, rails-to-trails conversions, and preservation of transportation-related historic resources. If your strategic plan includes transportation-related activities, be persistent in working with your state department of transportation to include these funds in your plan. For more information, visit www.fhwa.dot/gov/environment/te/overview.htm.



© Barbara Gosney

South Boston, Virginia, used federal transportation enhancements funds to help finance the rehabilitation of the historic Prizery building, a former tobacco warehouse. The Prizery now serves as a multi-purpose community center.

- **HOPE VI Main Street Program.** Created by former U.S. Rep. Jim Leach (R-IA) in 2003 and rolled out by HUD in 2005, the HOPE VI Main Street program provides grants of up to \$500,000 to close financing gaps in development projects that create affordable housing units. The program is available for communities that have fewer than 50,000 residents, have fewer than 100 units of public housing, and have a comprehensive revitalization program in place. Oskaloosa, Iowa, received a 2007 HOPE VI grant to develop low-income housing in a four-story, burned-out building located on a key corner of the Main Street district. The infusion of funds was critical in preventing the structure’s demolition.
- **U.S. Department of Justice.** The U.S. Department of Justice, as well as many state departments of justice, offers funding for projects that help reduce crime. Projects tend to change as federal (and state) administrations change, so check www.doj.gov for current information.
- **Economic Development Administration (EDA).** Although its grant programs have changed over the years, EDA generally makes grants available for business incubators, brownfields development, sustainable development, and economic development-related technical assistance. For more information, see www.eda.gov/InvestmentsGrants/Investments.xml.
- **Federal and state rehabilitation tax credits.** Developers and property owners who rehabilitate historic, income-producing buildings may be eligible for a federal income tax credit. The federal government offers an income tax credit equal to 20 percent of qualified rehabilitation expenses for historic buildings that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places or are contributing structures to a registered historic district, and a credit equal to 10 percent of qualified rehabilitation expenses for non-historic buildings that were built before 1936. If the entity that rehabilitates the building cannot take advantage of the tax credits (e.g. because it does not have enough tax liability or because it is a nonprofit organization that does not pay federal income tax), it can “sell” the credit to an investor and use the cash to help finance the rehabilitation, fund an operating reserve, or something similar.

The tax credit isn’t actually “sold”; the property owner forms a partnership with and transfers the credit to an investor; in exchange, the investor puts equity into the building rehabilitation project. The amount of equity depends on a number of factors, from the size of the project to how risky investors perceive it to be. For rehabilitation projects over \$5 million, investors are usually willing to invest about 92 to 95 percent of the tax credit’s value. So, if a rehabilitation project has qualified rehabilitation expenses of \$5 million, the federal rehabilitation tax credit would be \$1 million (20 percent of \$5 million), and an investor would typically pay between 92 to 95 percent of this amount for the credit, or \$920,000 to \$950,000.

Many states also offer rehabilitation tax credits to offset state income tax liability. See pages 130–131 for more information. For a detailed listing of state tax credits, visit the “Find Funding” section of www.PreservationNation.org.

- **Federal New Markets Tax Credits.** Enacted in 2002, the New Markets Tax Credits program offers federal income tax credits to investors—usually banks—that make capital available for business development in economically distressed areas. Typically, intermediary organizations, such as the National Trust Community Investment Corporation, apply for allocations of New Markets Tax Credits from the U.S. Department of Treasury, which administers the program, and then partner with an investor(s). The investors make loans or equity investments in eligible business development activities in economically distressed neighborhoods and, in turn, receive tax credits. Because of the tax credits they receive, the investors are generally able to reduce the interest rates on their loans, waive part of a loan’s repayment, or offer other favorable terms. Most importantly, however, the New Markets Tax Credits program makes capital available in areas that might not otherwise attract investment.

In summary, ensuring your program has diversified funding is critical to your organization’s stability and sustainability. This chapter presents a wide variety of sources you can tap for funding requests, but keep in mind that some of these sources might also make good partners that can provide in-kind donations in terms of services or supplies.

RESOURCES

For more information on funding, please see the list at the end of Chapter 5, Financing Main Street Revitalization.



PROMOTING THE MAIN STREET PROGRAM

By Andrea L. Dono

In a perfect world, all stakeholders will know about the great revitalization initiatives happening in your district and will recognize that your Main Street program is leading the charge.

People will be knocking at your office door asking to contribute time and money to the cause and be your advocate when you need one. In reality, however, the burden is on your organization to tell the public about your projects, promote your role in the revitalization effort, and ask for support. When done right, effective communications will make fund raising, partnership development, volunteer recruitment, and advocacy easier.

Strategic promotion of your organization will build excitement for its mission and convey a professional image. Your strategy must focus on creating consistent messages that position your Main Street program as the reliable and credible revitalization organization in your community. Creating an effective strategy involves planning regular communications that reinforce the message of your written materials, visual imagery, and official verbal communication (from interviews to presentations). Every communication must pass a quality control test. In order to accomplish this, the executive director must know about all of the organization's projects to ensure that they rise to a high standard.

When it comes to publicity, it is important to first understand the responsibilities of all members in your organization. Promoting the organization is a function of the organization committee, *not* the promotion committee. The promotion committee focuses on promoting

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the image of the district, event publicity and advertising, and ribbon-cuttings for new businesses or rehabilitations. Writing press releases about promoting the Main Street program itself is a shared responsibility among board members, the organization committee, and the executive director. Staff, board, and committee members may collaborate on certain projects and work individually on other activities. For example, among other duties, the board plays a primary role in advocating for the organization, the organization committee is responsible for developing a public relations strategy, and a major part of the executive director's job is promoting the organization.

Promoting the organization involves explaining its purpose and operations so people understand why your program exists. This ranges from conversations between volunteers and festival attendees to media interviews with the board president. All volunteers and staff must be trained in the Main Street approach and brought up to speed on accomplishments, goals, and other important talking points. While your organization must designate an official spokesperson, everyone associated with your program plays a role in shaping the public's perception, for better or for worse.

Keep in mind that promoting the organization is more than writing press releases. Fayetteville (Tennessee) Main Street has a two-minute video, produced by Fayetteville Public Utilities, on Google Video that features historic photos and current images of the community. The video features Fayetteville's prized 1951 Lincoln Theatre and includes information on other attractions, details about the Main Street program, and contacts for visitors seeking more information. People unfamiliar with this community can get a feel for Fayetteville before leaving home and know that a community group is hard at work making the town great.

Targeting Communications

The best way to reach specific groups of people, your target audiences, with your messages is to tailor your communications and delivery channels to meet their needs. Different constituent groups have different preferences for receiving information. To communicate effectively with diverse constituents, you need to know how to appeal to each group's interests and identify the best vehicles for conveying information.

For example, business owners and potential entrepreneurs will be most interested in your business assistance programs. Distributing brochures about your program's services to the local Small Business Association or chamber of commerce will enable you to reach business owners and help them view your organization as an entrepreneurial support entity.

Tech-savvy individuals and many younger people prefer getting information through blogs, e-mail, or social networking sites. Recognizing this, Downtown Boulder, Inc., established an Online Strategy Committee that is dedicated solely to identifying ways to communicate with various groups through new media. The group recruited

volunteers with online-marketing expertise; they plan strategies for improving outreach and aligning the organization's communications priorities to better meet the changing needs and preferences of its constituents. The team sends out regular e-newsletters, plans constant updates for the website, and writes daily blogs to keep people interested in Boulder.



Communication Tools

There are two kinds of communication tools—ones through which you control your message and those that you can't control. You can control what you put on your website and the topics you cover during a public presentation, but you can't control how a reporter will interpret a press release. This section will look at common communication tools that you can use to get messages out consistently and make it easy for people to learn about the Main Street program.

Newsletters

Print and electronic newsletters are great outreach tools for disseminating information about upcoming events, your program's goals, current projects, volunteer highlights, business spotlights, fund-raising goals, and other appropriate topics. The best part is that you control the message and distribution.

E-newsletters are excellent vehicles for getting timely information out, such as a call for action to save a threatened building, and can be produced quickly in-house using free or cheap software. By avoiding printing and mailing costs, electronic communications are incredibly cost effective. And, building and continually updating a distribution list is easy if you make collecting e-mail addresses a priority.

Even though traditional newsletters have printing and postage costs associated with their production, hard copies of your newsletter are excellent marketing and advocacy tools. By having a tangible item to hand to potential donors, supporters, members, and others, you can reach a new audience.

Many programs find it's useful to produce print and electronic communications. Both types should have a



high-quality design, be well-written and proofread, and sent regularly. Producing newsletters erratically will reflect poorly on the professionalism of your organization, so set a schedule and stick with it. Newsletter production can be a shared responsibility among staff member(s) and organization committee members who are skilled in graphics and writing. Don't forget to post an archive of your newsletters on your website—this helps track your organization's history and accomplishments.

Collateral Materials

These materials include brochures, letterhead, business directories, walking tour booklets, business cards, annual reports, utility bill inserts, and even giveaway items like hats. Each of these items has a different purpose, but each offers an opportunity to promote your organization. And each item also shares something else—your Main Street logo.

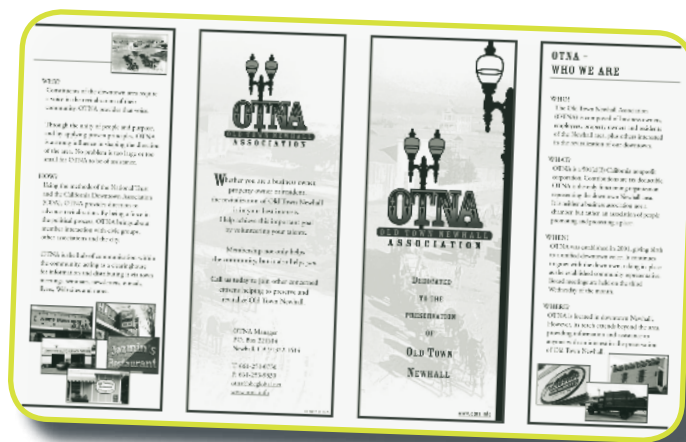
- **Logo.** Every organization needs a logo—a visual representation of the program that creates instant recognition with the viewer. This logo will become part of your image and a symbol that the public associates with the revitalization effort. The logo will inform people that Main Street is behind various projects and initiatives.

Avoid the well-intentioned logo-development contests, which often produce amateurish designs, and instead hire a graphic design specialist to create your logo. A skilled professional can visually capture the spirit of your organization and design a logo that will look attractive on a variety of materials. Some of the best logos incorporate an architectural or streetscape detail within their design. Does your district have a landmark building? Do you have unique visual elements that people might associate with the revitalization and your program?



As a nod to the community's copper mining past, Main Street Uptown Butte in Montana incorporates the headframes that still stand today into its logo.

- **Main Street brochures.** Groups just starting out can create a simple brochure in-house and later develop a professionally designed piece once funds are available. General overview brochures should include the organization's mission statement and purpose, services offered, accomplishments, reinvestment statistics, awards or recognition, future plans, and contact information. Other brochures can also be developed to meet specific purposes, such as to promote a façade grant program.



- **Miscellaneous materials.** Business cards and letterhead also help convey the professionalism and credibility of your organization. Hats and pens printed with your logo are nice giveaways, but definitely are not a priority when you are just starting a revitalization program. Regardless of what materials your organization produces, the bottom line is that they must be high quality and convey an appropriate image for your program.

Website

Websites facilitate communication with a large audience, including people who stumble across your site. For instance, your online calendar of events might catch the attention of potential visitors or your success stories might spark a reporter's interest.

Establish a website task force to identify your intended messages and audience, and work in partnership with a web design or web hosting company to build a website that meets your organization's needs and promotes your image. The group should also think of keywords that will make your site pop up in popular search engines' results.

Main Street communities have successfully worked with student web developers and volunteers to create affordable websites. Whether you hire someone or work with volunteers, your task force will have to write the content and establish a process for frequently updating information. Work with the developer to make sure you can easily update content and fix broken links on your own or find a firm that will make changes quickly and affordably. The trick is in building a website that you can handle on your own or can afford to maintain. Sure, there are a lot of cool web tools, but if you can't keep on top of them, then they are a waste of money. And if you can't frequently post new content, then your website will be nothing more than a virtual brochure.

While web content must remain fresh to keep visitors coming back, that doesn't mean that initiatives should be deleted from your website after they are completed. Make sure people know about completed projects and initiatives so they can trace your effectiveness. The Adams Morgan Main Street Group in Washington, D.C., does this well because it posts current events and projects online and then updates the site with related news coverage and post-event details.

At a minimum, your website needs to include:

- Logo;
- Pictures of your district;
- Contact information;
- Staff and board member directory;
- Directions;
- Event calendar;
- Appeal for volunteers, members, and donations;
- Explanation of Main Street approach;
- Mission statement;
- Incentives or assistance offered;
- Successes and recent reinvestment statistics; and
- Annual report (if available electronically).
- More extensive websites might include:
- Business directory (possibly one that is interactive);
- Design guidelines;
- Committee work plans, minutes, reports;
- Map of district;
- By-laws;
- Archive of press releases and/or media coverage;



- Calendar of board and committee meetings;
- Spotlight on featured businesses;
- Links to social media tools;
- History of district and historic photos;
- Blog;
- Archives of past newsletters;
- Capability to accept donations online;
- Photo gallery (before and afters!);
- News;
- Demographic information about the trade area;
- Volunteer job listings;
- Resources for property and business owners; and
- Links to other community resources, coordinating program, National Main Street Center, and partner organizations/agencies.

There is plenty of room for your website to grow as your program matures. Two examples: Mount Pleasant MainStreet in D.C. uses a blog to solicit ideas about what people want to see happen in the business district and the Davis (California) Downtown Business Association has produced a podcast to give an exciting audio introduction to its community and its events.

Presentations

With all the discussion about blogs and newsletters, don't underestimate the impact of verbal communication to create a buzz about successes and build the organization's credibility. Presentations to civic associations, the municipality, other organizations, and conferences are

Electronic Downtown Manhattan, Inc.

Downtown Manhattan, Inc., (DMI) a Kansas Main Street program, communicates regularly with more than 260 people in its business improvement district. It turned to the free Google™ Groups to engage various groups of people according to their interests, activities, or Main Street committee membership. The organization set up two accounts: the Downtown Update, which serves as DMI's e-newsletter; and the Downtown Retailer Update, which facilitates a dialogue among business owners. The Downtown Update initially started with 200 subscribers and quickly grew to 500, including members of the media, local officials, mall representatives, and others. As an incentive, the Update rewards the first few responders

to trivia questions posed in the e-newsletter with downtown certificates. The Update covers news about volunteer jobs, road closures, sponsorship opportunities, and more. The quality of the content has made it easy for local media to reprint news bites directly from the Update.

The Downtown Retailer Update poses questions to the business community, such as how helpful has snow removal been or are downtown workers parking in prime customer spaces? Merchants can provide feedback to the Main Street program and discuss topics with each other. Often, more than 50 replies to a topic go out immediately after the question is sent.

excellent ways to get your message out and build support. The National Main Street Center publishes several PowerPoint presentations that you can use to teach people about Main Street.



© Timothy Bishop

While being a vocal and informed participant in town hall or city council meetings isn't the same as giving a presentation, it is an effective way to articulate the organization's role in the community. By sharing helpful, compelling information, you can build your organization's credibility; and decision makers and members of the media may start turning to you for information.

Annual Reports

Your annual report serves two purposes: to show your investors your accomplishments and financial activity during the last year and to present your organization in a favorable light to secure continued or new investment. These reports prove that your organization is accountable to its investors and has made progress toward its goals. They can be great collateral materials for donation requests and volunteer recruitment, too. Once complete, post an electronic version on your website. Annual reports should include:

- A letter from the board president;
- Mission statement;
- Directory of board members, staff members, and committee chairs;
- Committee reports;
- Financial statements;
- Market profile;
- District profile;
- A brief report on changes in the district's economy during the past year;
- Reports on new programs or initiatives for the coming year;
- Reinvestment statistics and volunteer hours contributed;
- Awards and recognition;
- Testimonials; and
- Explanation of the Main Street approach.

Working with the Media

There are three main ways to get your message to media outlets. One is buying ad space, the second is contributing an article, and the third is getting media coverage. Clearly, the first two options allow you to control the messages you send. You can buy ads to thank volunteers, publicize events or projects, and promote the district; or you can work with local media to publish a monthly column about revitalization news—both help keep the business district in the public eye.

While some editors publish press releases as written, more often than not, you lose control over media messages when you're not buying ad space or writing the story. Sending press releases or being interviewed doesn't guarantee that a journalist will convey your message. However, with practice, your organization's spokespeople will be able to answer any question that is thrown at them in a way that delivers the program's important messages. They can do this by planning out what they want to say and anticipating reporters' questions so that they can work key messages into their answers.

Even though you can't control what reporters write, you can develop a public relations strategy for getting your message to appropriate media outlets, thereby increasing your chances for favorable coverage.

Creating the Public Relations Campaign

Although creating a P.R. campaign is mainly the job of the organization committee, volunteers can collaborate with the promotion committee and executive director to develop a thorough plan and coordinate annual messaging. When developing your plan, decide who your audience will be—who do you want to reach? Then, decide what you want them to do.

Next, think about your objectives. What outcomes would you like to see from your communications? How would you like the public to perceive your organization? Then grab a calendar and plan when you want to promote upcoming events, initiatives, or issues and identify the most appropriate communication vehicles. You'll need to determine which media outlets you want to target—local



Elements of a Public Relations Plan

1. Set goals and objectives.
2. Identify your target audience.
3. Identify appropriate media outlets. If your district is in a multilingual community, don't ignore audiences whose first language is not English.
4. Create a media contact list, including reporters' beats and contact preferences.
5. Identify the Main Street spokesperson.
6. Identify methods for reaching media outlets (press release, op-ed pieces, public service announcements, advertisements, presentations, media tours, etc.).
7. Cultivate relationships with media representatives.
8. Create a media calendar to promote planned news and events (using work plans) to ensure the proper timing of press releases.
9. Collect media "hits" and find out media outlets' viewer/readership.
10. Assess whether goals and objectives were met (what worked and what could be improved).



newspapers, regional magazines, trade periodicals, national media, community cable channels, bulletin boards, websites, blogs, utility bill inserts, partners' communications—the list goes on. On your calendar, mark deadlines for submitting story ideas, press releases, ads, guest columns, and other activities to make sure your outreach is timely.

Let the goals of your communication efforts and the audiences you want to reach guide your public relations plan. Don't waste time courting a reporter whose readership doesn't include your target audience. Media outlets know the demographics of their audience or subscribers. If it isn't posted on their website (if you can't find it right away, read their advertising information), you can use media directories to get this information. Directories provide audience demographics as well as contact information, reporters' beats and preferences for receiving press releases, lead times for stories, editorial calendars, and more. Call or e-mail the reporters with whom you will be in frequent contact to introduce yourself and your organization. Then follow up by sending a note with your press kit package and offer to help with any upcoming features, such as an article in a travel magazine or breaking news for local news media.

Just keep in mind that journalists are looking for good stories that will interest their audience, so if your story is relevant and interesting, you are helping them as much as they are helping you.

Crisis Communication

Let's face it. Unexpected problems and conflict happen, and when they do, the Main Street program needs to be ready to deal with them publicly. Nonprofits are not exempt from controversy. If your organization has to fire a staff member, if it doesn't receive a public funding allocation, or if a local resident sends a scathing letter to the editor that slams your program, your Main Street program's leadership must be ready to develop a public relations response to minimize the negative impact. Taking an active role in communicating during a crisis requires a strategy to shape public opinion about your organization instead of letting the media do it.

Track Media Coverage

Wherever your news shows up—track it! Keep article clippings and save web pages or e-newsletters to track your media hits. This is a great way to discover what the media considers newsworthy, identify Main Street-friendly media and reporters, document news coverage in your annual report, and build your corporate history file. Find out the readership of publications that cover your stories so you can report how many people may have read them. Count how many people became members or volunteers since you started specific media campaigns. All of this information will help you measure the impact of your public relations campaign and determine its effectiveness.

During these situations, the board of directors should immediately meet to brainstorm solutions to the problem and devise strategies. The strategy should always focus on honesty and assuring the public that your organization is dedicated to righting any wrongs. Depending on the crisis, strategies similar to your public relations plan should suffice. First, communicate with your organization internally to limit rumors and misinformation. Second, if the situation requires it, hold a meeting or contact the individuals involved to discuss the problem and seek solutions. Third, figure out your message and start sending it. Does your organization need to take responsibility for something? Does it need to announce it has put new controls in place to prevent something from happening again? Does it need to get facts out about an issue to correct misinformation? Decide who your spokesperson will be and identify which activities (press releases, press conference, website statements, letters to the editor) are appropriate in order to protect your program's credibility, reputation, and image.

The Value of Tooting Your Own Horn

Annually tabulating your benchmarks and reinvestment statistics and then actively promoting the (hopefully) good news goes a long way in promoting your organization and its effectiveness. Talking about Main Street's successes is not shameless self-promotion—promoting the organization's impact and community benefit is critical in building public support. Without this support, renewing memberships, soliciting donations, advocating for specific issues, and countless other Main Street activities will become more difficult. Your stakeholders need to know that the program is positively changing the community so they that will continue to support your organization and its mission.

Do's and Don'ts for Working with the Media

DO

- Provide photos with press releases;
- Avoid saying “no comment”;
- If you offer to send additional information or provide contact information for other people they can interview, do so right away;
- Remember that television stories must have visual appeal; so think about the site for the shoot;
- Use the Associated Press (AP) style guide when writing press releases and brush up on press release writing skills—some members of the media publish them verbatim;
- Politely contact the journalist if a mistake is made and provide the correct information so that an erratum can be published;
- Select a few key individuals as your main spokespeople (board president, members of executive committee, and executive director) and make sure someone is prepared and available for comment at all times;
- Hold conferences in the morning so reporters can meet their deadlines. Send media advisories to reporters, but if they don't come, send polite follow-up information;
- Write thank you notes or e-mails to reporters who cover your story; and
- Be realistic; of course you think Main Street work is interesting, but is it really newsworthy?

DON'T

- Don't send press releases on irrelevant or underwhelming “news”—this may cause the media to ignore your “real” news;
- Don't miss or be late for interviews;
- Don't send angry e-mails or nasty voice mails to journalists who didn't cover your story the way you wanted; and
- Don't send out old news or resend press releases if your story wasn't picked up.



RESOURCES

Articles

“Effective E-Communication: Using E-mail to Communicate with your Constituents,” by David Tully, *Main Street News*, November 2003. Tips for writing effective e-mails, managing distribution lists, avoiding spam, and other considerations.

“E-newsletter Enhances Communication Effort,” by Scott Grove, *Main Street News*, November 2003. Discusses the advantages of e-newsletters and some considerations you need to give to their design, distribution, and editorial copy.

“Leveraging Public Relations to Promote Your Main Street,” by Malcolm Johnstone, *Main Street News*, October 2008. Discusses the basics of a publicity plan, from making a strong media pitch to putting together a press kit. It also explores special topics such as crisis communication.

“Making the Most of Media on Main Street,” by Kendall C. Mooney, *Main Street News*, May 2003. Discusses many common media opportunities for Main Street programs.

“Network Notes: Characteristics of an Effective Newsletter: A Checklist,” by Luke VanBelleghem, *Main Street News*, January 2003. Tips for ensuring that your e-newsletter gets read instead of left unopened in recipient’s inboxes.

“Working with a Web Designer: 10 Tips,” by Greg Stein and Andrea L. Dono, *Main Street News*, November 2003. The basics of how to work with a website designer to create a website that works best for your program.

Books

A Primer on Nonprofit PR...If Charity Begins at Home, by Kathleen A. Neal (Pineapple Press, 2001). A manual for nonprofit organizations to guide their public relations efforts. Touches on topics ranging from crisis communication, and working with media professionals, to fund raising.

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, by Norm Goldstein (Basic Books, 2007). This style guidebook is most often used by journalists and will help you “speak their language.”

The Non-Designer’s Design Book, 3rd Edition, by Robin Williams (PeachPit Press, 2008). This book was developed with amateurs in mind to help them with details such as selecting the proper font and using good alignment. It also discusses basic design principles and offers sample images to guide the reader.

The Publicity Handbook, New Edition: The Inside Scoop from More than 100 Journalists and PR Pros on How to Get Great Publicity Coverage, by David R. Yale and Andrew J. Caruthers (McGraw-Hill, 2001). This primer teaches you how to set goals and develop a publicity plan to help you meet them. Discusses Internet campaigns, writing press releases, using databases, and more.

Logo Design Workbook: A Hands-On Guide to Creating Logos, by Noreen Morioka, Terry Stone, and Sean Adams (Rockport Publishers, 2006). This publication is intended to help designers work with clients to understand their goals, logo concept, and the logo-development process. Includes case studies of logo usage.

Building Support through Public Relations: A Guide for Nonprofit Preservation Organizations (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1998). Explains how to conduct a successful public relations campaign.



chapter 8

EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY FOR MAIN STREET PROGRAMS

By Rhonda Sincavage and Stacey VanBelleghem

You likely have heard that effective advocacy is one of the keys to the success of a Main Street program.

In fact, revitalization organizations that actively advocate for community issues are better able to establish a Main Street-friendly climate in which to conduct their work. By building general awareness of the Main Street program and the commercial district's needs within the community—and especially among elected officials—your organization will have an easier time implementing projects and getting the variety of resources your program will need to accomplish its goals.

Unfortunately, there is often confusion about the definition of advocacy and how to expand a Main Street program's advocacy capacity. Advocacy can include anything from relationship-building activities, such as educating decision makers, informing the public, raising visibility, and gaining support for Main Street, to activities designed to bring about a specific change in policy. In general, advocacy involves the same communication and support-building skills that you already utilize in advancing your program, so even if you do not realize it, you are probably already engaging in advocacy on a regular basis.

Lobbying is a subset of advocacy activities involving efforts to influence legislation. Specific laws govern lobbying by nonprofit organizations, so it is important to understand what constitutes lobbying and ensure that your program does not run afoul of these limitations (see the section, "Lobbying by 501(c)(3) Organizations," on pages 66–67).

Members of the Missouri Main Street Connection meet to discuss advocacy strategy for saving the state Main Street coordinating program whose funding was threatened.



You should be aware that there are laws on the federal, state, and possibly even local level governing the types of lobbying activities that are allowable for nonprofits and government employees. Before your organization engages in lobbying activities, you should contact your lawyer about the specific restrictions that apply to your program.

Why is Advocacy Necessary?

Your program needs the support of decision makers because they may determine policies that affect your community or your program directly. For example, elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels make decisions on funding measures and grant programs; enact tax incentives to encourage historic preservation and community revitalization (federal tax credits, state tax credits, or local property tax abatement programs); and enact legal protections to preserve the historic buildings that are the core of your community. These decision makers are shaping policies that may affect not only your local Main Street organization but also your statewide, countywide, or citywide coordinating program.

In the best circumstances, your advocacy efforts will produce policies that benefit your community and your program; in the worst case, your advocacy and relationship-building efforts will prepare you to defend against threats to your program. In any case, decision makers can and should be partners in your success. Building relationships with elected officials is like saving money in the bank. Cultivating those relationships gives you people you can rely on in times of need.

Don't think of your advocacy as only benefiting your program or community, however. Your relationship with an elected official benefits the official as well. Decision makers and their staff members are required to be "experts" on a wide variety of issues, and you can help by keeping them informed about what is happening in downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts and by sharing your benchmarks and reinvestment statistics. You provide value to the relationship because you know about your community and can provide new and exciting ideas. Your events and activities also provide valuable opportunities for your elected officials to appear in public and interact with constituents.



Iowa Senator Tom Harkin poses with various agency representatives and the Main Street manager from Jewell, Iowa, during a celebration of a federal grant for assisting Main Street communities.

Where to Begin

Your first priority in incorporating advocacy into your program is to lay the groundwork for forming relationships and introducing your program to stakeholders and policymakers. A little research and planning up front can help you identify the aspects of your program that will appeal to decision makers.

Who Can Be Involved?

Supporters of Main Street come in all shapes and sizes, from Main Street executive directors and board members (see the section, "Lobbying by 501(c)(3) Organizations," on pages 66–67) to volunteers, business owners, and allied community and neighborhood organizations. Build a group of supporters who represent a wide-ranging, diverse constituency. You should also select an appropriate spokesperson who can cultivate relationships with elected officials. Your program must be strategic in its efforts to identify advocacy partners—aligning yourself with contentious or controversial groups or individuals could derail your efforts.

Elected officials respond well to groups of constituents who represent multiple interests, so broadening your base of support will pay off as you move forward with relationship building and advocacy. As a first step, think about program supporters who already have relationships with elected officials. Elected officials respond to people they know and trust, so tapping Main Street supporters who have established relationships with decision makers can help you identify a potential representative for your program or someone who can introduce officials to your executive director or board members. Keep in mind that the person who introduces you to an official may not be the best person to be your advocate or representative. A committed board member or the executive director would be the best person for the job. When selecting your main advocacy representative, be sure to choose someone who is an effective communicator, who can be readily available, and who is well-informed about the program and current issues.

Researching Your Decision Makers

Researching decision makers at every level of government is an important first step before you approach them. Get to know your representatives in Congress and the state legislature as well as important local decision makers, such as the city manager, planners, and council members. Basically, you need to know what motivates elected officials and how they can help your cause. Here are some things that may be useful to know:

- What is the official's background: hometown, school, previous career, outside interests? This information



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Representatives of College Park, one of Orlando's oldest neighborhood business districts, pose with Mayor Buddy Dyer at the announcement ceremony for the new Orlando citywide program.

can help you identify people who work with the official as well as issues that are important to him or her.

- What committee memberships does the official hold? What is the official's seniority? This information will tell you what types of policy the legislator can most effectively influence and the official's relative position among his or her colleagues. This type of information will be important at every level, from county legislatures and city councils to the state legislature and Congress.
- What are the official's positions on issues that matter to Main Street? What is the official's voting record on these issues? This will tell you where you stand as you start out. Your elected official may already be a supporter of Main Street or you may have to work to gain his or her support.
- What other issues does the official support? This information will help you connect your policy priorities with the issues that are at the forefront of your elected official's policy agenda. Review the official's policy platform and campaign issues by visiting his or her website, talking with staffers, or searching for press releases and media coverage.
- Remember to cultivate key decision makers outside your district as well. These individuals can be influential in supporting Main Street-friendly policies on a broad level.

Understanding the Decision-making Process

As you start your efforts, familiarize yourself with the policy-making process at the level you are targeting (local, state, or federal). If your priority is an issue before the city council, learn how the decision-making process works in your city. If your priority is a matter before the state legislature, study your state's legislative process. State and federal legislative processes are often described on free legislative web-

sites. Each state has its own legislative website and most include an overview of that state's legislative process. In addition, the Library of Congress' legislative site, THOMAS (thomas.loc.gov), is a great resource on the federal process.

Understanding the decision-making process is a prerequisite to pursuing policy objectives. It will also help you plan strategically and time your efforts to coincide with important points during the decision-making process.

Getting to Know the Issues

Study policies and issues that affect Main Street, such as funding sources, economic incentives, and zoning regulations. Your advocacy will be more persuasive if you have a thorough understanding of how and why these issues are priorities for your Main Street community. Although many policies may impact Main Street in some way, advocates should select a few important issues on which to focus.

Prioritize these issues and research the pros and cons so that you can anticipate people's concerns or potential opposition; this will help you craft your message, explain why an issue is important to Main Street, determine which outcomes would be favorable to the revitalization effort, and prepare informed rebuttals to the opposition. A knowledgeable advocate is often seen by the elected official as a valuable resource. Your role as a reliable informational resource can strengthen your relationship with elected officials. Finally, researching the important issues will help you counteract any opposition to your position. You'll be able to anticipate what the opposition would say and plan your message accordingly. Do not overlook your Main Street colleagues; they can be a great resource for sharing lessons learned on similar policy issues.



Joette Booker of the city manager's office welcomes Alabama State Senator Harri Anne Smith to Dothan, Alabama, during a breast cancer awareness event.

Putting Advocacy into Practice

Once you lay the groundwork for effective advocacy, you will need to put this knowledge into practice, both by communicating directly with your elected officials and by assisting other Main Street supporters in their advocacy efforts. As an active participant in your Main Street organization, you are poised to take a leadership role by expressing the needs of the community to decision makers at all levels of government. In addition to acting as a spokesperson for Main Street, you can coordinate with other advocates in your community by reaching out to like-minded groups, such as smart growth advocates, developers focused on revitalization, or supporters of heritage tourism. By taking on this responsibility, you can ensure that decision makers hear about Main Street's importance from a wide, diverse constituency.

Messaging

Carefully craft a message that conveys to decision makers how important the Main Street program is to your community and how it relates to specific policies or issues of interest. As you develop this message, keep in mind the advantages that the Main Street program has. You have the support of constituents: local patrons of Main Street, business owners, and allied community groups. You also have the added advantage that community revitalization is a nonpartisan issue that everyone can support.

In crafting your message, identify aspects of your program that will persuade a decision maker to support your policy agenda. If job growth is an issue in your area, focus on the jobs created and maintained by a vibrant commercial corridor. If tax base is an issue, focus on the increased tax revenue of an active business district with low vacancy rates. Be sure to showcase statistics to highlight your success with measurable data. For instance, the Main Street reinvestment statistics offer impressive evidence of the benefits of the Main Street Four-Point Approach. Also consider highlighting a specific accomplishment such as a major streetscape improvement project or a festival to show the benefits of your program.

Crafting Your Message

Plan a tour of your downtown or neighborhood business district. Decide which businesses you want a decision maker to visit and which stakeholders you want him or her to meet. Ask select business owners if they would be willing to meet a decision maker dur-

ing the tour if the need arises. Share your message with people who may be on the tour and encourage them to highlight their business in a certain manner. That way, if a sudden opportunity arises to give a decision maker a tour, the plan will already be in place and all you'll need to do is confirm participants' availability.

- Identify spokespeople who can effectively communicate your message. Share all of your messaging materials with them and keep them informed about your program's activities and progress. That way if you get a call from the media or a decision maker who wants to learn more about the program, you will be prepared with a consistent, persuasive message.
- Unfortunately, not every decision maker will be able to tour your Main Street. Effective alternatives to a tour include producing a high quality visual presentation or printed materials that explain your work and successes. These visuals can be useful for any type of stakeholder: an elected official, a member of the press, a potential volunteer, or a possible funder.
- Finally, prepare a brief "elevator speech" that summarizes your message. You never know when you will run into an elected official or stakeholder and have the opportunity for a very brief conversation. If you have the main points summarized in your head as an "elevator speech," you'll be able to make the most of the opportunity.

Communicating with Your Elected Officials

When contacting elected officials—either as an individual or as a representative of your Main Street organization—engage them in different ways. It is important to use each of the following methods of communication to build a strong relationship with decision makers. If you are new to advocacy, begin building a foundation through outreach and education, then advance to specific requests and recognition opportunities. You may find it more challenging to work with certain elected officials than others, but a sustained effort will often produce a positive result.

- **Outreach.** First, you need to reach out to your decision makers, introduce yourself, and explain the importance of the Main Street organization to them and their staff members. Elected officials want and expect to hear from you; they appreciate your taking time to get to know them. It is your responsibility as a citizen and constituent to communicate with those in office. If elected officials don't know who you are, they cannot effectively represent you or make informed decisions on issues affecting Main Street. Remember that decision makers are constantly balancing the interests of concerned citizens, so be sure you and your message make a positive impression. Hopefully, your elected official is already familiar with

HINT

If your city government or a partner nonprofit organization has lobbyists, take them out for coffee and ask them to explain the process to you. Ask them for tips, and be on the lookout for common interests that could suggest a joint advocacy partnership.

your Main Street district and organization and has had firsthand experiences in your community. A few ways in which you can engage your officials are to:

- Include their office on your mailing list;
 - Include them on the distribution list of your newsletter if you have one;
 - Invite them to present at or attend community meetings;
 - Inform them and their staff about events in your district; and
 - Invite them to participate in events that you sponsor; be sure to arrange a photo opportunity while they are visiting and distribute the photos to print media with a media release to publicize their visit to your Main Street district.
- **Education.** Next, you need to educate your elected officials and serve as an informational resource on Main Street issues. Once officials know who you are and what Main Street is, they should be made aware of the many issues that may affect your efforts. Don't assume that decision makers will necessarily make the connection between Main Street and certain policy initiatives; it's up to you to explain the impact of policies on your Main Street program. Elected officials and their staff tend to have general knowledge on a wide variety of subjects, but when it comes to the specifics, they rely on experts in the field to guide and educate them. You should aim to be the "go-to" person for decision makers when they have a question about Main Street. Some examples of helpful information you can give your elected officials include:
 - History and significance of your Main Street;
 - Economic benefit studies;
 - Reinvestment statistics;
 - Letters of support;
 - Local success stories; and
 - Awards and recognition.
 - **Ask.** Once you have established a relationship with your elected officials and they are familiar with the concerns of Main Street, think about specific ways they can advance your Main Street agenda. When directly asking decision makers to support your program, you need to be cognizant of the lobbying limitations for your organization (see the section, "Lobbying by 501(c)(3) Organizations," on pages 66–67). A specific ask can range from requesting

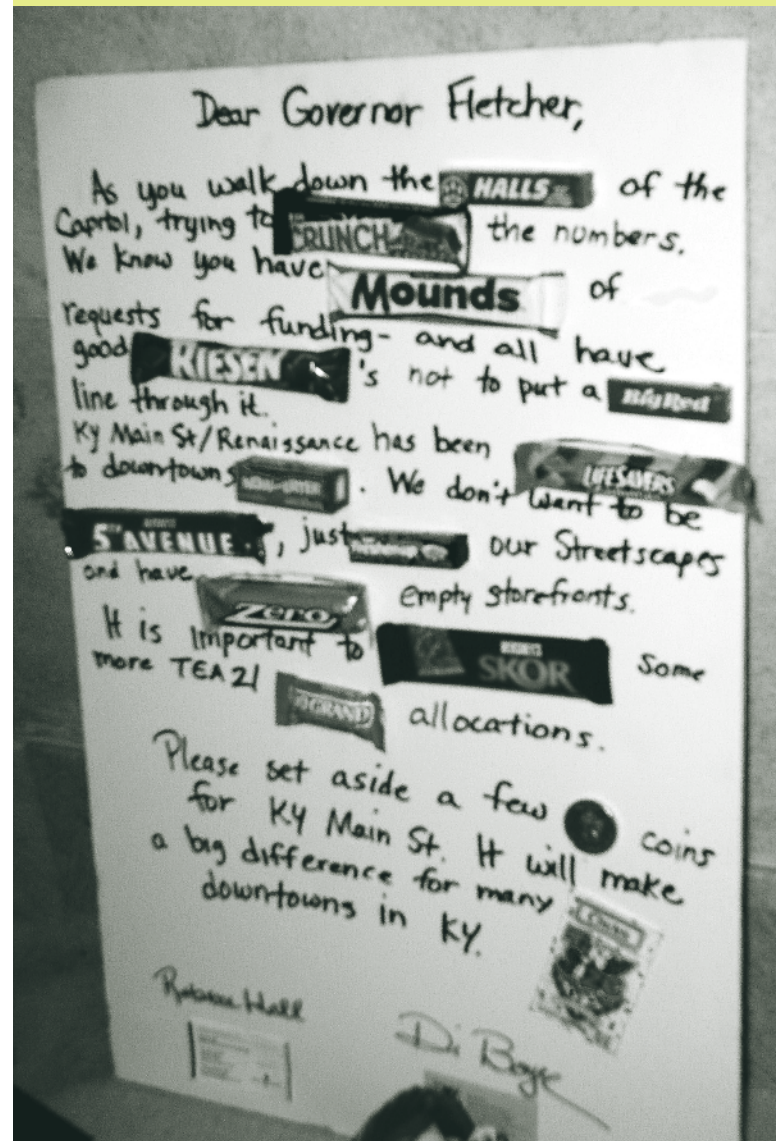
Be Creative!

Advocacy should be taken seriously, but that does not mean it can't be fun. During a Kentucky Main Street quarterly meeting held in the state capital, for example, many of the local program directors met with their legislators. To capture the attention of the lawmakers, they distributed jars of fruit preserves with labels that read: "Preserve our Main Street Funding."

The group also gave the governor a "candy-gram" poster that incorporated candy bars in place of certain words to let him know how much they wanted his support in keeping Kentucky Main Street funding in place. The clever poster garnered a lot of attention and hung in the governor's office for weeks.

Translation of the poster:

"Dear Governor Fletcher: As you walk down the halls of the Capitol, trying to crunch the numbers, we know you have mounds of requests for funding—and all have good reasons not to cut a big red line through it. KY Main Street/Renaissance have been lifesavers to downtown, now and later. We don't want to be Fifth Avenue, just freshen up our streetscapes and have zero empty storefronts. It is important to score some more TEA 21 grant allocations. Please set aside a few gold coins for KY Main Street. It will make a big difference for many tiny size downtowns in KY."



the official to support or sponsor legislation that would benefit Main Street, to asking the official to vote a certain way on a measure, to including Main Street in a legislative platform. Regardless of the request, be sure to explain why the legislator’s support would benefit Main Street and use local examples to show the impact in his or her district.

- **Recognition.** The final stage of communication with elected officials is recognizing when they have acted on behalf of your community. Not only should you directly thank them for their efforts; you should also consider publicly acknowledging their support. This can be done in person at a variety of occasions, including Main Street events, ribbon cuttings, or a press event. Other options include bestowing an award on the elected official or acknowledging his or her effort in the press through a letter to the editor. In any case, it is important to let your elected officials know that you recognize and appreciate their support of Main Street.

Communicating with Main Street Advocates

Your role in advocating for Main Street should not end with contacting elected officials. You should also mobilize your members and volunteers, as well as the general public or “grassroots” Main Street supporters. As a leader in your community, you need to encourage the advocacy of others who value Main Street’s mission. Communication with these supporters will differ from your direct communication with elected officials. In this case, you will act as a coordinator, supplying informa-

tion and guidance on when and what to say to lawmakers as they consider policies affecting Main Street.

Advocates will need to know background information and details of a particular issue before springing into action. Often, Main Street supporters do not consider themselves advocates or don’t know much about the legislative process, so it is important to make them as comfortable as possible by providing clear, concise information and instructions. Any time advocates are asked to take action on an issue, you should provide:

- Background information about the issue;
- Timing of the issue and communications needed;
- A clearly defined action to take;
- Key talking points and messaging tips, including a sample letter or “script” for a conversation;
- Contact information for targeted decision makers; and
- A method for advocates to provide feedback to your organization.

Communicating with advocates means not only informing them of pressing issues, but also motivating them to take action. Specify how their action will benefit Main Street and your community. There is “strength in numbers” so reach out to as many supporters as possible and encourage them to spread the message to others. In order to give advocates a sense of accomplishment, remember to thank them for their involvement and provide periodic updates on the issue.

DO’S & DON’T’S FOR MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

DO...	DON’T...
Your research ahead of time	Show up unprepared to talk about your issues or without necessary materials
Answer questions truthfully	Be afraid to say “I don’t know” and follow up with an answer over the phone or in writing.
Make clear, concise arguments	Ramble or go into too much detail
Show up on time	Be offended if you are asked to wait
Relax and speak in a conversational tone	Be intimidated
Be polite	Get angry or defensive
Make a specific request	Expect an immediate answer
Listen to the elected official to ascertain his or her interests and priorities	Allow the official to get you so sidetracked from the issue at hand that you are not able to make your request
Understand that many offices lack proper meeting space	Be disappointed if you meet with legislative staff
Leave room for follow up	Forget to send a thank-you note

Methods for Mobilizing Success

Of the many different modes of communicating your advocacy message, you will need to determine which is most appropriate depending on the situation. In general, communication with elected officials can take place via e-mail, fax, mail, telephone, or face-to-face meetings.

Because you want to personalize your message to the greatest extent possible, face-to-face meetings are usually preferable, but that does not mean that other forms of communication can't be just as effective. The method of communication is not nearly as important as the message it contains. A thoughtful, personalized, and well-written e-mail, fax, or letter that includes relevant Main Street examples familiar to the legislator can have nearly the same effect as a personal visit. Communications that have the most impact on elected officials are from citizens they represent, so be sure to state that you are a constituent in every communication.

When communicating with grassroots advocates, you often want to reach as many people as possible in as short a time as possible, so e-mail is a logical method given its ease of use and cost effectiveness. There are many tools, including advocacy software, that can make this job easier, but a wide-reaching distribution list and a carefully crafted message are the most important components when communicating to advocates. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Public Policy Office can recommend software to help you with your efforts. A few examples of advocacy mobilization tools include:

- **Website.** Use your website to assemble background information on the issue, status reports, contact information for key decision makers, sample letter to the editor, and talking points.
- **Newsletter.** Use your newsletter either to provide in-depth coverage or give status updates on an issue. By covering the issue in your regular publication, you will educate your members so that they are familiar with the details and comfortable discussing it.
- **Electronic alert.** Use electronic alerts to call your members to action.
- **Feedback.** Provide a mechanism for advocates to share any responses they receive from decision makers.

Proactive and Reactive Advocacy

Unfortunately, more often than not, advocacy tends to take place when there's a crisis—the city council is planning to permit the opening of a “big-box” retailer that would negatively affect eight Main Street businesses, or the state legislature is considering cutting the state Main Street program's funding, for example. While responding to an impending threat can be a powerful way to mobilize advocates around an issue, it can also



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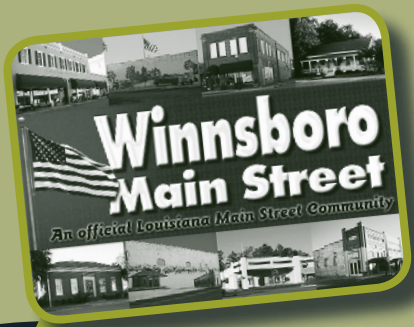
California Assemblywoman Nicole Parra receives a plaque from the former California Main Street Association president in appreciation of her efforts to reinstate the California Main Street program.

create a chaotic situation for you and your supporters. In most cases, these crises require an immediate, widespread response, so it is important to prepare as extensively as possible for these situations before they occur.

Having an up-to-date contact list of advocates, background information, and talking points on critical aspects of your Main Street program can help alleviate some of the disorder when crisis strikes. The Coldwater Downtown Development Association in Michigan makes constant contact with its state senators and representatives a priority. The DDA meets with legislators monthly when they are in town, as well as regularly sending them meeting minute notes and important correspondence on various issues. As a result, the group finds it easy to get direct interaction with legislators when issues unexpectedly arise.

In an ideal situation, you will be able to proactively advocate for Main Street. This often depends on timing, budgets, and political climate, so be sure to develop long-term goals that you can propose to potential Main Street legislative champions at the opportune time. A wonderful example of proactive advocacy is the work of the New Mexico Coalition of Main Street Communities. The coalition, initially formed in response to declining legislative support of the New Mexico MainStreet program, has successfully pursued several legislative initiatives, including creation of a Main Street Revolving Loan Fund and development of Arts and Cultural District legislation. The coalition has evolved and grown over the years to the point where it now employs contract lobbyists and other staff to promote its agenda during the legislative session.

Even the most successful programs, deserving projects, and worthy causes will not reach their full potential without support from elected officials who have the ability to enact beneficial policies. Thankfully, every voice matters in our legislative process and your advocacy can help ensure that decision makers hear and act on the Main Street message.



Homepage image courtesy of Winnsboro Main Street (www.winnsboromainstreet.com)

Advocacy Luncheon

The Franklin (Parish) Economic Development Foundation, which houses Winnsboro (Louisiana) Main Street, began hosting annual legislative luncheons with members from its organization, the Franklin Parish Tourism Commission, the Catfish Festival, the Historical Society, and the Princess Theatre, along with northeast Louisiana legislators. These luncheons, which the regional utility company, Entergy, sponsors, have become events that legislators expect each year.

The groups travel to Baton Rouge so they can meet with senators, representatives, the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, the Secretary of Economic Development, the Secretary of Agriculture, and regional economic development representatives to exchange updates and ideas on economic development issues. The group prefers to keep the lunch informal and without a set agenda, as many legislators come from committee meetings or the floor.

However, the outcomes are not at all casual. In 2006, the Main Street program received an operational funding allocation that allowed it to leverage its membership budget monies so it could start a \$10,000 local façade matching grant program.

Lobbying by 501(c)(3) Organizations: The Basics

The following thumbnail description of lobbying and political activity is a summary to assist organizations in identifying these issues. This brief description is not intended as legal advice. Organizations should seek the advice of qualified legal counsel if they are considering engaging in lobbying or similar activities.

For more information, see “Lobbying by Historic Preservation Organizations: Understanding the Rules,” by Stephanie Ann Ades, 13 Preservation Law Reporter 1107 (June 1994).

The general rule is that 501(c)(3) organizations are limited in lobbying by the requirement that “no substantial part of the activities be used for carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation.” Because this vague rule was difficult to interpret and apply, Congress modified the tax code to permit certain 501(c)(3) organizations to elect to lobby under prescribed limits, which provide a safe harbor for the lobbying activities of the organizations. An organization that chooses not to follow the safe harbor limits of the tax code can still lobby, but only if lobbying does not constitute a substantial part of the activities of the organization.

A 501(c)(3) organization may choose to *elect* to participate in lobbying activities under the safe harbor provisions of the tax code by filing form 5768 with the Internal Revenue Service. Once the election has been made, the organization is subject to specific expenditure limits for lobbying activities rather than the more vague “no substantial part” rule. (Election is optional; the organization may prefer to rely on the general rule, particu-

larly if lobbying activities are minimal.) The expenditure limits under the election rules are graduated, beginning at 20 percent of the first \$500,000 of the organization’s expenditures for charitable “exempt function” purposes, plus 15 percent of the second \$500,000 of charitable “exempt function” expenditures, plus 10 percent of the third \$500,000, plus 5 percent of any additional expenditures, subject to a maximum of \$1,000,000 for any one year.

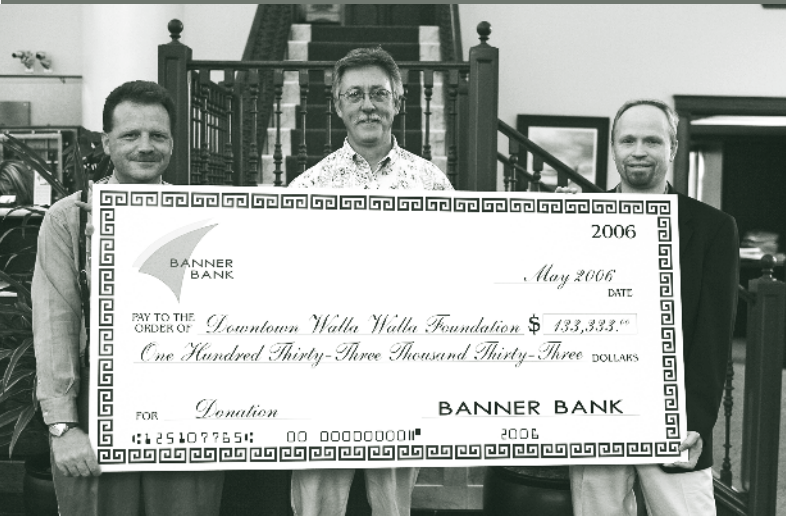
It is important to understand the activities that will constitute “lobbying” for the purposes of these requirements. Lobbying activities seek to influence specific legislation. Legislation, in turn, is defined as action by Congress, by any state legislature, by any local council or similar governing body, or by the public in a referendum, initiative, constitutional amendment, or similar procedure.

Lobbying is broken down into two categories. *Direct lobbying* includes contacting members and employees of legislative bodies, such as congressmen, senators, state legislators, city council members, their staffs, or others who formulate legislation. *Grassroots lobbying* is an attempt to influence the general public on legislative matters. Within the limits on lobbying expenditures, a separate limitation is placed on “grassroots” lobbying. Only 25 percent of the permitted lobbying expenditures may be made on “grassroots” lobbying.

- A critical distinction for nonprofit organizations considering these activities is the difference between lobbying and political activity. While 501(c)(3) organizations may lobby within the limitations noted above, they are prohibited from engaging in political activity, and may lose their tax exempt status if they do so. Political activity is defined as participating in or

CASE STUDY

Walla Walla, Washington Persistence Pays Off



intervening in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.

- There are several notable distinctions between 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), and 501(c)(6) organizations regarding lobbying restrictions. First, unlike 501(c)(3) organizations, 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(6) organizations may engage in an unrestricted amount of lobbying. However, the lobbying activities must be related to the organization's exempt purpose. Any lobbying activities not related to the organization's exempt purpose are taxed. Second, whereas 501(c)(3) organizations are absolutely barred from engaging in "political activities," both 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(6) may engage in political activities, but such involvement cannot constitute the organization's primary activity. A 501(c)(4) or 501(c)(6) organization's expenditures for engaging in political activities are taxed. (Reminder: A donor's charitable donations to 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(6) are generally not deductible.)

Keep in mind that building relationships and getting results from your advocacy efforts can take time. In the case of the Main Street programs in Washington State, it took four legislative sessions to build momentum and support before the "Main Street Bill" was passed in 2005. In this effort, local programs banded together to advance a bill that would codify the statewide Main Street program (which, as a stage agency, could not lead the advocacy effort) and help provide a funding stream to support local downtown revitalization organizations.

By partnering with the Association of Washington Cities and the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, both of which added this initiative to their legislative agendas, and by rallying local stakeholders to contact their legislators, the group built momentum over time and got a louder and broader voice each year.

The advocates noticed that the bill gained traction once local residents and business owners started contacting representatives. "Oftentimes, we rely on Main Street staff members to write letters and make presentations, but it is important that decision makers hear from 'average' citizens," advises Timothy Bishop, who was an active advocate of this bill while he was executive director of the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation. Just as it took a few legislative sessions to increase awareness and support for this issue among legislators, grassroots awareness at the local level also took time to build. Regular updates and continual communication helped sustain interest.

"Main Street managers are tenacious by nature," says Bishop, "and they need to know that nothing is really dead in the legislature until the final gavel falls." He points out that sometimes initiatives look like they are moving forward but then get sidetracked. Even though advocacy efforts take time, initiatives can suddenly start moving quickly and it is essential for a designated person in the advocacy group to track the bill and make sure that someone can respond quickly by attending hearings or testifying on short notice.

A key component of this success story involves the staunch support of Representative Bill Grant (D-16) who refused to let the bill die and rallied last-minute support among his colleagues. Already a supporter of downtown revitalization, he was frequently visited by Main Streeters at his office in Walla Walla and was invited to special events, ribbon cuttings, and other events celebrating downtown revitalization achievements. Bishop stresses that it is important to keep legislators engaged in downtown successes as they happen.

At the end of the day, the bill passed with 16th District Representative Grant's encouragement, and the National Main Street Center presented him with its Civic Leadership Award in 2006 for his efforts. The Washington State Main Street Program was incorporated into the Department of Community Trade and Economic Development; a statewide Main Street Advisory Committee was established; and a tax credit incentive that encourages businesses to make qualifying contributions to a designated local downtown revitalization program was created. Even though the credit is capped at \$100,000 for any one organization, this resource allows Washington State's Main Street programs to essentially double their annual budgets.

RESOURCES

Websites

Advocacy Guru: This website offers advocacy checklists, tip sheets, articles, and other resources. www.advocacyguru.com

Congress.org: This website is dedicated to fostering civic participation. Among its resources include tips for communicating with elected officials, a congressional directory, committee hearings search, and current Senate schedule. www.congress.org

Independent Sector: This nonprofit has an array of advocacy and lobbying resources, including information on tax status and lobbying restrictions. www.independentsector.org/programs/gr/advocacy_lobbying.htm

THOMAS: The Library of Congress's legislative site is a great resource on the federal process; it includes search features for committee reports and current legislation. <http://thomas.loc.gov/>

Periodicals

"Main Street Advocacy," by Laura Cole-Rowe, Donna Harris, Hayley Klein, Maria G. Rinaldi, and Stephanie Redman. *Main Street News*, January 2005. Four case study articles featuring Main Street programs from four different states telling their war stories and lessons learned regarding the importance of dedicated advocacy efforts to save the state program or restore funding. Useful tips on ways your local Main Street network can advocate on behalf of your coordinating program.

"Raising Program Visibility: Educating Public Officials About Main Street," by Cara Camacho. *Main Street News*, February 2003. More tips on educating elected officials, ways to make the case for your revitalization effort, and advice from experienced Main Street managers.

Books

These publications are available from the National Trust for Historic Preservation (www.preservationbooks.org):

Effective Communications for Preservation Nonprofit Organizations, by Richard McPherson, Debra Ashmore and Timothy O'leary (National Trust for Historic Preservation: 2002). Tips on effective communication to get your message out to the general public and increase awareness. Includes communications evaluations, advocacy help, working with the media, annual reports, and more.

A Blueprint for Lobbying, by Susan West Montgomery (National Trust for Historic Preservation: 2002). A primer on lobbying, timing your efforts, background on the legislative process, and lobbying techniques.

Politics of Historic Districts: A Primer for Grassroots Preservation, by William Lanham Schmickle (Altamira Press: 2007). This book covers everything you need to know about the politics of organizing a grassroots campaign to create a historic district.

Image, far left © Jason Clement



chapter 9

IMPROVING COMMERCIAL DYNAMICS

By Kennedy Lawson Smith

Revitalizing a neighborhood business district or downtown is essentially a real estate problem: how can you make the buildings generate enough income to support their rehabilitation and ongoing maintenance?

At the same time, revitalizing a commercial area is an opportunity to define and celebrate the personality of the district. In almost all communities—even severely distressed ones—there are many combinations of building uses that can provide an adequate income to support property improvement and maintenance. The challenge for your revitalization organization is to find the combination of uses that best reflects community preferences, captures emerging market opportunities, builds on local assets, and strengthens community identity.

The key to finding that optimum combination is to determine what the district's best economic uses might be, and, armed with this information, implement a sound, long-term economic development plan. You can renovate buildings, improve parking, and organize the coolest promotional events imaginable; but if the revitalization program's staff and leaders don't understand the district's economy and don't know how to manipulate it effectively, all the building renovations and great promotional activities on earth won't ensure commercial success. Your Main Street program must know what kinds of stores, offices, apartments, and other uses are not only economically viable *but* also a good fit for the district's buildings and the community's values.

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Improving the commercial dynamics of a Main Street district involves action in five major areas:

- Understanding the district’s economic strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities;
- Diversifying the district’s economic uses;
- Strengthening existing businesses and developing (or recruiting) complementary ones;
- Encouraging building rehabilitation projects and new construction; and
- Monitoring and reporting the district’s economic performance.

Economic restructuring activities are closely inter-related, with actions in one area invariably affecting actions in another. There is a close relationship, for example, between real estate development activity and retail rent levels in a commercial district. Without careful attention, substantial building improvement projects can drive up rent levels for retail tenants too quickly, displacing them in favor of retailers who can afford higher rents and putting the district at risk of “gentrification.”

What is commercial gentrification? Here is an example. Early in the district revitalization process, the owner of a two-story commercial building on High Street decides to invest \$100,000 to upgrade the building—a new roof, new HVAC systems, façade improvements, and other upgrades. She gets a 15-year, 6.5 percent interest loan for \$100,000 from a neighborhood bank. Her annual principal and interest payment will be \$10,635.

The building’s current ground-floor retail tenant, a shoe store, currently grosses about \$300,000 per year. He pays \$24,000 annually in rent, or 8 percent of his gross sales.

The building owner, though, plans to pass the costs of the property improvements along to her tenant when his current lease expires—so, his rent will increase by \$10,635 per year, to \$34,635.

The shoe store owner wants to know how much his gross sales will need to be in order to stay in the building, so he divides the new rent by 8 percent (the percent of gross sales he currently budgets for rent):

$$\$34,635 \div 8\% = \$433,000$$

To his surprise, he realizes he will need to increase his gross annual sales by \$133,000 (from \$300,000 to \$433,000). Worried that he cannot boost his sales by that amount, the store owner decides to close his business.

This is an overly generalized example, of course, and there are a number of things a Main Street program might do to mitigate the problem. However, it illustrates the delicate relationship among retailing, real estate, and rent levels in commercial districts and underscores the importance of working comprehensively, with change occurring incrementally over time. (For more information, see “Commercial District Gentrification” on www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.)

In addition to these interrelationships, the five areas of economic restructuring activities should also affect actions

in the other Main Street points. Market strategies, for example, must be reinforced by the district’s promotional program: special events, business promotions, and image marketing messages should all target specific audiences and aim to “reposition” the way people perceive the district. Efforts to develop underutilized space must coordinate with the district’s design program—guidelines, assistance, and incentives for design improvements should strive to create viable, competitive commercial space.

Reversing the Disinvestment Spiral

As discouraging as it might seem to tackle the downward spiral of disinvestment as discussed in the sidebar “The Disinvestment Domino Effect,” even the most distressed districts often have several revitalization advantages. For example, it is likely that the district’s businesses aren’t meeting local consumer needs. As a result, there are probably unrealized opportunities to launch successful new businesses. The availability of vacant, inexpensive, and smaller spaces might enable the revitalization program to attract new entrepreneurs who can quickly respond to market opportunities and remake the district; the offer of free or cheap rent for several years would give these business owners a chance to establish an economic foothold in the neighborhood. The district’s economic condition will likely mean that investors (banks, in particular) would be eligible for incentives such as federal New Markets Tax Credits if they invest in business development in the district. These credits are a powerful tool, particularly when combined with the federal historic rehabilitation tax credit.

Historic Main Street districts also have inherent strategic advantages over shopping centers and malls. Most Main Streets are still mixed-use districts, offering not just retail stores, but also housing, offices, government, entertainment and cultural venues, service businesses, and industry. Consequently, the people who live and work in and around Main Street provide a built-in customer base for local businesses—an advantage shopping malls just don’t have. But, most important of all, Main Streets have historic buildings. Main Street districts are one-of-a-kind places, and Main Street buildings are one-of-a-kind buildings. Shoppers can be in a mall anywhere in the world and not know where they are. From Boston, Massachusetts, to Pleasanton, California—or, for that matter, from Rio de Janeiro to Singapore—“sprawl” looks basically the same and offers basically the same products and services.

Historic Main Streets, by contrast, are different, and that difference gives them a competitive market advantage. One of the forces that produces economic value is uniqueness, and all historic Main Streets are authentic places that offer unique experiences with intrinsic economic value.

It is important to note that for severely distressed Main Streets, the performance and achievement benchmarks will be different. Depending on the community’s demographic and physical assets, its Main Street program might concentrate its initial efforts on a small section of

the district, then use this area's successes to gradually expand outward. Or, if the district is relatively large, the revitalization program could create a development strategy that focuses simultaneously on two or three areas. Also, severely distressed districts will probably need to address crime and other socio-cultural problems before trying to establish niches and other revitalization initiatives.

Learning About Your District's Economy

There is no “wrong” place to begin analyzing a Main Street district's economy and identifying development possibilities. Some programs look for opportunities to fill ground-floor vacancies with new retail businesses. Some focus on upper-floor housing by examining market demand or interest in living above storefronts. Others start by increasing the employment base in the district. All of these activities are, of course, economically interrelated—and it is this interrelationship that, at least in part, makes Main Street economies dynamic. Each activity supports the others by providing customers or services.

The process behind building a dynamic commercial environment requires the involvement and cooperation of many stakeholders, from your business owners adopting convenient business hours to your municipality developing ordinances that support a thriving business community.

People in all Main Street districts have choices about their economic futures. There is no single economic development strategy that will work—instead, there are a variety of options. Of course, each has pros and cons. Some options may be more expedient, but less beneficial in the long run. For example, it may be more expedient to recruit chain stores than to develop locally owned businesses, but chain stores don't keep as much of their profits in the community as independently owned businesses do. It might be more expedient to cultivate entertainment-related businesses that cater to tourists rather than recruit a grocery store, clothing stores, and a pharmacy, but this strategy might force community residents to shop elsewhere for basic goods and services.

Improving the commercial dynamics of a Main Street district involves many different components and demands many difficult decisions. Ultimately, it requires a market-based strategic plan to guide all the actions and decisions made by the organizations and agencies involved in the district's revitalization.

To develop a market-based strategic plan, begin by gathering and analyzing information about your district. The following are some of the categories of information you may want to gather and analyze:

- Information about the district's buildings:
 - Ownership;
 - Tenancy and current uses;
 - Size (square feet, number of floors, number of units) and physical configuration;

The Disinvestment Domino Effect

As people moved to the suburbs and stopped shopping in downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts, businesses lost customers and either had to follow the traffic and relocate to suburban shopping centers; stay, but struggle to adjust to a changing market; or close. The decisions of local business owners had an overwhelming effect on local Main Street economies:

As demand for commercial space dwindled, vacancies increased, and rents decreased.

Property owners had less money to maintain their buildings, which fell into disrepair.

As buildings fell into disrepair, the commercial space became less desirable, further increasing vacancies and decreasing rents.

Along with rents, property values decreased; and with less real estate taxes collected, public investment in the district decreased.

Below-market rents attracted marginal and undercapitalized businesses.

Inappropriate uses such as storefront churches, storage, or residential units located in some commercial spaces.

A confusing combination of uses eroded the market cohesion and identity the district once enjoyed, further decreasing demand for its commercial space.

The high vacancy rates and decaying buildings contributed to negative image issues and socio-cultural problems, like crime.

Investor confidence bottomed out, and traditional financing for building and business development on Main Street dried up because of the assessed and/or perceived risk.



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- Utilities;
- Physical condition and special features;
- Age, historic status (if any), and history;
- Appraised and assessed value;
- Zoning; and
- Legal identification and GIS (Geographic Information System) coding.
- Information about the district’s businesses:
 - Ownership;
 - Business description and assessment of business performance;
 - NAICS¹ code (North American Industrial Classification System);
 - Number of full- and part-time staff;
 - Description of primary customer base;
 - Business history;
 - Business hours; and
 - Size (square feet).
- Information about the district’s visitors:
 - Demographic profile of current customers;
 - Information on the shopping habits and preferences of current customers;
 - Demographic profile of neighborhood residents;
 - Information on where neighborhood residents shop for various goods and services;
 - Demographic profile of other potential market segments (e.g., people who commute through the

1. See www.census.gov/epcd/www/naics.html for more information.

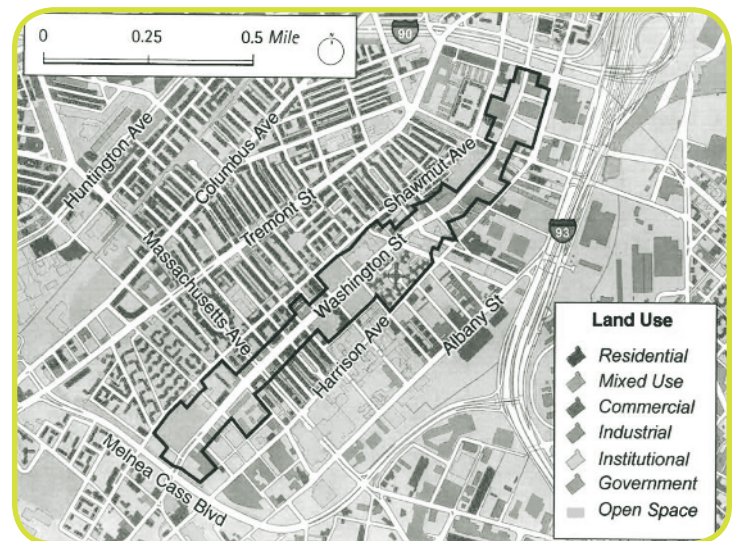
district, people who work in or near the district but do not live there, tourists); and

- Information about how the district is perceived by shoppers, neighborhood residents, and other potential market segments (e.g., what do they consider to be its strengths and weaknesses? What do they like and dislike about it?)
- Information about the number of businesses the district could support:
 - “Buying power” of neighborhood residents, workers, and visitors;
 - Types of businesses the district could support, and size (square footage) of each;
 - Customers who might patronize your district if certain needs were met; and
 - Barriers that prevent the district from capturing more of the immediately available market (e.g. inconvenient store hours).

Using Market Research

Gathering and analyzing this information is, in essence, market research. Market research is an essential tool for identifying realistic choices and weighing the pros and cons of each choice. Good market research has many practical uses, including:

- Helping businesses identify ways to sell more products and services to current customers;



Maps and building and business inventories help your economic restructuring committee figure out what already exists in your district before it starts to assess local economic opportunities. Understanding what your district already has and where everything is located is an important part of understanding your market.

- Helping businesses respond to market trends and identify new customers and ways to attract them;
- Identifying types of new businesses that your district can probably support;
- Deciding where to locate businesses within your district—or where to encourage existing businesses to *relocate* within the district;
- Planning effective promotional activities that appeal to the types of customers you are trying to attract;
- Determining how much money you should encourage property owners to spend on building rehabilitation projects (so that rents don't increase too quickly/outpace the market); and
- Establishing realistic, economically based performance benchmarks for your revitalization program and monitoring your program's progress over time.

Even more significantly, good market research can provide the foundation for the revitalization program's overall strategic plan by grounding the program's actions in a sound, market-based understanding of the most realistic opportunities for the district's economic growth.

Many people have misperceptions about what market research is—and isn't:

First, market research is not an exact science. It won't give you a detailed blueprint for improving your commercial district, and it won't give you a list of priority actions to pursue. It does not use precise numbers, just approximations. And, because economic conditions are always changing, market research isn't even a process with a clearly defined end.

Market research is simply a tool to help you make educated guesses about the potential success of various development strategies. More precisely, market research is a set of measurements which, when used together, provide a snapshot of current market conditions and trends that could affect the district's potential for growth and change. Although different methods of market research may contain different types of measurements, good research should help you:

- Shape a vision and create tangible economic goals for your district;
- Build on your district's strengths and strategic advantages; and
- Mitigate your district's weaknesses.

A Main Street district's "market"—its economic condition, potential, and performance—differs from that of a shopping mall or shopping center. While some of the same tools used for shopping mall market research can also be employed for Main Street districts, market research for a Main Street district differs from that for a shopping mall in some important ways. Among the key differences:



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- Shopping malls are by and large single-use facilities. They mostly contain shops and restaurants, while Main Streets include homes, professional offices, government facilities, cultural amenities, and many other uses—all of which shape, or have the potential to shape, the district's economic activities.
- Shopping malls generally cater to a demographically homogeneous group of customers. Main Streets usually attract a more demographically diverse group of customers.
- Shopping malls usually have one corporate owner. Main Street districts have multiple owners, with divergent interests.
- Shopping malls, with the development as a whole being a destination, generally draw customers from a geographically broad trade area. Main Streets, by contrast, often aren't singular destinations (although they could be, particularly as tourist draws). Each business within the district may have a different trade area: some destination businesses may attract customers from great distances while others primarily serve local customers.

Market research is an *ongoing* process of continually learning more about the district's economic condition and choices, taking action, and monitoring the results. Begin with a few simple measurements drawn from readily available information—then add new measurements as your program matures. Avoid the trap of waiting to use what you learn about your district's economy until you have gathered all the information that you think you might ultimately need. Instead, use information as soon as you get it to make better decisions, plan better promotional events, and strengthen local businesses. As you gather more information, continue to refine your activities.

Understanding Your District's Strengths

Before you can figure out what your district can *become*, you need to have a solid understanding of what it is. This may be the easiest part of the entire market

Should You Hire A Consultant?

Some organizations choose to speed the information-gathering and analysis process along by hiring a consultant to conduct a market analysis. There are numerous advantages to hiring a consultant: in particular, it saves time and gives you the benefit of their expertise. But there are drawbacks, as well: a good market analysis is expensive, and the market analyst might not understand your community and its preferences as well as you do. You will also need to select someone who has worked with historic commercial districts—not just with shopping centers.

Doing the entire market analysis, or just parts of it, yourself will give your organization a keen understanding of the

district's economic condition and prepare you to interpret changes in its performance. On the other hand, it is a time-consuming activity that can draw attention away from other priorities. Some districts strike a balance by conducting some parts of the market analysis themselves, while hiring a professional to help interpret the information.

You can successfully do this research. Many Main Street programs in districts of all sizes have done it on their own. For a guide through the market analysis process, refer to the National Main Street Center's *Step-by-Step Market Analysis* manual.

research process. Your strengths distinguish the district's competitive advantage over your competition. Some find strength in continuing to meet the basic consumer needs of the community by holding onto the strongest of their staple businesses. Others tout a strong destination business that can attract customers from a considerable distance. To be successful, Main Street programs need to move beyond their district's past glory, and through realistic self-evaluation, identify what their commercial strengths are (or can be) and develop them.

Niches

Within the context of market research, a niche is a market specialization—a clearly defined and tightly focused segment of potential customers (consumer niche) or products/services (business niche). Subsets of the larger marketplace, niches are often smaller markets not occupied or covered well by the mainstream. Since the competition may not be aware of them or want to bother with them, filling a niche presents a unique opportunity for your district. The goal is to find a niche for which you are well suited and not try to be all things to all people.

Strengthening your niche will allow you to develop your *market position*. Market position is essentially your market strength relative to the competition based on your *primary* consumer niche and/or your *primary* business niche. Establishing a strong market position involves matching a stable, or growing, consumer niche whose needs are not being met with a profitable business niche that offers products or services that satisfy those needs. Individual business owners, whether they are merchants or service providers, should develop their own market positions and market their strengths versus those of their competition. By promoting the advantages associated with their brand name, quality, expertise, and other attributes, local businesses will build customer loyalty and strengthen their position in the marketplace. For an exercise that can help you identify your district's existing niches, see www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.

A strong, memorable market position will prompt consumers to choose your district over the competition. Likewise, businesses may choose to locate in your district and investors may choose to invest there simply because they buy into Main Street's market position. For more information on market position as it relates to promotions, see pages 196–197.

- **Consumer Niches.** Downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts are often uniquely suited to serve one or more segments of potential customers. Those consumer niches can be clearly defined demographically (by age, income, gender, etc.) or psychographically (by personality, lifestyle, etc.). They can also be defined by geography such as “captive,” or nearby consumer groups including people who live, work and play in (or who travel through) the neighborhood. This is why some places are referred to as neighborhood-servicing districts—their niche is defined by their primary consumers who are local residents. The closer people are to a business, the easier it is for that business to capture them as customers. Providing more, and better, businesses for that audience is often a good way to develop commercial strength. For example, grocery stores, bakeries, hardware stores, pharmacies, fast-food restaurants, and dry cleaners are all convenience-oriented businesses whose customers usually live or work close by.
- **College student niches.** The Gunnison Main Street Program in Colorado made it a goal to better engage students at nearby Western State College. It developed the Western Orientation Weekend (WOW) promotion to welcome new students to the community by hosting concerts, activities, and giveaways in addition to promotional pieces highlighting local businesses and special discounts. The parents also received flyers promoting businesses so they could visit the downtown during orientation sessions. During WOW's first year, business owners reported their best sales of the year.



Gunnison (Colorado) Main Street developed its WOW (Western Orientation Weekend) event to introduce the new Western State College students and their parents to downtown Gunnison.



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(Left) Theaters often serve as “anchors” for arts and entertainment niches.

(Right) Personal service businesses are an important part of a neighborhood’s business mix.

- Business Niches.** Downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts often have businesses that offer clearly defined and tightly focused products and services that are unique in the area. Some niches are so strong that they attract customers throughout the region. New business niches can be created by recruiting or expanding existing businesses that meet the needs of customer groups who are currently underserved. Some common types of business niches include:

Arts and entertainment niches (including restaurants). The Downtown Frederick Partnership (DFP) was designated the managing entity of the downtown’s Arts and Entertainment District. As a result, it provides tax credits and other incentives to support arts-related businesses and entities. DFP works in partnership with the Tourism Council and several local arts groups to produce a variety of arts-oriented events, support public art programs, and create an entertainment district with several performances spaces and cultural centers (many of which are housed in rehabbed historic properties).

Boston’s Allston Village Main Street district boasts more than 50 restaurants, which are promoted through an annual dining guide, and the yearly “A Taste of Allston Village” festival.

Ethnic and cultural heritage niches. In Oakland, California, the Fruitvale Main Street program has stimulated development of a thriving collection of Latino businesses—restaurants, clothing stores, even a recording studio—and reduced the ground-floor vacancy rate from 40 percent to less than one percent since the late 1990s.

Professional service niches. Pittsburgh’s Lawrenceville neighborhood has developed a strong concentration of interior design-related businesses and home furnishings stores, many of which include working studios. Lawrenceville branded and cooperatively markets the neighborhood as the 16:62 Design Zone.

Personal service niches. The annual Bel-Hair Back-to-School Festival in Baltimore’s Belair-Edison Neighborhood features local hair salons that put on a hairstyle show to model the latest fall fashions and showcase this important service business cluster.

Home furnishings/improvement niches. Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin, is home to businesses that sell furniture, paint, fixtures, wallpaper, kitchen supplies, outdoor home accessories, fireplaces, and more. In addition to providing business assistance, the Main Street program holds an annual “Home and Hearth” event that promotes the home improvement niche. The event features demonstrations, deals, and prizes.

Bringing a Grocery Store to the Neighborhood

When the last grocery store closed in Boston’s Roslindale Village neighborhood in the late 1980s, few neighborhood residents would have predicted that the *Boston Globe* would one day call the district “the next cool hot spot in Boston.” The ground-floor vacancy rate was high, buildings were being vandalized, and residents were moving away.

The community, however, was determined to turn things around as well as attract a new grocery store. After failing in its bid to get a co-op grocery in the early 1990s, the Roslindale Village Main Street program spun off a separate organization to create the district’s own co-op. The new group raised money by seeking grants and by selling \$100 shares of stock to 600 neighborhood residents (who would get a 2 percent discount on their groceries); they bought a

building, issued a request for proposals, and located an independent grocer to operate the Village Market.

The Village Market, though, was just part of the district’s plan to better serve the neighborhood. Roslindale has retained almost all of the district’s ethnic bakeries (Greek, Italian, Middle Eastern, and others), has a farmers’ market, and has recruited more than a dozen new restaurants. The Main Street program has worked diligently to improve storefronts (including removing the threatening-looking metal security grates), organize neighborhood festivals, and upgrade sidewalks and street lighting. The district now boasts more than 160 businesses—almost all of them independent and locally owned—and a ground-floor vacancy rate below 5 percent.



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Locating businesses in your district is more an art than a science. Businesses like this yoga studio can thrive in an upper-floor space because most patrons enroll in regularly scheduled classes rather than dropping in on an impulse. Businesses that rely on customer interaction, like this hair salon, are appropriate for locating in ground-level storefronts.

Clustering Businesses

By Todd Barman

The process of strategically arranging/locating businesses to increase foot traffic and sales is known as “clustering”—a skill perfected by shopping mall managers. The goal is for customers to visit more than one business before leaving the district. A clustering plan would help businesses decide where best to locate in your district. This is more an art than a science. A good way to figure out if you have business clusters—even if they are small or still a bit weak—is to visually map out or model your business district. The location of a business on the street strongly affects its chances of success.

A commercial district could have a *business niche* without having a *business cluster* if those niche businesses are scattered throughout the district in a way that doesn't

generate customer traffic among them. Businesses located near others in the same or similar niche often do better than those separated from their peers; cooperation and friendly competition can lead to more customers for all.

For clusters to be truly effective, they must reach a critical mass. Some clusters evolve from existing businesses; others are developed deliberately. The following are three useful ways to categorize business clusters.

Competitive Clusters: Clustering based on similar business niches.

Competitive businesses sell the same *type* of products and services. There are some purchases—clothing, for example—for which shoppers like to compare prices, styles, varieties, and brands. For that reason, they like to shop for these items in different stores. Competitive businesses generally do better when clustered together, which is exactly what shopping malls do—they specialize in comparison shopping—and is a strategy you can use.

Your promotion committee will find that competitive clusters lend themselves to cooperative business promotions that market the ability to comparison shop within your commercial district. Even though the stores are competitors, it is in their financial interest to cooperate.

Complementary Clusters: Clustering based on related business niches.

Complementary businesses, by contrast, sell related products and services; they are not direct competitors. Some combinations of purchases just naturally go together, such as the bridal cluster that groups together everything a couple will need when getting married. Or home décor businesses that sell carpets, draperies, and appliances. Complementary clusters facilitate what may best be described as “power shopping,” which lets shoppers easily patronize stores that are near each other. While some big-box businesses are now attempting to capture all related purchases under one roof, commercial districts with complementary clusters of independent businesses have already proven successful.

Complementary clusters lend themselves to cross-business promotions that compel the customer to purchase all related products and services while shopping in your commercial district.

Compatible Clusters: Clustering based on consumer niches.

Compatible businesses may sell unrelated products and services but share customers. Consumers, like businesses, can be grouped according to commonalities. Customers who are similar demographically or psychographically will, in theory, have similar purchasing preferences. Compatible clusters include a concentration of businesses that appeal to a particular customer group, such as up-scale, senior-citizen, or discount-oriented customers. If your district has half a dozen businesses that cater to teens, for example, they will do better if they are located near one another than if they are scattered throughout the district—the teens will be more inclined to visit all of these stores if they are near one another

than if they have to search for them. Compatible clusters facilitate what may best be described as impulse shopping.

Compatible clusters lend themselves to consumer segment promotions that focus on connecting the targeted customer group with all the businesses in your commercial district that will appeal to them.

The most successful clusters have at least one anchor business that acts like a magnet and initially attracts customers, often from a large trade area, who will then ideally shop their way through the cluster. Corner locations have greater visibility than interior-block spaces. By definition, all clusters will make shopping more convenient because the businesses each customer wants will be close together.

Because property in downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts is usually independently owned, Main Street is at a disadvantage when it comes to clustering businesses. Unlike mall managers and shopping center directors, Main Street programs probably won't be able to actively cluster businesses through lease management (although some programs have established first right-of-refusal agreements with property owners to govern selection of future tenants and bought lease options to keep a space available until such time as a mutually agreed upon tenant is found).

The economic restructuring committee must be strategic, patient, and more creative than the competition and subtly influence where businesses are located. Two-way communication about the financial benefits of using a clustering plan is the key to success. Your district's existing businesses may be locked into their current locations for a while—but, when there are new vacancies or when you recruit or develop new businesses, you have an opportunity to strategically suggest the location most likely to help them generate traffic. Here are some tips:

- The economic restructuring and design committees can work together to create a pleasant streetscape of storefronts that encourages people to walk throughout the district. Storefronts without window displays, vacancies, businesses that aren't part of a cluster, parks, parking lots, poor lighting, buildings set too far back from the sidewalk, and other situations can cause people to lose interest or feel threatened.
- Locate automobile-dependent and destination businesses on the outskirts of the district and at transition points, which is where transit stops and parking lots/ramps should be located. Use business placement to encourage circular pedestrian movement, drawing people into and through the district so that they pass by stores that might not generate as much traffic on their own.
- Locate "impulse" shops that sell things like flowers or coffee and stores that attract recreational shoppers in heavily trafficked areas (near bus stops or employment centers) so that they benefit from the flow of people.
- Businesses that require planned or scheduled buying can thrive on upper floors and on secondary streets adjacent to the pedestrian core. Businesses that don't require face-to-face interaction with customers may be better situated on the periphery of the commercial district.

Understanding Market Demand

The next step in the market analysis process is to take a look at your area's market demand for various products and services, then determine how much of that demand is currently being met—and how much is *not* being met—by local businesses.

"Market demand," which is sometimes called buying power, means the dollar amount that people in your area are *likely* to spend on something, somewhere, in one year. The calculation is based on what average American households similar to those in your community spend, and on the number of households in the geographic area you are examining—your downtown or neighborhood, probably, and perhaps adjacent regional or metropolitan areas as well.

You'll need three basic tools to figure out the market demand:

- First, you will need the *Consumer Expenditure Survey*, a document produced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to track the way Americans spend money (www.bls.gov/cex).
- Second, you will need the *Census of Population* or another reliable source to find out how many households of different income levels, ages, and sizes are in the trade areas you plan to examine. Go to www.census.gov, navigate to "American Factfinder," then follow the online prompts to select data for the city, census tract(s), or zip code area you want to examine.
- Finally, make a list of the products and services for which you want to calculate market demand. Start with general categories, such as "apparel," "restaurants," and "home furnishings," and gradually become more specific as you go along.

With these three tools you are ready to get started. The formula for calculating market demand is:

**Market demand =
households x typical sales per household**

Example:

If there are 10,000 households in your neighborhood, and the average American household spends \$2,700 per year on groceries, then the **total market demand** for groceries in your district is \$27,000,000 per year (10,000 households x \$2,700 per household).

It is actually a *little* more complicated than that. Different households spend different amounts of money for things, depending on their income, size, age, and other factors. So, to be more precise, you will need to do



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Business owners use customer demographics and other market data to identify potential sales opportunities.

a separate calculation for every income group, age group, and so on, to more accurately reflect the demographics of your community.

Let's say that the *Census of Population* shows that your 10,000 households break out into the following income categories:

Income	# of Households
Under \$5,000	400
\$5,000-\$10,000	550
\$10,000-\$15,000	650
\$15,000-\$20,000	1,100
\$20,000-\$30,000	1,900
\$30,000-\$40,000	2,200
\$40,000-\$50,000	1,700
\$50,000-\$70,000	1,000
Over \$70,000	500

Then, let's assume the *Consumer Expenditure Survey* reports that the average American household in each of these categories typically spends the following amount each year on groceries:

Income	Groceries: \$/Year
Under \$5,000	\$1,703
\$5,000-\$10,000	\$1,790
\$10,000-\$15,000	\$2,200
\$15,000-\$20,000	\$2,437
\$20,000-\$30,000	\$2,598
\$30,000-\$40,000	\$2,834
\$40,000-\$50,000	\$3,176
\$50,000-\$70,000	\$3,582
Over \$70,000	\$4,023

For each household income category, multiply the number of households in your trade area by the amount of money a household in that category typically spends on, in this example, groceries.

Household Income	# of Hslds	x Sales per Hsld	=	Market Demand
Under \$5,000	400	x \$1,703	=	\$681,200
\$5,000-\$10,000	550	x \$1,790	=	\$984,500
\$10,000-\$15,000	650	x \$2,200	=	\$1,430,000
\$15,000-\$20,000	1,100	x \$2,437	=	\$2,690,700
\$20,000-\$30,000	1,900	x \$2,598	=	\$4,936,200
\$30,000-\$40,000	2,200	x \$2,834	=	\$6,234,800
\$40,000-\$50,000	1,700	x \$3,176	=	\$5,399,200
\$50,000-\$70,000	1,000	x \$3,582	=	\$3,582,000
Over \$70,000	500	x \$4,023	=	\$2,011,500
TOTAL potential sales for groceries				= \$27,940,100

The total market demand—\$27.9 million, rounded—is relatively close to the total number reached in the earlier example (\$27 million), but it reflects the actual demographic characteristics of the community a little more accurately. If you wished to do so, you could repeat this exercise using other demographic characteristics, such as household size, ethnicity, or region of residence. The estimates will vary somewhat; for the purposes of market analysis, you should use the most conservative (meaning the lowest) estimate when determining whether there is enough unmet market demand to support a new business or to help an existing one expand. Repeat this process for other products and services.

Once you have calculated estimated potential sales for all the categories you want to examine, compare *market demand* to *actual sales* to see if your district is capturing all the available dollars local residents and other district visitors have to spend. You will sometimes hear this referred to as “sales gap analysis”—literally, measuring the gap between potential sales and actual sales.

Gap (or surplus) = Potential sales - Actual sales

You can find information on actual sales in your community in several places. In many states, the state office of taxation or revenue collects and publishes sales data annually; it is usually listed by city and county and sometimes by census tract. If your state does not publish this data, or if you live in a state that doesn't charge sales tax, such as Delaware or Florida, you can get information from the *Census of Retail Trade*, published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census every five years (www.census.gov). You probably won't find information on actual sales in your neighborhood, so you'll need to calculate the average sales per business, by business type, for your city, then multiply this by the number of businesses, by business type, in your district. If you think your district's businesses are performing below average businesses in your city, you may want to subtract 20 percent or so from your estimate of actual sales.

Sales Gap Example

\$195,000,000	Total clothing store sales in the city
÷ 600	# of clothing stores in the city
= \$325,000	Average sales/clothing store
x 8	# of clothing stores in the district
= \$2,600,000	Estimated sales for district clothing stores
- \$4,800,000	Potential sales (neighborhood residents)
= (\$2,200,000) GAP	

In this example, there is a sales gap—meaning that residents are (probably) spending more on clothing than the district’s eight clothing stores are selling.

If there are more potential sales than actual sales, your district is most likely losing sales; there *might* be an opportunity to capture more dollars, either by strengthening existing businesses or developing new ones. Likewise, if there are more actual sales than potential sales, your district is attracting customers from other areas and thereby capturing more dollars than its own residents generate—in which case your district might be “saturated.”

Of course, there are always exceptions. For instance, there could be an unusual reason why people in your community don’t buy certain products, no matter how much potential demand appears to exist on paper. On the other hand, having a surplus doesn’t necessarily mean that your district cannot support additional businesses of that type. Business niches are perfect examples of situations where a Main Street district’s market position allows it to draw customers from far beyond the downtown, neighborhood, or even the city’s typical trade area, thus outstripping the demand generated by residents alone.

Thus, a sales gap analysis alone won’t give you enough information to reach reasonable conclusions about the new types of businesses your district can support and how many of each type might be viable. You need to gather firsthand information from consumers.

Understanding Consumers

Until now, we’ve been talking about gathering information from secondary sources—the Census of Population and the Consumer Expenditure Survey, in particular. Now, it’s time to get information directly from the people who visit (or might visit) your commercial district. Before you begin your primary research, review all the data you’ve collected so far. Get your committees to discuss the data and decide whether additional information is needed. Clearly define what you hope to learn. If your sales gap analysis suggests enough market demand to support a new restaurant, for instance, you’ll want to ask residents within the district’s trade area which restaurants they currently patronize.

Use the following ways to ask a specific group of people to answer a specific question or questions about when, where, why, how and for what they shop.

- **Focus groups.** Focus groups are brief (e.g., 90 minutes), facilitated, small-group question-and-answer sessions. They can provide rich, qualitative information from a small number of people and a deeper personal perspective on a topic. Convene groups of eight to 12 people who represent a particular customer niche—for instance, people who work in the district; teenagers; Asian Americans; or another characteristic, such as people who think the district’s prices are too high. During the focus group, an experienced, neutral facilitator asks participants questions about their perceptions of the district, shopping preferences, and other attitudes and opinions.
- **Surveys.** Surveys are more structured than interviews and involve more people. They provide less quantitative information and are useful when you want to collect comprehensive consumer information. For tips on conducting surveys, see www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.
- **Intercept surveys.** In an intercept survey, you stop people on the street and ask them to answer brief written questions. By selecting people randomly, you help ensure that their responses represent everyone visiting the district. Intercept surveys provide a good profile of current users of your district: who they are (demographically speaking), what they like (and don’t like) about the district, where they park, where they shop for various items, when they visit the district, etc. The best intercept surveys have two volunteers working together because that helps with comfort level and logistics: one volunteer can ask someone to complete a survey, while the other keeps track of the number of people walking by or the passage of time.
- **Distance surveys.** Mail, Internet, and phone surveys fall within this category. For a distance survey to reflect the characteristics of the entire population, participants should be selected using random-sample methodology—meaning that every person in the survey area has an equal chance of being selected to participate. Again, the survey should be brief.
- **Analysis.** Analysis involves collecting data and organizing it according to criteria you develop to determine some trend or pattern. Point-of-purchase customer tracking systems, zip code tallies, and license plate surveys all fall within this category.

Any of these information-gathering techniques, if administered properly, will provide valuable information. Most communities would be best served by using a combination of techniques. A distance survey could provide general consumer information, while data from an on-the-street intercept survey will allow you to compare and contrast users of the district with the general population. Focus groups are intended to “focus” research on specific topics; for example, they can explore the attitudes

CASE STUDY

Livermore, California

Livermore Downtown, Inc.: Female Focus

By attending a workshop and doing market research, Livermore (California) Downtown, Inc., Executive Director Rachael Snedecor learned that females between the ages of 30 and 60 make 80 percent of the buying and dining decisions for their households. To tap this demographic locally, Livermore Downtown, Inc., (LDI) launched its Female Focus initiative in 2005. LDI assembled a group of 50 women and gave them a homework assignment: to do as much of their holiday shopping downtown as possible and to make notes about their impressions of the business district. They were asked to note the businesses they liked, explain why they didn't go into certain shops, and jot down other impressions. Following the shopping blitz, a focus group was assembled to collect their findings.

Using that information, the program educated the city's economic development office, commercial realtors, property owners, and investors about the needs and desires of Livermore ladies. LDI was able to convince property owners that renting to businesses that met these needs would result in a supported, and therefore, rent-paying tenant. The information also made a compelling recruitment tool. Since then, Livermore's downtown has become home to a couple of new clothing boutiques, a shoe store, a few home décor/gift shops, new art galleries, coffee shops, several new restaurants, and a dozen other new businesses. In 2007, 80 percent of the new businesses were locally owned, and 80 percent of those were female owned.

This information was a valued complement to the community's storefront improvement loan and grant programs, rent assistance program for targeted businesses, and the huge streetscape project. Not only have many of the focus group ladies become Main Street volunteers and avid shoppers, but Livermore has won many California state awards, as well as being named the 31st best place to live by *Money* magazine!

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of a specific consumer niche in-depth. They aren't meant to substitute for a survey. Each technique will require different commitments of time (staff and volunteers) and money to conduct/tabulate. You could conduct a survey every few years, while using focus groups or analysis to gather information as needed during the years in between.

Synthesizing Market Information

There is no "correct" format for synthesizing the market information you gather. Use the process that works best for your organization: discussing key questions in small committees; holding a series of facilitated meetings for the entire economic restructuring committee; or dividing up responsibilities among individual program participants are a few methods. The critical element is to methodically sift through all the information and to answer these 10 sets of questions:

1. Which consumers visit the Main Street district most often? Why do they visit it? What do they like most, and *dislike* most, about it?
2. Who are the consumers who live in the neighborhood and surrounding areas but *don't* visit the district on a regular basis? What do they dislike about it?
3. Where do neighborhood residents of different ages, incomes, and ethnic characteristics shop for various goods and services? What shopping areas predominate for each type of product or service?
4. Are there significant differences in attitudes toward the district among people of different ages, incomes, or ethnicity? Do people who work or live in the district perceive it differently than people who visit the district less often?
5. Are there any categories of retail goods or services that appear to be underserved in the neighborhood? In other words, do neighborhood residents seem to have the ability to spend more money on certain products or services than they are actually spending?
6. Conversely, are there any categories of retail goods or services that appear to be *overserved*? In other words, is the community generating higher sales of certain goods or services than it might be expected to support?
7. Is there any correlation between a particular demographic group's attitudes about the district and that group's shopping patterns? For instance, people may *want* to shop in the district more often than they are able to, due to limited store hours or difficult access. On the other hand, people may be

avoiding the district because they perceive it to be unsafe or unattractive or because they think it has high prices or poor quality merchandise.

8. What are the district's strongest businesses? What do these businesses have in common?
9. Does the district have any unique strategic advantages—something that sets it apart from other commercial areas and makes it unique in the regional marketplace? For instance, it might be located near a major traffic-generator, such as a factory, a popular tourist attraction, or a highway; it might have an unusually popular business or a large number of workers; or it might be the site of a historic event.
10. Which of the survey findings surprised you the most? Why?

Crafting a Market-based Business Development Strategy

After each of these 10 questions has been thoroughly discussed and the market analysis team has developed answers for each of them, put together a brief written document *in the format of a business plan*—the same basic format a business would use. Include the following “chapters”:

- **Executive summary.** Write a concise overview of the entire business development plan (although this should be the first chapter, you'll probably write it last).
- **Description of the district.** How would you describe the district's physical appearance, accessibility, businesses, the demographic groups that visit it most often, public perceptions, and strategic advantages? Be sure to discuss the district's strengths and weaknesses (both real and perceived).
- **Competition.** Who is your district's competition? Why? How would you characterize each competing commercial area in terms of business strengths, demographic strengths, and consumer perception?
- **Market opportunities.** For which products or services does there appear to be unmet market demand? For what products or services does there appear to be a surplus of actual sales over potential sales?
- **Objectives.** What are the revitalization organization's economic development goals? Be as specific as possible—for instance, “increase daytime sales to district workers by 20 percent over the next three years,” or “reverse negative consumer perceptions about the variety of goods and services available on Main Street.” Back up each objective with hard facts.

- **Strategy.** What specific steps will the revitalization program pursue over the next three to five years to achieve its goals?
- **Finances.** What will it cost the district revitalization program to carry out the activities outlined in its plan?
- **Management.** Who are the key organizational partners involved in the district's revitalization? What roles will they play in implementing the business plan? What are their capabilities? Are they lacking any skills that they will need to find through new partnerships or through hiring new staff or consultants?

Activities in all four points of the Main Street approach—design, organization, promotion, and economic restructuring—must be incorporated into your market strategy. Strengthening commercial activity involves more than simply expanding existing businesses or recruiting new ones; it also means correcting tangible problems that deter people from shopping in the district, changing attitudes and perceptions, and distinguishing the Main Street district from all other commercial districts in the region. Eliminating concerns about crime, for example, generally requires concerted work in all four points of the Main Street approach. In this way, the business development strategy cross-cuts the entire Main Street revitalization process, engaging all four primary committees and gradually shifting the revitalization program's focus from committee-specific activities to integrated objectives carried out by the four committees working together.

The information you gather about your district's economy, demographics, and market potential will have many applications beyond business recruitment and development. Two of its most beneficial uses are for developing effective promotions and monitoring your program's success. Strategic promotions will reinforce your marketing image and attract your targeted consumer groups. See Chapter 21, Promotion: Building Excitement, for more information. Your district's reinvestment statistics are another important tool to build support among local government officials, potential funders, the media, and various stakeholders. Refer to pages 22-23 for more information on benchmarking.

Diversifying Main Street's Uses

So far, this chapter has discussed techniques for retail and small business development in Main Street districts—they are important but far from the only components of a district's economy. As the district's primary ground-floor use, retailing is its most highly visible component; and, as the most important element of Main Street's economy, it is almost always the best starting point for examining the district's development possibilities.

But almost all Main Street districts also have significant opportunities to develop other building uses as well. Diversifying Main Street's economy is an important strategy for commercial districts for a number of reasons.

For instance:

- Apartments, offices, and small industries provide additional customers for the district’s retailers. Converting vacant or under-used space to a new use provides more income for the building’s property owner, easing rent pressure on the ground-floor retail space.
- Small industries generally provide greater economic returns per worker to the neighborhood than retail businesses do.
- Some districts no longer need as much retail space as they once did, and it may be unrealistic to fill all available retail spaces with new stores. Remember to group retail businesses together and to avoid interspersing retail clusters with non-retail uses.

While there are methods for estimating market demand for new housing and office space, very few (if any) apply to historic Main Street districts. Traditional housing and office market analyses rely on the assumption that new housing units and office spaces are more or less homogeneous—that a “Class A” office space in one location, for example, will be comparable to a “Class A” office space somewhere else. Most Main Street spaces, however, are one-of-a-kind and the key to marketing them is their uniqueness.

Housing

Housing has always been a central component of Main Street’s economic map—not just housing in the residential areas surrounding the business corridor, but housing above storefronts in buildings on the district’s main commercial streets. Many of the nation’s earliest merchants lived above their businesses in storefront buildings.

Lots of literature is available on the process of creating new, freestanding housing in older neighborhoods, and most Community Development Corporations (CDC) have experience developing new houses in older neighborhoods. But little has been written about creating housing in older commercial buildings—above storefront spaces, for instance, or in “white elephant” buildings, like warehouses and factories. While many of the tools are similar to those used to develop new, freestanding housing units, creating housing in older commercial buildings has some special challenges:



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- Banks usually offer loan products for housing and loan products for commercial development, but not loan products that combine both uses.
- Zoning codes written with single-family housing in mind often require a certain number of on-site parking spaces for each housing unit—even in dense neighborhoods well-served by public transit, where residents do not typically own cars.
- Life-safety codes designed for new construction can be difficult to apply to older and historic buildings.
- Federal programs designed to stimulate housing development usually work best for large-scale projects and multiple units—not for small-scale, one-at-a-time units developed over storefronts.

There are several questions to consider when your program decides to stimulate upper-floor housing development:

- Are most of the development opportunities for small numbers of units (e.g., two apartments over a storefront) or for larger numbers of units (e.g., conversion of multi-floor warehouses to dozens of apartments)?
- For small-scale projects with only a few units, are the buildings’ current owners interested in developing the housing units themselves, or will you need to find a developer? If it’s the former, what kinds of guidance, assistance, or incentives will they need? If it’s the latter, will the developer want to acquire the properties or work for one or more property owners on a fee basis? Will it be cost-effective for the developer and property owner(s)?
- Is there likely to be more demand for rental units or for condominiums?
- Is there demand for both market-rate and affordable units?
- Are there city, state, or federal programs that can assist with development of small numbers of units?

Creating upper-floor housing and converting unused warehouses and other peripheral buildings into new housing units require a great deal of persistence in tailoring lending programs to accommodate Main Street buildings, working with lenders to craft new programs for older commercial districts, and building partnerships with zoning and building code officials to ease the process of developing housing in older commercial buildings. Fortunately, many Main Street programs are overcoming these obstacles and creating new housing units in upper-floor spaces, “white elephant” buildings, and new construction. For example:

- San Diego’s North Park Main Street Program played an active role in developing a new condominium on the site of a former Rite Aid drugstore and a bakery. The new development—La Bohème—will contain more than 200

residential units and 15,000 square feet of ground-floor retail space when completed. Forty-five of the new units will be affordable units at 100 and 120 percent of area median income.

- A developer working with Detroit’s Wayne State University to create new housing and retail space in the neighborhood will be setting aside a portion of the rent collected on apartments leased to recent graduates. After three years, the graduates can apply the rent set aside to down payments on the units they have rented, if they so desire.
- Working in conjunction with the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the Boston Society of Architects’ Housing Committee, the citywide Boston Main Streets program sponsored a six-month planning program in the Grove Hall neighborhood. Called “Housing on Main Street,” it identified opportunities for upper-floor apartments and new freestanding units and helped property owners and other program participants develop the skills and find the resources needed to create housing in the district.

In recent years developers, lenders, and federal agencies have begun to recognize that compact, mixed-use districts—like historic and older Main Streets—are among the most beneficial forms of development. Programs like the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Homeownership Zones, HOPE VI, and HOME and the U.S. General Services Administration’s Good Neighbor Initiative provide incentives for cities to develop mixed-use, mixed-income new development. A growing number of communities, like San Diego’s North Park neighborhood, are taking advantage of opportunities to replace the suburban-style, single-use retail buildings of the past 30 to 50 years with new, Main Street-friendly mixed-use development. The federal HOME program is particularly beneficial for creating small numbers of housing units in the upper-floor spaces of Main Street districts. See www.hud.gov for information on its affordable housing programs.

Offices

Offices are another excellent use of vacant and under-used upper-floor spaces on Main Street. Upper-floor offices put workers near restaurants, postal services, office supply stores, and other services they need.

Many of the same obstacles that affect upper-floor housing development also affect upper-floor office development—building and zoning codes, for example. Again, the key is to build partnerships with organizations and agencies that can streamline the process and systematically identify and chip away at the barriers.

Small Industry

Like housing, small industry has traditionally been part of many Main Street districts. While many industries—like tanneries and blacksmiths—have long since disap-

Cool Space Locator

The Cool Space Locator, a Pittsburgh company that began as part of Pittsburgh’s East Carson Street Main Street program, helped businesses find unique office space in older and historic Main Street buildings.

The company found that few professional offices were locating in the city’s historic neighborhood Main Street districts. Staffers spoke with a number of corporate decision makers in the area and found that most of them used real estate brokers to find office space and that the brokers were showing them space out in the suburbs, not in the historic neighborhood commercial districts. Cool Space Locator served as a broker of one-of-a-kind spaces in Main Street district commercial buildings.

peared, many Main Street districts retain clusters of small industries often related to their forbears. Others have developed new industries over the years—both Philadelphia’s Frankford neighborhood and Providence’s East Broad Street district have clusters of architectural metal crafters (like wrought-iron craftspeople), for instance. Some areas, like Paducah, Kentucky, have strong artist and artisan niches, while many other districts have high-tech industries, often spurred by high-tech zoning overlay zones that provide tax credits and other incentives to high-tech businesses that locate there.

Light industries not only bolster the district’s retail and restaurant sales, but also provide opportunities for specialized retail businesses and offices that serve those industries. And a neighborhood’s proximity to larger industries can create opportunities for smaller, related industries in the district. A luggage repair business located in East Boston’s Main Street district, for instance, because of the district’s close proximity to Boston’s airport.

Working with Existing Businesses

When it comes down to it, retaining your district’s existing businesses is easier than recruiting new ones. While it is tempting to rush into a business recruitment program, your district’s current businesses are the front line in the battle to strengthen the commercial area. They have established relationships with shoppers, they know the market, and they are committed to the community. An effective business assistance program helps your district’s businesses expand their sales and do better a job of meeting customers’ needs.

This is not to say that business recruitment and development shouldn’t be an important part of improving your commercial district’s dynamics. Working with talented entrepreneurs and seeking other businesses to relocate or open up another location in your district are also important opportunities to reinforce a niche and build clusters. The next sections will look at both aspects of strengthening businesses.

There are two ways a business can make more money: it can sell more merchandise or services to current custom-

ers, or it can sell current merchandise or services to more customers. Your program can help in a number of ways:

Build relationships. Property and business owners have to trust the Main Street program to support their interests—a trust that will be earned over time. Until they trust you, people won't accept your "expert" advice. If the economic restructuring committee can build a good relationship with business and property owners, it can tailor counseling and assistance programs to best meet the owners' needs and satisfy their personal interests while working toward meeting revitalization goals.

Sometimes business assistance means creating connections among businesses. It is not uncommon to find that business owners on the same street don't interact with each other. Chances are they are so busy running their own businesses that they seldom see each other, let alone collaborate on joint efforts. In order to facilitate regular interaction among downtown stakeholders, Downtown Manhattan (Kansas), Inc., uses free software to distribute regular e-newsletters and manage an e-mail list. Neighboring business owners who previously didn't communicate regularly with each other can now interact daily. The Main Street program has been able to get them talking, build a stronger community, and get stakeholder feedback quickly on various issues.

Share information. The market information your Main Street organization gathers is invaluable to your district's businesses. The more business owners can learn about their customers—and potential customers—the greater their chances of increasing sales. Armed with this information, they can make changes in the merchandise they carry, the services they provide, the places they advertise, the design of their window and in-store displays, their store hours, and a host of other business practices—maybe even moving the business to a more advantageous location within the district.

Use multiple communication channels to get this information to the business community. Because independent business owners spend lots of hours on the job (well, at

least the successful ones do), it may not be possible to rely solely on meetings to share information. A number of revitalization organizations have found that summarizing small bits of information on a single sheet of paper, then distributing a different summary to businesses every few weeks, makes it easy for people to digest market information.

Share ideas. Main Street businesses thrive on new, creative ideas that they can incorporate into their operations. By sharing good ideas, you can help them find ways to expand sales. For example, the Ellensburg (Washington) Downtown Association joined the Ellensburg Public Library to launch a cooperative project called Brown Bag Business Basics. This monthly book review seminar series became extremely popular with local businesses owners who met during their lunch hours and discussed ideas for improving their businesses. There are many ways in which businesses can apply creative ideas, such as:

- Finding ways to bring products and services to customers, rather than waiting for customers to visit the business. For example, a merchant could use a webcam to show merchandise to online customers.
- Adding new products or services to augment established product lines or build on unmet market opportunities. In downtown Seguin, Texas, for example, a group of friends opened Chiro-Java, a chiropractor's office and Internet café under one roof.
- Collaborating to market services with other Main Street businesses that have similar customers. In downtown Livermore, California, BeWellYoga, a yoga studio, teamed up with nearby restaurants for Yoga Date Night. Couples were able to attend a relaxing yoga session before heading out to dinner while the yoga studio provided babysitting services.

Many Main Street businesses have increased their profitability by becoming more than just a storefront. Instead of simply selling merchandise, they give customers

Your Main Street program is in a unique position to help strengthen the district's existing businesses by sharing information, creating networking opportunities for the business community, coordinating joint-marketing opportunities, and making suggestions for new products or services that could meet the needs of local customers.



an experience. Experienced-based retailing has a lot of potential to increase the competitive advantage of historic commercial districts. The Beauty Bar in Mt. Holly, New Jersey, sells a variety of skin care products but also has The Blending Lounge, a unique space that groups can reserve for special perfume blending parties complete with music and truffles. Another business called RVP 1875 in Story City, Iowa, is more than just a furniture store in a historic building on Main Street. It specializes in using period tools and techniques to make 19th-century furniture styles by hand. Because of this unique niche, the store is able to offer tours, classes, and hands-on demonstrations, which cost participants anywhere from \$2 donations for tours to \$250 for workshops.

Market existing business assistance programs and create new ones. Many business improvement resources may already be available in your city or region. The economic restructuring committee should compile a list of these resources, serve as a clearinghouse for the information, and market the resources. By learning what assistance is already available, you can create new business improvement resources to fill the gaps. Below are some types of programs that you can create if none already exists:

- Matching grants for small-scale façade and sign improvements; business startups, transitions, and spin-offs; and business improvements and expansions.
- Low (or no) interest loan pools and revolving loan funds for major building rehabilitations.
- Tax abatement programs.
- Free or below-cost buildings, land, or rent.
- Supplemental equity capital (i.e., angel investment funds targeting local entrepreneurial ventures).

In order to maintain high-quality businesses and buildings, assistance programs should be tied to design and/or business standards and guidelines.

Facilitate access to expert advice. Chain retailers and franchises generally get plenty of guidance from their national corporations, but independent businesses have few sources of information and advice. Your organization can help level the playing field by facilitating access to expert advice. Contact your coordinating program to find out what expertise they have on staff or arrange for a business specialist’s visit to your community. For districts that have universities nearby, look into opportunities to bring faculty and students to your businesses as part of internship programs or special projects.

Many Main Street organizations put together business assistance teams of professionals and other people with specific skills to provide *pro bono* guidance to business owners. Retired business people often make excellent business assistance team members; they have time to commit to the process, they know the community well,



The owner of the Ellensburg Pet Center participated in the Brown Bag Basics business owner book discussion club in Ellensburg, Washington.

and they have extensive experience. See more information on the Small Business Association’s Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) program in the Resources section. Be careful not to involve professionals with active business interests that might create a conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict.

Businesses generally need help reaching customers, connecting with complementary businesses, and improving their operations and physical environs. Your organization can help business owners learn more about topics such as:

- Improving visual merchandising—window displays, in-store layout, point-of-purchase displays—in order to maximize merchandise visibility and improve store efficiency.
- Setting up and maintaining accounting systems, particularly as the business grows and accounting demands more of the business owner’s time.
- Complying with zoning regulations; tax laws; the Americans with Disabilities Act; and other local, state, and federal regulations.
- Designing advertisements, advertising campaigns, in-store promotional events, and collaborative promotional events with other district businesses.
- Partnering with product suppliers and manufacturers to tap into co-op advertising dollars.
- Developing strategies for selling products and services online, designing effective websites, and capturing new and existing customers online.
- Identifying business-to-business sales and service opportunities.
- Preventing shoplifting and improving in-store security.
- Evaluating and training in-store staff.
- Improving customer service.
- Staying on top of emerging retail and demographic trends that might affect their businesses.

The economic restructuring committee can help reduce the overall cost of business consultations by negotiating group rates and coordinating visits with multiple businesses, or it could create a business improvement grant program. A grant could cover part or all of the cost or offer a 50/50 match of the consultation/visit or continued training at seminars or conferences.

Help businesses in transition. Sometimes profitable businesses close simply because the owners want out and believe their only, or most profitable, option is liquidating. It can be devastating for a Main Street district to lose a successful, long-established business because the business owner is ready to retire.

Your Main Street program can play an active role in keeping a business open by finding a buyer or, if necessary, by finding a way to incorporate the store's product and service lines into other businesses within the district. While each business situation will differ, some of your options include:

- Connecting the business owner with a business broker;
- Using the national Main Street network to locate a buyer for the business;
- Working with financial institutions to line up financing and create financial incentives to facilitate the sale of the business;
- Working with the business owner and employees to explore the possibility of an employee purchase program;
- Offering trainings or resource materials on transitioning a business; and
- Preparing marketing materials for the business owner to distribute to potential buyers.

Your organization can help store owners prepare for a transition by encouraging them to get their operations in order. They can do this by writing down their business processes. Ironically, many of the most successful small business owners do well because they are good at adhering to a formula or plan, not because they're creative. That's one of the reasons why chains and franchises are often so successful. Main Street business owners should organize their financial statements as well as document their promotional efforts over the last three to five years. Business owners should also keep good employees in mind—employee purchasing programs are an option for a smooth transition.

Bringing New Businesses to Main Street

New businesses add dynamism to Main Street districts. They keep the district fresh, forward-looking, and responsive to emerging market trends. Developing and recruiting

new businesses, though, is a long-term process that requires an organized infrastructure. There are essentially two ways to bring a new business to a Main Street district:

- Work with local entrepreneurs, financial institutions, and other partners to develop completely new businesses; and
- Find an existing business that is interested in relocating to the district or opening a branch there.

Both methods share some common needs—like financing, management training, and information about the demographic and economic characteristics of the district—but involve different techniques.

First, the common needs. An active business development and recruitment program requires the following.

A good building inventory. You'll need current information on all the available spaces in your district—the owner, square footage, lease terms, amenities, whether the spaces are available for purchase, etc.—so that you can quickly match a prospective business with a space that meets its needs. Many Main Street programs list properties available for rent or purchase, including specific details of the space, contact information, and photos.

Current information about the district's economy, customers, and opportunities. The first question prospective business owners will ask you is, "Why do you think my business would do well in your district?" They'll be interested in your program's marketing activities and the district's amenities, but what they really want to know is, "How large is the market, how much money am I likely to make there, and what can you do to help me succeed?"

A good business owner will want to know as much as possible about the district in order to make a decision. Be prepared to provide:

- A demographic profile of the kinds of people who visit your district, including the percentages of people of different incomes, ages, and ethnic groups;
- Times of day and days of the week that attract the most shoppers;
- Specific businesses that generate the most customer traffic and a demographic profile of the kinds of customers who visit each of these places;
- The district's total estimated retail sales for at least the past three years—divided by retail categories, if possible, and hopefully showing a steady increase in sales in most categories; and
- Estimates of the region's "buying power" for the products the prospective business sells—in other words, how much money people in the region are likely to spend on those products and services.

Be sure to sell your community by sharing perks for local business and property owners. For example, the Downtown Newark Partnership in Delaware markets its \$1,500 grants for utility expenses to targeted new businesses, and Main Street Galion in Ohio generates interest in its district by teaming up with the chamber of commerce and the Ohio Business Institute to have a business consultant visit the Main Street office once a week to advise small business owners and entrepreneurs.

The Rochester Downtown Development Authority in Michigan produced an online video that shows vibrant images of the downtown and asks business owners why the community is good for business. Your marketing materials need to show prospects the potential for success.

Make your resources, incentives, and market research data available in print and online. The basic package should include the information listed above, along with a current business directory, a map of the district, and information about your organization.

You can create a virtual business recruitment package by putting this information online, as well as producing a professionally designed portfolio with all relevant information and brochures. Have the portfolios handy for people who drop by your office as well as sending them to your partners, local and regional economic development groups, and real estate agents. If the information from your market analysis is stored in your computer in an easy-to-access format, you can print out customized information with details about a business niche or potential customers for a prospective business owner.

Posting your district's market analysis information on your website can help your recruitment efforts, especially if you register keywords for some of the basic characteristics that distinguish your Main Street district. If a business owner or real estate agent is searching the web for compatible business locations, popular search engines will read the keywords and direct them to your homepage.

A pipeline of potential businesses and entrepreneurs. One of the most frustrating aspects of Main Street business development is timing the availability of business space with the supply of potential new businesses. It can take years for a business willing to locate in your district to be able to do so—and it can take years for a prime retail space to become available. Build relationships with several prospective business owners and stay in contact so you can inform them when a space becomes available.

Seed funding and ongoing, long-term business financing. Work with banks, Small Business Development Centers, and Community Development Corporations to put together a range of financing packages and seed funding incentives to support new businesses. Lending to start-up businesses can be risky, but you can reduce the risk for lenders by seeking grants for loan guarantees, for instance, or by helping ensure that the prospective business is well capitalized and has a solid business plan in place. Remember that the federal Community Reinvestment Act requires banks to make loans and other investments in the communi-

ties where they do business—so, banks should be willing to work with you and other community organizations to create programs that support start-up businesses.

A supply of trained workers. One of the greatest challenges small businesses face when opening a new location is finding qualified staff to operate the business. The owner simply can't be in two places at once. Consider partnering with local job training programs to develop a core of people with retail management skills (drawing from existing district retail sales staff, perhaps) so that when a prospective business owner expresses interest in opening a new store your district, you can introduce him or her to a few management candidates.

Business mentors. The business assistance team you assemble to help existing businesses will be equally valuable in working with new businesses. It's a good idea for a member of the business assistance team to meet with the owners of new businesses weekly for three or four months, then monthly thereafter for at least three years (the period of time in which new small businesses are most vulnerable).

Business resource library. Collect publications, trade magazines, and other business-related resources for a complete library in your Main Street office. Cover both the basics and advanced resource materials (e.g., publications on developing a business plan, marketing on a shoestring, etc.).

Developing New Businesses

The process of developing new businesses has many aspects in common with the process of recruiting existing businesses to your district. New businesses need technical assistance, financing, information about the district, help in finding the right location, and mentoring. The primary difference is that you will be cultivating individuals who might open a new business, rather than targeting established businesses.



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New businesses contribute freshness to a healthy business mix that keep customers coming back to see what is exciting and new on Main Street.

There are several places where you can look for people interested in opening a new business in your district. Many prospective entrepreneurs contact a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for information and assistance. There are SBDCs throughout the country, most housed within a college or university. Be sure to familiarize the staff of your city's SBDC with your district's business development plans and with any resources you can offer, and stay in close contact with them—they can be an excellent source of referrals and contacts.

Another place to look is at area colleges, community colleges, and universities. Most of these institutions have active career planning and placement programs to help new graduates and alumni find jobs. Meet with the staff of the career planning offices of local colleges to tell them you are looking for prospective business owners and that you have programs in place to provide training, financing and support.

For more information on ways to develop new businesses, read "Becoming an Entrepreneurial Support Center" online at www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.

Recruiting Existing Businesses

When business owners decide to relocate or to open an additional location, they do so for a variety of reasons. They might be looking for a district with better traffic volume, or with customers more likely to patronize their business, or with better district-wide promotional activities than their current location. They might be looking for opportunities to lower their operating costs—lower rent or labor costs, for instance, or better financing. If they are currently in a shopping mall, they might be eager to stop paying the "common-area maintenance" fees that malls typically charge. They might want a building that offers more space or a better configuration or better access to parking, a loading area, or public transportation. They might be looking for a district that is cleaner or safer or that offers better



Ribbon-cutting events are a public celebration of a new addition to the business community that convey the message that business owners are valued and supported.

services. They might want to be surrounded by businesses that complement them better, or they might want to be next to a "magnet" business that attracts lots of customers.

Finding out what would motivate a business owner to move to or open an additional location in your district is one of the keys to recruiting success. Find out what he or she needs to make the business more successful—and, if your district can offer that, you have a good chance of persuading the business owner to locate in your district.

Consider your own district before you start looking elsewhere for existing businesses. Local business owners already know the district. They already have established working relationships with financial institutions, property owners, local government, and other businesses. Owning more than one business in the same district also makes it possible for the owner to share storage space and shuffle sales staff from one store to another as needed.

So, how does one recruit businesses anyway? Business recruitment has both active and passive components.

CASE STUDY

Winston-Salem, North Carolina *"Restaurant Row"*

In 2000, the city of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, created a loan program to encourage development of new restaurants on several blocks of its historic downtown. Designed to bolster the city's efforts to create an entertainment district downtown and to foster nightlife, the loan program offered low-interest 15-year loans to restaurant owners, with loan repayments deferred for two years. For restaurants that opened on one of several designated blocks, interest rates were three percent; five-percent loans were available to restaurants locating in other designated sections of the downtown. The city provided 37.5 percent of the loan, with two local banks providing the remaining 62.5 percent.

The city used \$1.2 million in federal Community Development Block Grants to fund its portion of the loan program. The city's goal was to provide financing for 10 new restaurants, with the hope that at least six of the new restaurants would succeed (nationally, about 50 percent of new restaurants fail within their first few years). The program ultimately provided loans to nine restaurants before the program ended in 2007.

Two of the nine restaurants failed, but the rest appear to be succeeding. The portion of the loans repaid to the city will be used for other community development programs in Winston-Salem, including housing rehabilitation. The program met its Community Development Block Grant obligations to HUD by creating 75 jobs for low- and moderate-income individuals. And, when the program ended in 2007 there were more than 700 residential units downtown, up from 400 in 2000, with another few hundred under construction.

“Active” recruitment means seeking out potential businesses. But many Main Street businesses are recruited “passively,” when a prospective business owner simply walks in the door and asks for information about your district. For example, Bob and Linda Metzger decided to move from their long-time home in Alaska with the goal of opening up a coffee roaster and café. They sought a new home specifically in a district with a Main Street program in place. They opened Badger Brothers Coffee and Internet Café in Platteville, Wisconsin, because they felt their investment dollars would go farther there because a dedicated group was focused on enhancing the downtown.

Your program is likely to be better prepared for active recruitment—but passive recruitment is just as important. Be sure you have programs in place and materials ready and be ready to drop everything to show a new prospect around the district. A Main Street executive director in North Carolina keeps keys to all the district’s vacant properties in her office; that way, if a prospective business owner drops in, she can show off available spaces right away.

Something to keep in mind before you get started is that some businesses have special needs. Toy stores like communities with elderly residents—grandparents are their top customers. Clothing stores prefer to locate in districts that have several other established, successful clothing stores. Restaurants want districts that offer good trash collection and security services. Before beginning an active recruitment program, talk with your Main Street business owners and find out what sorts of special needs they have—then be sure you can offer these to your prospects.

Recruitment Steps

There are a number of ways to recruit a new business. Most programs, though, include these steps:

1. **Develop profiles of desired businesses.** Write a brief profile of each type of business you would like to recruit—what it sells, for instance, and what types of customers it targets.
2. **Send out scouts.** Ask volunteers to visit other neighborhoods and nearby cities to look for businesses that match the profiles of those you would like to recruit (this will be a popular volunteer job!). They don’t have to make contact with the business owner—but they should jot down notes about the business and explain why they think it would be a good fit for your district.
3. **Visit business owners.** When a business appropriate for your district has been identified, contact the business owner and make an appointment to visit at a convenient time. During the visit, explain that you have heard good things about the business and that they might find it profitable to open a new store in your district. More importantly, find out what the business owner would need (bigger space? lower rent?). It’s a good idea to bring one of your district’s successful retailers to the meeting, as well—nothing

Avoid Conflicts of Interest

While the idea of earning a broker’s fee for the revitalization program by helping district property owners recruit new business (or residential) tenants is tempting, don’t do it. At best, it could make your organization liable for an Unrelated Business Income Tax (UBIT). At worst, your organization could be sued (business brokers must be licensed), and it could lose its nonprofit, tax-exempt organizational status. Moreover, collecting fees for finding tenants would almost certainly create conflict with real estate agents and business brokers in your community. It’s better to partner with property owners and realtors in your district to identify prospective tenants—but doing so should be a service the revitalization program provides for free.

is as persuasive as a peer talking glowingly about the district and about how successful his or her business is.

4. **Follow up with specific, helpful information.** After the visit, follow up with a letter and information that addresses the needs and questions the business owner raised.
5. **Stay in close contact.** As mentioned earlier, it can take years for a business to be ready to open a second location—and it can take years for the right location to open up. Contact the prospective business owners every few months and send additional information from time to time, so that they know you are still interested. If your organization has a newsletter, add them to your distribution list.
6. **Bring business prospects to your district.** Give them a driving and walking tour. Show them prospective sites that you have previewed. Share the history of nearby businesses (particularly within their niche) and why businesses similar to theirs have closed (if any). Introduce them to prominent local merchants and bankers and provide a list of local business service professionals and qualified contractors for rehabilitations. Take them to a lunch/dinner meeting with key “influencers.”
7. **Celebrate the opening.** When the business is finally ready to open in your district, introduce the owner to his or her new neighbors and to the community by organizing a ribbon-cutting (always nice to have the mayor there, if possible), sponsoring an open house, and arranging for coverage in local news media.

The process of recruiting a national retailer is, of course, somewhat different. In most instances, national retailers will ask you to contact a business broker who will work with them on your behalf. But, if the retailer is willing to work with you directly, it will want detailed information about the district, including:



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Should you work with a broker?

Business brokers serve as agents to find businesses (usually retailers) to fill vacancies in your district. While this may sound like a good idea, there are some drawbacks.

- **Brokers work mostly with chains.** Very few brokers have good networks of independent businesses. Also, many brokers have exclusive relationships with particular national retailers. A broker who has a relationship with Starbucks, for example, will not help you recruit a rival coffee shop.
- **It's expensive.** Business brokers typically charge about five percent of the rent the new business will pay for the next five years. So, for a new business whose monthly rent will be \$3,000, you'll pay about \$9,000—up front. Brokers will often charge more if you want independent businesses, rather than chains, because the process is more time consuming and involves more due diligence.

If you want to recruit a national retailer, though, you will almost certainly have to hire a broker; most national retailers only work with brokers.

- Pedestrian traffic counts in the district—by location, time of day, and day of the week;
- Retail sales volume, by retail category;
- Demographic profile of current shoppers;
- Inventory of the district's businesses;
- Information on available financing;
- Photos, profiles, and lease terms of available properties; and
- The district's annual promotion calendar.

If you are interested in attracting a chain store or franchise to your district, contact the corporation's site location division and provide a brief overview of your district's market statistics, including those listed above, and ask if your district meets their basic criteria. In addition, if you are trying to attract a franchise, the franchise company will want you to assist in finding prospective franchisees.

To better understand the balance between chain stores and independents, read "Understanding Commercial Gentrification" at www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreets.

Economic restructuring is the component of the Main Street approach that works toward finding viable economic uses for commercial buildings, both new and historic, which helps keep structures occupied with businesses and people coming to the community. Market research will help the economic restructuring committee support a strong mix of thriving businesses as well as provide valuable information that the entire organization will use to make educated decisions about projects and strategies necessary for meeting revitalization goals.

RESOURCES

Websites

US Small Business Administration: The SBA offers a wealth of training and technical assistance to small businesses. www.sba.gov

These programs include:

- **Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE).** One of the SBA's most valuable programs, SCORE pairs retired, experienced business people with small businesses that need assistance.
- **Certification programs.** SBA offers several programs that certify small businesses in categories where the government is committed to creating opportunities—minority-owned, women-owned, and small disadvantaged businesses (SDBs), in particular. It also offers a special certification for businesses in “HUBZones” (Historically Underutilized Business Zones). In all instances, certification provides special opportunities for small businesses to sell their products or services to federal government agencies and federal contractors.
- **Women's Business Centers.** SBA operates almost 100 Women's Business Centers throughout the United States. These centers offer a wide range of programs to help women open and operate successful businesses. The Boston Main Streets program has a longstanding partnership with the Boston area's Women's Business Development Center, which conducts training programs for the city's neighborhood Main Street managers and business owners and helps participating Main Street programs recruit new businesses and find resources for existing ones.

The SBA also offers loans, but, frankly, most Main Street retailers will usually do better with local banks, which are required by the federal Community Reinvestment Act to reinvest in the neighborhoods in which they conduct business.

Small Business Development Centers: Affiliated with (but not technically part of) the SBA, Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) provide a broad range of technical assistance to small businesses, including start-up assistance and help maneuvering through the SBA's certification and loan programs. Many prospective business owners contact a Small Business Development Center for information and assistance. Located throughout the country, most SBDCs are housed in colleges or universities.

Be sure to familiarize the staff of your city's SBDC with your district's business development plans and with any other resources you can offer, and stay in close contact with them—they can be an excellent source of referrals and contacts. Use the SBDC locator on www.sba.gov to find a center near you.

Associations of independent businesses: There are numerous national associations for independent businesses, and most of them provide valuable information, procurement, and networking opportunities for small businesses. Among them:

American Booksellers Association's "BookSense" program: www.bookweb.org/booksense

American Independent Business Alliance: www.amiba.net

American Specialty Toy Retailers' Association: www.astratoy.org

The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies: www.livingeconomies.org

Council of Independent Restaurants of America: www.ciraonline.org

Independent Community Banks of America: www.ibaa.org

National Association of Theater Owners (NATO): www.natooline.org

National Community Pharmacists' Association: www.ncpanet.org

National Cooperative Business Association: www.ncba.coop

National Grocers' Association: www.nationalgrocers.org

The National Business Incubator Association: Provides trends research, resources, and success stories on business incubators. www.nbia.org

Articles

“Andersonville: Where Local Businesses Come First,” by Andrea L. Dono, *Main Street News*, November 2008. Explores Andersonville's successful “Buy Local First” initiative.

“Averting Disaster: Asset Protection for Main Street Businesses,” by Genny Dill, *Main Street News*, December 2006. Explains the type of insurance coverage small businesses need.

“Focus Groups,” by Josh Bloom, *Main Street News*, March 2006. Explains when and how a program should conduct a focus group.

“Main Street Business Assistance Round-up,” by Andrea L. Dono, *Main Street News*, December 2005. Describes innovative and creative strategies several Main Street programs have devised to help their local independent business owners.

RESOURCES, continued

Articles, continued

“Market Analysis: Going it Alone,” by Andrea L. Dono, *Main Street News*, January/February 2006. Case study on how Jamestown, N.Y., conducted its market analysis research without hiring a consultant.

Profitable Solutions series by Tom Shay. Discusses retail management in *Main Street News* issues: October 2008, January 2009.

“Protecting Locally Owned Retail: Planning Tools for Curbing Chains and Nurturing Homegrown Businesses,” by Stacy Mitchell, *Main Street News*, February 2004. Regulatory strategies and planning tools to help small business owners prosper; looks at economic impact reviews, land-use rules, limiting chains and big-box stores, and more.

“Recruiting Sustainable Businesses,” by Diane Laird and Rick Ferrell, *Main Street News*, August 2007. A primer on creating a business inventory, recruiting businesses, and balancing the right mix of businesses.

“Servicing the Service Sector,” by Todd Barman and Sheri Stuart, *Main Street News*, October 2006. Ways to include service businesses, not just retail, in the revitalization effort.

Shop Talk series by Margie Johnson. Discusses business improvement in *Main Street News* issues: January 2008; March 2008, May 2008, July 2008, September 2008, December 2008.

“Surveys,” by Josh Bloom, *Main Street News*, April 2005. A primer on conducting surveys and designing survey tools.

Books

Step-by-Step Market Analysis: A workbook for commercial district business development, by Kate Joncas (National Main Street Center, 2004). Steps for volunteers to follow when collecting market data.

Fill-in-the-Blank Business Recruitment: A workbook for Main Street Business Development, by Kate Joncas (National Main Street Center, 2000). Explains how to develop a recruitment program and ways to achieve the right business mix.

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REAL ESTATE AND THE MAIN STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT

By Kennedy Lawson Smith

It is virtually impossible to separate the economics of a commercial district and its real estate.

All economic activities require real estate and nearly all—the exception, perhaps, being street vendors—need buildings. Even a business selling its goods and services through the Internet needs a building at least to house the computer. Furthermore, there is a direct, interdependent relationship between the building—and its economic value—and the economic activities within the four walls.

The public sector's return on its “investment” in a commercial district is also related to the area's real estate—directly through property tax revenues, building permits, utility hook-up fees, and special assessments; and indirectly from sales taxes, business license fees, franchise taxes, water and sewer charges, and business income taxes.

The vast majority of buildings in commercial districts are owned by private-sector users or investors. For a business owner who also owns his or her building, the most significant fixed asset on the balance sheet is that piece of real estate. For an investor who owns a commercial property, the economic health of that asset is intimately related to the economic health of the business district, whether the owner recognizes that or not—and many don't.

The primary funding source for some mature Main Street organizations is a Business Improvement District (BID) or the equivalent, which is usually structured on a property value-based levy. Regardless of whether or not your Main Street program receives BID funding, a big part of your organization's work is helping property owners make appropriate design improvements to their buildings to protect the district's historic fabric and contribute to the desirability of the community.

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So all three sectors—private, public, and nonprofit—have a vested interest in maintaining the economic health of real estate within the commercial district. But the appearance of economic vitality is at least as important in a commercial district as the reality. Vacant or poorly maintained buildings send a less-than-subtle message that “business isn’t so great here.” So do buildings with deferred maintenance, boarded-up structures, vacant lots, and low-quality alterations.

Thus, frequently on the agenda of the business district management organization is the question, “What should we be doing about the real estate here?” This chapter will help Main Street board and staff members answer that question.

Basics of Real Estate

Real estate is a particular challenge since it has characteristics shared by no other asset, including:

- Real estate is fixed in place (unlike a government bond or gold coins).
- Every parcel is unique (unlike, say, shares of Microsoft, where one share of stock is, by definition, the same as all others).
- Real estate is finite in quantity (Will Rogers was right—we’re not making any more land).
- Real estate is necessary for every human activity (not true of any other asset).
- Real estate is a longer term asset than virtually any other (and the land portion of the real estate will outlast any of its possessors).

When the term real estate is used, it generally implies both land and any structure built upon the land. For investment purposes, however, the land portion is assumed to have an infinite life, while the building has a “declining” life. This characteristic is shared with other types of investments. An oil well or a coal mine, for example, is also a declining asset—that is to say as oil or coal is extracted, the asset diminishes in value until it reaches a point where the supply is exhausted and the economic value is essentially zero.

But one important difference exists between these “declining” assets and a building. With proper maintenance and periodic reinvestment (renovation or rehabilitation), the productive life of a building can be repeatedly extended. This is proven by the sheer number of buildings 50, 100, and even 200 years old that are still in active use and economically productive.

From a real estate perspective a building is said to have two life expectancies: 1) the remaining physical life (how long the building will continue to stand); and 2) the remaining economic life (how long the building will generate sufficient net income to justify continuing to



A new awning, tuck pointing, and new upper-floor windows turned this declining asset into a shining asset in Charles City, Iowa.

Images © Jim Davis

own it). There’s an old saying in real estate that “far more buildings are torn down than fall down.” What this means is that the remaining economic life—or is thought by the owner to be—shorter than the remaining physical life.

This reality of real estate is why Main Street organizations become concerned about the economic viability of their commercial buildings. Some buildings in the district: need expenditures to remedy deferred maintenance; require substantial rehabilitation; or face demolition.

So real estate should be an agenda item on the Main Street program’s work plan.

Why Get Involved

Ask anyone to name the three most important things in real estate and they’re likely to respond— “location, location, location.” But consider what that means. The cliché isn’t “roof, walls, and floor.” The three most important things actually don’t have anything to do with the building at all. Real estate is peculiar as an asset because its economic value does not come from four walls and a roof. It comes from the building’s context—its location, in other words, factors generated external to the property lot lines.

An individual property owner may claim, “my property is my castle.” But the economic value of that “castle” is generated by the investments of others, including the city, other property owners, institutions, transportation agencies, and business owners. The economic value of a parcel of real estate is created not by that parcel but by its context. Conversely, the condition, occupancy, and use of an individual property directly affect other properties near it.

You may look at an empty building and think, “that property owner isn’t making any money,” but he or she isn’t the only one suffering a loss. Adjacent property owners, nearby businesses, and city hall all suffer the consequences of the action, or inaction, of an individual property owner.

That is the core reason why your Main Street organization may get involved in real estate. It is not an independent asset but an interdependent one. Buildings that are poorly maintained, vacant, and deteriorating are liabilities, not assets, to the entire commercial district. If a vacant, or underused, building that is poorly maintained and physically deteriorating adversely affects both the owner’s financial statement and the economic health of the business district, why, then, doesn’t the owner reinvest? There are two possible reasons—the market or the owner—and each is discussed below.

Understanding the Market—Cost and Value

Two words are often used as synonyms in real estate—cost and value. While both are important concepts in understanding real estate, not only are cost and value not synonyms, they have decidedly different meanings.

In somewhat oversimplified terms, cost is the sum of the dollars that will have to be spent between an idea—“I think I’ll buy that building and turn it into a coffee shop”—and a completed project.

Value is what the property is worth to someone else—potential third parties in the marketplace—who will buy or rent the property when the project is completed. *Cost* and *value* are driven by different variables.

Cost is composed of the acquisition price, construction costs, professional fees, construction financing, and miscellaneous costs. Construction costs are typically identified as *hard costs* (building construction labor and materials) and *soft costs* (fees, financing, professional services, etc.).

Value is more complex, but is affected by anticipated operations (rents, vacancy, expenses); financing (amount, interest rate, loan term); equity perceptions (risks, investment alternatives, tax benefits); and market expectations (anticipated appreciation, liquidity, management intensity).

More simply, *cost* is what will have to be spent; *value* is what can be obtained from the market.

If *value* exceeds, or is expected to exceed, *cost*, private capital will generally act without further action by the public or nonprofit sector. Graphically, that situation might be represented as follows:



If *value* is greater than *cost* and if what the private sector is proposing to do is consistent with the overall economic development strategies of the district, your Main Street organization doesn’t need to do anything but stand back and cheer them on. Ultimately that should be the long-term goal—private capital making real estate investments without subsidy.

In many situations, however, the opposite is true—the *value* of the completed project is less than the *cost* of the project itself.



It doesn’t matter if this situation results from acquiring a building and rehabilitating it, buying a vacant lot and constructing a new building, or renovating a building already owned. If the owner/investor anticipates that the *cost* exceeds the *value*, the project will need incentives before it can be started. The difference between *cost* and *value* is called the *gap*.



The existence of a *gap* is often the reason that a local development entity gets involved in a real estate project. Usually, the organization will identify or create incentives to help close the gap. In some cases, however, the organization might become a direct participant in the development, either on its own or in partnership with a private-sector entity.

In real estate, the market generally works well, although not perfectly. The private sector won’t undertake certain activities without incentives or assistance of some type. Examples might be: affordable housing, business incubation, community meeting spaces, parking facilities, and others. Why won’t the private sector, by itself, invest in those activities? Simple—the cost is greater than the *value*.

While, as noted above, there are many variables that affect *value*, the most critical nexus between *cost* and *value* is the rental income the property can generate. While real estate analysis is a technical field that can include extremely sophisticated mathematical techniques, it is possible to establish some general parameters that will apply to most buildings in most places most of the time.

The table, “Estimating the Gap,” on page 96, is not a mathematically exact calculation of how large a gap might be; instead it provides an “order of magnitude” estimate your Main Street organization can use to figure out the size of a potential gap.

Across the top are a series of project costs. These are expressed in dollars per square foot and should include hard costs, soft costs, and acquisition cost, if any. Down the left hand side is a range of rents, expressed in dollars per square foot per year. At the juncture of the anticipated project costs

Estimating the Gap (per square foot)

Project Costs ¹									
Rent ²	\$25	\$40	\$50	\$60	\$75	\$90	\$100	\$125	\$150
\$5	\$0	\$5-15	\$15-25	\$25-35	\$40-50	\$55-65	\$65-75	\$90-100	\$115-125
\$8	\$0	\$0	\$0-10	\$5-20	\$20-35	\$35-50	\$45-60	\$70-85	\$95-110
\$10	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0-10	\$5-25	\$20-40	\$30-50	\$55-75	\$80-100
\$12	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0-15	\$5-30	\$15-40	\$40-65	\$65-90
\$14	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0-5	\$0-20	\$0-30	\$25-55	\$50-80
\$16	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0-10	\$0-20	\$10-45	\$35-70
\$18	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$	\$0-\$10	\$0-35	\$25-60
\$20	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0-25	\$10-50
\$22	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0-15	\$0-40
\$24	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0-5	\$0-30
\$25	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0-25
\$30	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

1. Dollars per square foot include acquisition, hard costs, and soft costs. For a long-term property owner who plans to rehabilitate a building and continue to own it, use construction costs only.

2. Dollars per square foot per year.

and the anticipated annual rents will be a range of numbers representing the gap, if any, that the project is likely to have.

Of course the particulars of the lease, the interest rate available at the time, the strength of the local real estate market, and numerous other factors will affect the gap. But this table represents a starting point for estimating the incentives or other gap-closing techniques necessary for the desired project to go forward.

According to this table, then, if a project is anticipated to cost \$125 per square foot, including acquisition and construction costs, and the rent available in the district is likely to be \$16 per square foot per year, then the expected gap would be between \$10 and \$45 per square foot. If the market is very strong, with properties rapidly appreciating and rents rising, the gap would be at the lower end of this range (or perhaps even a bit below). If, on the other hand, the revitalization process is just beginning, there is a high degree of vacancy, and interest rates are rising, the gap could be toward the higher end.

Why Building Owners Don't Invest

The existence of a gap is probably the most common reason that rehabilitation or new construction does not take place. But sometimes property owners don't reinvest, even though it would appear to be in their best financial interest to do so. Why wouldn't they rehab their buildings under those circumstances? There seem to be three primary reasons:

1. **They don't have the money.** Often people assume that because a person owns a parcel of real estate that he or she must have other financial resources as well. Sometimes this simply is not the case. "Land rich and cash poor" is not an uncommon situation.

2. **They don't know what to do.** A business owner may own his or her building, but that individual's expertise is probably in business, not real estate. A property owner who is a landlord may be good at recruiting tenants and collecting rents, but may know little about redevelopment issues. Rehabbing a building is not a simple process. Thinking about what should be done, who the architect and general contractor should be, how to finance the improvements, how to negotiate new leases to recover the additional investment, and dozens of other decisions may simply be beyond the capacity of the current owner.

3. **They don't want the hassle.** This may be the most common reason of all. Collecting rent from an existing long-term tenant who doesn't complain about much because the rent hasn't gone up in five years is a relatively hassle-free way to invest in real estate. Pondering all of the management decisions involved in rehabilitating a building and taking the speculative risk that things in the end will be financially better is challenging and stressful.

The role of your Main Street organization in these instances should be:

- To discover confidentially which of the above is the owner's situation;
- To figure out a way to provide the current owner with what he or she is missing; and/or
- To facilitate new ownership.

At the very least, posting a current listing of available properties online and telling the stories of new property owners on Main Street in your newsletter will help poten-

tial owners see the advantages of buying property in your district. (Check with your real estate licensing board before listing properties on your website if you are working with real estate agents instead of property owners to compile the list.) Create a package of incentives available in your area and other information to make the process as easy as possible for property owners to improve their properties so they enhance the district. Rehabilitating a building can also benefit the owner in many ways. Improvements can:

- Extend the property’s *economic life*.
- Achieve a better quantity, quality, and durability of the income stream from the property (i.e. more rents, better tenants, longer leases).
- Lower the *capitalization rate*.¹ (A rehabilitated property in good condition will be assigned a lower capitalization rate than a property in deteriorating condition. A lower capitalization rate results in a higher value for the property.)
- Make the property eligible for more favorable financing (lower interest rate, longer loan term).
- Eliminate operating inefficiencies.
- Decrease operating expenses.
- Turn unused areas into productive space.
- Improve the net to gross ratio.
- Establish a new depreciation schedule.
- Instill pride in the property owner.
- Eliminate embarrassment from owning a dilapidated or deteriorating building.
- Prevent badgering from bankers, other property owners, tenants, other businesses, and the Main Street organization.

Commercial building improvements can also help lower vacancy rates and spur reinvestment in adjacent properties, which are important indirect benefits for a property owner, as well as the entire district.

When to Get Involved

Chronologically, real estate development generally has five identifiable phases, each with its own challenges and activities. Those phases are:

1. Capitalization rate is the relationship between value and net operating income, which is usually expressed as a percentage. In a revitalizing community, a lower capitalization rate shows that the market values the future appreciation of the area more.



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- **Predevelopment.** When you or someone else has an idea for a project, the first step is to assess resources and local investment to determine if the project can be successful. This is a lengthy process that involves time, resources, partnerships, study, and expertise to decide if a project should be pursued or abandoned. Cost analysis, financing, a detailed development proposal, and a plan for the building’s reuse must all be factored into the decision to develop the property. Gaining control of the site—via development rights through a disposition agreement with the city or perhaps through an option to purchase, for example—generally happens during this phase.
- **Acquisition.** Acquiring the property should be postponed until the project’s feasibility is determined. Many nontraditional developers erroneously believe acquiring the property is the first step in the process. If possible, unless a structure is threatened with demolition or is in need of immediate stabilization, gaining control of the property should come first, and acquiring it should come after.
- **Construction and development.** After the property has been acquired, get out the hammer and nails and start marketing the space to potential tenants or buyers or begin planning for long-term ownership.
- **Operation.** Create a plan to manage and maintain the property. This stage includes marketing and managing tenants, drawing up lease agreements, drafting a maintenance schedule, managing the budget, and all other aspects of operating a property.
- **Disposition.** When it is appropriate—when market conditions are right and the proper buyer has been identified—the owner can dispose of the property.

Depending on the needs of the project, a local Main Street program could be involved in any or all of these phases. However, there is also another way to consider when to get involved. Look at situations where some type of participation in the development process might be particularly critical. These situations are:

- When the private sector, by itself, will not act;
- When the private sector, by itself, cannot act;
- When there is a need to influence the character, use, scale, or timing of the transaction;
- When the proposed use is an extension of a public benefit purpose;
- When the project would serve as a catalyst for additional activity; and
- When a nonprofit entity is needed as a conduit for funds.

While all of those situations occasionally arise, by far the most common scenario is when the private sector will not or cannot act on its own. When is that the case?

- When no financing is available;
- When no acceptable financing is available;
- When there is high actual risk;
- When there is high perceived risk;
- When the property cannot be acquired;
- When the scale of the project is either too small or too big for the interested developers or the owner;
- When the relationship between the risk involved in the project and the anticipated return is out of balance;
- When significant public benefits are an integral part of the project;
- When the property is not producing net revenue;
- When general economic conditions are unfavorable;
- When there are abnormally high transaction costs;
- When other available investment alternatives are more attractive; and
- When the project cost exceeds the project value.

In each of these instances, without the active involvement of the public and/or the nonprofit sector, the project most likely will not go forward.

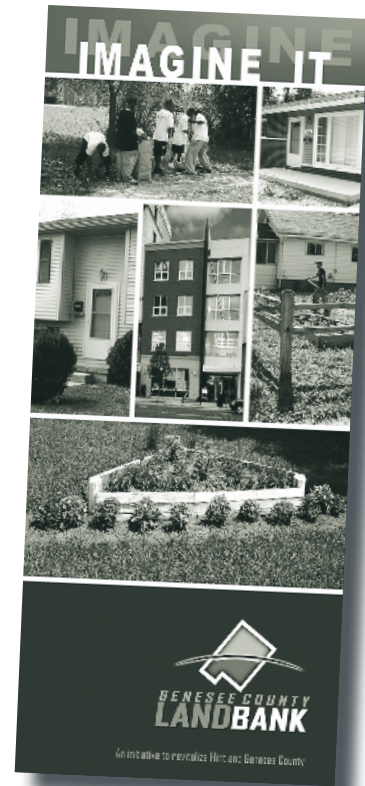
How to Get Involved

While there are dozens of ways for nonprofit organizations to become involved in the real estate development process, the most common are the following:

1. As an advocate (acting as a public proponent for the project);
2. As a packager (putting together the incentives and perhaps the property itself for development by someone else);
3. As a passive partner (taking on an ownership or other financial-reward capacity, but leaving the management, development, financing, and other activities to be handled by the other partner(s). The other partner(s) could be private entities, nonprofit organizations, or both);
4. As an active partner (directly assuming one or more roles necessary for the development to take place); and/or
5. As a developer (assuming all responsibilities of ownership, development, financing, management, etc.).

Your Main Street organization needs to consider which of these roles, if any, it should assume according to the consequences each role could entail. Issues to consider are:

- Financial risk;
- Political and/or community credibility risk;
- Short-term financial returns;
- Long-term financial returns;
- Staff time required;
- Staff expertise required;
- Board time required;
- The influence your organization's role would have on the use of the property;
- The financial capital required; and
- The political capital required.



The matrix below compares the various development roles with the consequences of those roles.

There is no way to absolutely determine which role is most appropriate. But before your Main Street program decides to become involved in real estate development, the roles and the consequences need to be carefully considered.

Often, a Main Street board will conclude, “We don’t have any money and we don’t have any real estate development expertise, therefore we shouldn’t be involved in real estate development at all.” But this is looking too narrowly at what the organization might “bring to the table” to help a private-sector developer. By getting involved with Main Street real estate, your organization can take control over the fate of historic assets and find appropriate tenants who advance your revitalization goals. The list of ways to get involved is nearly endless but could include:

- Pre-development planning and evaluation;
- Community outreach;
- Political contacts;
- Advocacy for stricter absentee landlord regulation;
- Acquisition assistance;
- Preliminary design work;
- Tenant identification;
- Assistance in structuring the transaction;

- Coordination of design work;
- Tenant recruitment;
- Assistance in securing equity;
- Assistance in securing debt;
- Assistance in securing incentives;
- Assistance in lease negotiation;
- Construction supervision;
- Rental of the property; and/or
- Long-term management.

The level of involvement will depend on your organization’s human and financial resources, the needs of the project, the importance of the development to the overall strategy of the district, and other factors.

Development Incentives

One of the most useful ways that a Main Street program can participate in a prospective real estate development is by identifying and facilitating incentives. This is an area where the organization can build expertise and knowledge that a local property owner, and even a sophisticated developer, will find extraordinarily valuable. But

CONSEQUENCES OF VARIOUS DEVELOPMENT ROLES

	Advocate	Packager	Passive Partner	Active Partner	Developer
Financial risk	Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Political/community risk	Moderate	Moderate	High	Very high	Very high
Short-term returns	None	None	Low	Low to moderate	Moderate
Long-term returns	None	None	Moderate	Potentially high	Potentially high
Staff time	Moderate	High	Moderate	Very high	Very high
Staff expertise	Low	Moderate	High	Very high	Very high
Board time	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High	Very high
Influence on use	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High	High
Financial capital	Low	Moderate	Depends	Very high	Very high
Political capital	Moderate	High	Moderate	Very high	Very high

the starting point is to remember that the purpose of incentives is to close the gap between cost and value.

Your organization should find out what is available and what is needed. Talking with area developers will reveal what types of financing they have found most helpful and what types have been most difficult to obtain. Area lenders can share if they have any special loan products for Main Street property as well as identify any financing needs in their Community Reinvestment Act plans. Local government officials can explain what types of financing they currently offer, and what they might be willing to offer in the future.

Literally hundreds of incentives have been created over the years to encourage real estate development. Virtually all of them fall into one or more of eight categories, according to the way they assist a project:

- Reduce costs (e.g. sale of property for \$1 in exchange for commitment to redevelop);
- Reduce cash required (e.g. grant for building code compliance);
- Increase income (e.g. rent subsidy);
- Reduce expenses (e.g. property tax abatement);
- Reduce risk (e.g. loan guarantee);
- Improve financing (e.g. contingent subordinate debt provided²);
- Improve the investment environment (e.g. establishment of targeted investment area); and
- Improve the informational environment (e.g. providing market studies to potential developers).

Incentives can come from any of the three economic sectors—public, private, and nonprofit. Public-sector incentives can come from the federal government (e.g. historic rehabilitation tax credits), from the state government (e.g. sale tax waivers on building materials), or from the local government (e.g. creation of a tax increment financing district).

For additional examples of incentives such as sales tax sharing and the transfer of development rights, visit www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet to access “Development Incentives.”

How to Become the Developer

Many Main Street programs are assuming a development role in real estate. When the private sector won't act but the commercial district needs key

redevelopment projects to keep demolition at bay or to spur other investment, becoming a developer often is the best decision. Don't confuse a financially unfeasible project with one that simply has a financing gap. Projects must be viable, “bankable” projects.

If you don't know anything about being a developer, and if you don't feel you know much about real estate in general, don't let that be an insurmountable barrier. Here's one inspiration: Historic Clarksville, Inc. (HCI), the Main Street program in Clarksville, Missouri, a tiny town of 490 people, bought its first property for \$459 in 1988, and subsequently acquired 19 of the 31 contiguous downtown structures. At first, many people didn't take the group's vision seriously; they wondered why anyone would want to buy crumbling real estate in a sagging economy. But HCI proved its ability to get things done by quickly turning a vacant lot into an attractive park after getting Southwestern Bell to donate the land to the city.

Soon donations began to pour in. Ralph Huesing, HCI's program manager, had spent a lot of time building relationships, informing people about historic tax credits, and soliciting contributions from people who stood to benefit from the revitalization. For example, Huesing convinced an area electrician to donate his services because that money would come back to him in future rehab work. HCI worked with an architect made available through the Missouri Main Street Program to rehab the buildings and follow the Secretary of Interior's Standards.

Over time, the private sector initiated several projects on its own. HCI worked with the state historic preservation officer (SHPO) to develop a façade easement policy and write legal agreements. The group also worked with local banks to modify plans and find creative ways to make building sales happen. Read “Main Street as Developer: Salem, New Jersey,” on www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet for the full case study.



Dilapidated and economically depressed in the 1980s, downtown Clarksville, Missouri, has seen a remarkable resurrection thanks to the efforts of Historic Clarksville, Inc., which served as the catalyst for redevelopment by purchasing and rehabbing downtown real estate.

2. These are loans that rank lower in priority than other loans and therefore would get paid out after the other loans in case of default, if your project meets certain lender goals (like affordable housing, for example).



Lessons Learned from a Main Street Program Developer

Stand Up For Salem (SUFS) in Salem, New Jersey, was appointed the official redeveloper of municipal-owned, vacant properties and incorporated a separate nonprofit for development purposes. Guided by the goals from a master planning process, it began taking on exciting mixed-use projects downtown. To fund its development work, SUFS created a real estate fund by selling properties it acquired to private developers, securing grants, splitting developer fees, and charging property management fees.

The group offers these tips:

- Conduct a real estate assessment and get recommendations from an expert;
- Take a property inventory and document each property;
- Work with lawyers and other professionals to help you close the deals;
- Develop a positive relationship with the city and study city codes;
- When working with contractors, don't be afraid to ask questions and clearly define your expectations. Give contractors feedback on their performance;
- Be the good guys—let the city play “bad cop”;
- Don't put off projects for too long—as buildings age they turn into more complex projects; and
- Try to find an end use before buying a property so that you can build the cost of acquisition into the overall project.

Staying true to a comprehensive approach, HCI also identified four business niches that worked well in Clarksville (artists/artisans, antiques, nature, and history) and only sold or leased space to appropriate businesses.

Conclusion

Not every Main Street program should be involved in the real estate development process. And certainly Main Street needn't be involved in every potential project. But it is likely that your organization has the primary responsibility for improving the economic health

of the district, and real estate development needs to be an essential component of that strategy. Without the active participation of Main Street, many projects that ought to be done won't get off the ground. Every program should at least ask itself: is now the time to become more active in real estate development?

Most importantly, if we truly want our commercial districts to be economically and culturally vibrant, it is imperative that they be among the easiest places for people to develop new businesses, rehabilitate historic buildings, and construct new, compatible infill buildings.

How to Be a Successful Loan Candidate

By Krista Kendall

Projects take money to happen. Among the dozens of financing tools and incentives available for a development project, applying for a loan might be on your to-do list. The best way to be a successful loan candidate is to strengthen your lender's confidence. One tool that will increase your success in securing money—whether for a loan or other funding mechanism—is writing a sound business plan. Developing a business plan for your real estate project will make you look credible to lenders, as well as other stakeholders and partners, and will get you organized.

Start your plan with the pre-development phase and end with selling or managing the space once the project is complete. The business plan will not only be your road map to completing the project, but will also include information that lenders and other funders seek—even though each funding source will have its own underwriting parameters.

When you apply for a grant, you increase your chances of success by targeting your request to meet the grantor's requirements or goals. When applying for a loan, you need to assure the lender that you can repay it. The lender will assess the project's risk and you must be prepared to provide information that backs up your vision. Be prepared to share:

- Your vision and the end goal of the project;
- The economic viability of the project;
- The capacity of the developer and development team;
- Collateral for the loan;
- The source of loan repayment;
- The financial capacity of your organization;
- Other funding sources;
- The debt coverage; and
- All other information that the lender requests.

RESOURCES

Websites

National Trust Community Investment Corporation (NTCIC): This subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation makes equity investments in real estate projects that qualify for federal historic tax credits and when available, state historic and New Markets Tax Credits. Online tools include the basics about historic tax credits, an interactive online tax credit calculator, and an interactive rehabilitation credit guide that walks you through the stages of using tax credits: qualifying, earning, and redeeming. www.ntcicfunds.com

National Trust Loan Fund (NTLF): NTLF specializes in predevelopment; acquisition; mini-permanent, bridge, and rehabilitation loans for residential, commercial, and public-use projects. Eligible borrowers include revitalization organizations or real estate developers working in designated Main Street communities; local, state or regional governments; and for-profit developers of older and/or historic buildings. Read case studies and get checklists in the Resources section of www.PreservationNation.org.

Articles

“Control Your Real Estate, Control Your Destiny,” by Jay C. Jurgensen, *Main Street News*, February 2005. Learn real estate finance, how to put together a development team, and how to make the right decisions during the pre-development phase.

“Historic Clarksville, Inc.: Saving the Historic Downtown by Buying One Building at a Time,” by Andrea L. Dono, *Main Street News*, August 2003. The full case study of the Clarksville, Missouri, real estate success mentioned on pages 100-101.

“Main Street Real Estate Development Strategies: Borrowing for Development,” by Krista Kendall, Sarah Greenberg, and Tanya Winters, *Main Street News*, July 2007. Get an inside perspective on what makes a good loan applicant, what information the applicant should have, how to write a business plan, how to approach a lender as well as tips for underwriting the loan, repayment, and building a sources and uses budget. See www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet for the full article.

Books

Building Codes and Historic Buildings, by Melvin Green and Anne Watson (National Trust for Historic Preservation: 2005). Figure out which codes and other regulations apply in your community and how to work out alternatives that preserve historic features.

Buying Time for Heritage: How to Save an Endangered Historic Property, by J. Myrick Howard (University of North Carolina Press: 2007). Practical tips on how a neighborhood, downtown, or preservation group can get involved in beneficial real estate work with modest resources.

Community Initiated Development: A manual for nonprofit real estate development in traditional commercial districts, by Donovan Rypkema (National Main Street Center: 2004). This manual is written to help nonprofit organizations to approach real estate development as an informed developer. This book takes you step by step through the process.

Feasibility Assessment Manual for Reusing Historic Buildings, by Donovan Rypkema (National Trust for Historic Preservation: 2007). Outlines a step-by-step process that enables an assessment team to determine the feasibility of a building project and prepare a written report to support its findings.

Guide to Tax-Advantaged Rehabilitation, by Jayne Boyle, Stuart Ginsberg, Sally Oldham, and Donovan Rypkema (National Trust for Historic Preservation: 2002). Provides information on the historic rehabilitation tax credit in an easy question-and-answer format.



chapter 11

VISUAL MERCHANDISING:**Building the Main Street Experience**

By Leon Steele

If only creating a dynamic Main Street experience were as simple as advertising and interviewing for a position.

Main Streets are about commerce—but unique retail and service businesses alone do not make visiting Main Street exciting. A customer develops opinions about Main Street based on real and perceived experiences within individual businesses as well as the entire district. A positive trip to Main Street hinges on many factors, including great shopping experiences, an attractive streetscape and storefronts, effective signage, superior customer service, festivals and events, security, and many other elements addressed by the Main Street Four-Point Approach®—all of which require a collective revitalization effort as well as individual merchant participation and the commitment of local government and community stakeholders.

For example, in the heart of Louisiana, along the Cane River, sits Natchitoches—a Christmas holiday destination for thousands of people who descend on this picturesque downtown because stakeholders pull out all the stops to create a dynamic Main Street experience. Residents and tourists get a Norman Rockwell-style emotional rush through the annual Festival of Lights along the banks of the river, fireworks, caroling, food, parades, music, and other entertainment. Every merchant strives to create the best possible impression. Streets and sidewalks are clean, and storefront window decorations contribute to this holiday wonderland.

This annual celebration only gets better each year. Why? Because the mayor, the chamber, the CVB, the tourism office, the Main Street program, and the merchants all *get it*. They understand the economic value of cultural tourism, preservation of their



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commercial structures, the need to work toward the collective good, and the importance of marketing the town and the experiences it promises. Main Street programs must help local stakeholders “get it” and convince them to work together toward the same vision.

Adopting the Main Street approach is not a silver bullet for revitalization; maintaining success over time requires support and commitment from all stakeholders. Your organization must help them understand that the district is truly the sum of its parts. Revitalization will take time and changes will happen in stages, but it must be addressed wholly, and with overlapping plans of implementation. Main Streets are not just collections of buildings, but the hearts of communities, distinct places, and the roots of our nation. Ignored, abandoned, and otherwise unprotected, they disappear. And with that, so do the souls of communities—and people.

Spending money is a big part of American life. Dell deChant, a religion professor at the University of South Florida, writes in his book, *The Sacred Santa: Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture*, that consumerism is a religion itself and that “we buy, not because something is worn out, but because it’s what we do...it’s a rush.” He states that we are not workaholics, but shopaholics who work so we can consume. Even during economic downturns, Americans shop, particularly for special occasions, because the associated activities and rituals make us feel good. The questions for Main Street executive directors and business people are: how aggressively do you capitalize on the emotional rush of consumerism and special occasions, and how do you contribute to making Main Street a special place?

Many people consider shopping a form of entertainment, which makes it imperative that your Main Street offer more than a one-dimensional experience where customers buy what they need and then leave. A historic commercial district can be designed and programmed in countless ways to create a festive, exciting environment—through the business mix, the historic setting, unique architecture, appealing store interiors, walkable streets, events, cultural attractions, and so much more. Creating a dynamic experience can be achieved through blending aspects of each of the four points. This chapter will look at helping businesses create special, and profitable, spaces.

The Five-year Rule

There are no set rules of design that apply across the board. Interior design should be influenced by the needs of the occupant and the limitations and opportunities of the space. However, there is one guiding design principle—the Five-year Rule—which advises that a store should get a makeover or be refreshed every five years. Five years gives merchants a chance to notice which design strategies worked and which did not. Five years is also enough time for styles to grow stale so business owners should update their store’s appearance to keep its image fresh. Merchants should assess everything from store layout to signage and every other design component.

Your design committee can help business owners make the Five-year Rule affordable by introducing them to portable fixtures, which can be easily rearranged or moved to storage as needed. Merchants can also make “lease-hold improvements,” which are achieved by changing fixtures, installing carpet, and building out kitchens. But these investments are left behind when the merchant vacates the space and thus should be kept to a minimum. Portable fixtures will allow the business owner to refresh the store’s look frequently and often cost less than permanent fixtures.

All businesses, from large national retailers to doctor’s offices and small coffee shops, use design professionals to create an inviting, user-friendly space. After all, shopping isn’t fun when we have to blaze a trail through densely packed racks, and it is equally unsettling to browse through stores with sparsely stocked shelves. Your Main Street program can arrange consulting visits from coordinating Main Street design staff or other specialists to help business owners meet their goals through better design. Specialists can analyze the floor plan, lighting, display areas, and layout to ensure that customers can circulate comfortably and that design plans contribute to Main Street’s appeal. A good designer can also help create design plans or models, especially during the concept and planning phases, for a business owner who wishes to expand.



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Custom shelving looks attractive and meets the needs of this wine shop, but are “lease-hold improvements” such as these right for your local businesses?

Customer Service

The design of a commercial space is not the only tool for boosting sales. Customer service plays a major role in attracting and keeping customers. When you think about your own experiences, when you compare shops where you are treated like the store's most important customer and others where you were barely acknowledged, which left you with the best impression? Strong customer service is where Main Street businesses have a chance to stand out from the competition. Your organization is poised to help business owners capitalize on customer service strengths.

Meet, Greet, and Excite

The most important customer interaction is between the shopper and employees. Customers should always be treated as guests and welcomed with a friendly greeting and warm smile, which go a long way toward making people feel comfortable. The greeting offers an opportunity to highlight featured merchandise or specials. Sales clerks may enjoy engaging in brief small talk or asking people where they are from, but they shouldn't hover. Customers need their space, but employees can make it known they are available for assistance.

A customer-oriented personality is essential. Conscientious employers train all employees in basic courtesies and customer service, including something as ordinary as how to answer the phone because such skills cannot be assumed. Employees who are unfriendly, who never leave the register, who don't have sufficient knowledge of products or services, and who don't thank customers are a detriment to a business.

Good customer service makes or breaks a business because word of mouth is powerful, especially given the wide reach of online customer review websites. Seminars or visits by consultants can provide effective employee training or customer service improvement tips.

Window Display Design

Visual merchandising refers to the display of merchandise—how it is presented in storefront windows and interior store displays. The manner in which merchandise is presented is a direct reflection of a business owner's creativity and understanding of customers. A storefront is one of the first points of contact potential customers have with a business and should pique their interest enough to lure them inside.

Visual Merchandising

Display windows are essentially street-level billboards—they convey the image of the store and instantly communicate price point, quality, or specialization of goods and services; therefore, they should be designed to command attention, send appropriate messages about the business, and entice people inside. Shoppers talk about exciting window displays; consider the buzz generated around the

exciting winter holidays window décor of major department stores along Manhattan's famed Fifth Avenue and the festive holiday atmosphere of downtown Natchitoches, Louisiana. In big cities and small towns alike, exciting, creative window displays contribute to the sense of place, an attractive streetscape, and "street theatre," which is street-level visual interest and activity that increase foot traffic.

Window displays project an image, either good or bad, of the quality of goods and services available throughout a district. Exciting, visually appealing windows that are visible day and night contribute to a vibrant feel and positive public perception. At the other end of the design spectrum, dirty windows, or worse, display space used for storage, contribute to a low-quality, negative public perception that hurts the entire district, not just the business with the unattractive storefront.

- **Attract attention.** Properly designed display windows blur the separation between the sidewalk and the store interior, and entice people to window shop. In order to motivate pedestrians to look inside, a display window must attract their attention. Merchants do this by setting up special, eye-catching items in a window display along with merchandise. The special items may or may not be for sale but they certainly can create a visual hook. For a toy store, the hook may be a giant Red Flyer wagon or an over-scaled model airplane. These hooks can either be related to the theme of the window or season, or simply be an item that adds complementary visual interest. Laconia (N.H.) Main Street even teamed up with the local theater group to feature "live mannequins" in 11 storefront window displays to lure people downtown.

Color, pattern, and light also create visual interest. Lighting, in particular, is extremely important. It can highlight important aspects of a display, create a mood (romantic for Valentine's Day), or produce shadow/pattern interest as part of the window environment.

- **Avoid confusion and clutter.** The average shopper makes the decision to enter a store in less than three seconds. For this reason, it is important that a window display be simple, without too much information or clutter. Encourage your merchants to display only a few items at a time in a simple, aesthetically pleasing manner. Small windows should feature a few small-scale items, while larger windows can accommodate more merchandise and bigger items.

Objects that are part of a display should not be lined up like soldiers. Merchants can create visual interest by varying the levels of displays and arrangement patterns. Business owners should use their imaginations when selecting appropriate props for elevating items. For instance, a summertime window display can use sand pails or other beach-related items to display merchandise.

Windows covered with many signs in varying styles and colors are unattractive, confusing, and visually intrusive. Pedestrians and drivers passing by won't have enough time to read and absorb all of the messages on the window and most will keep going.

What Message Does Your Window Send?

It may seem obvious, but the little things make a difference between a shopper choosing to enter your store—or not.



© Andrea L. Dono

AVOID CLUTTER
Cluttered windows and storefronts that use the space for storage project a negative image of the business, and the district.



© Leon Steele

KEEP IT FRESH
If display items have seen better days, retire them. Damaged displays don't do your merchants any favors.



© Josh Bloom

ADD VISUAL INTEREST
This paper store sets a joyful mood through its fun, summer-themed window display.



© Linda S. Glisson

LESS IS MORE
A few signature pieces displayed in an unusual way can attract attention.



© Tony Bowles

ADD MOOD LIGHTING
Dramatic window lighting draws attention to this business even after hours.

Coordinating the merchandise in a display makes good visual sense. It is confusing for customers to see an evening bag, a pair of beach sandals, and a toothbrush tossed into a window just because they are all items the store sells. Every merchandise category offers an opportunity for a themed display that will create greater visual impact and enhance the credibility of the business. The important thing to communicate to your local shop owners is to keep displays coordinated and focused whatever the season or niche and ensure that display designs reflect the messages they wish to send to customers.

- **Change displays frequently.** Many potential Main Street shoppers probably work, live, or do their shopping in the district, and may pass by a particular store every day. With this comes familiarity, and familiarity can result in a person not even noticing places they pass by every day. To combat this indifference, business owners should change window displays frequently, at least monthly, and for every holiday and special event. More frequent display changes can showcase new arrivals and advertised items. Encourage shop owners to include display fixtures in the budget, including those that are necessary for special themed windows or holiday displays, but assure them that simple, inexpensive displays and props can be just as dramatic as elaborate and costly ones. That said, only mannequins in top condition should be used. Mannequins with bro-

ken fingers, missing limbs, chipped finishes, or other damage should be refurbished or replaced. If mannequins are outdated (but not vintage) they should be put into storage until they become vintage.

Another tip: each window change should trigger a thorough cleaning. When taking down signs, all tape residue should be removed from the glass, counters, or walls. Ideally, some method of display other than tape should be used, such as a small easel or a plate stand, depending on the size of the sign.

- **Lighting.** Far too many merchants shut their lights off when they close for the day. Surveys show that many people discover a new store after hours. Haven't we all discovered a product that we want to check out another day or noticed a new store on the walk back to our car after dinner or a movie?

Leaving window lights on at night implies activity and provides additional street lighting that alleviates the anxiety of pedestrians in what may otherwise be a dark district. Window lights left on may also serve as a crime deterrent because they illuminate the store interior so that passersby and security personnel can see inside.

Business owners should install timers on their display lights and keep them on until at least 10:00 or 11:00 p.m., if not all night. Store owners may express concern about energy costs incurred from leaving the lights on. The lighting in most display windows is incandescent, which uses more energy and produces

more heat than necessary for the amount of light produced. In comparison, compact fluorescent lighting (CFL) uses less power and produces less heat. CFLs also have the added cost benefit of a much longer life and, although they have a higher upfront cost, offer a savings over the life of the lamp. CFLs typically average 8,000 to 15,000 hours, compared to a life span of 750 to 1,000 hours for incandescent lamps. However the actual lifetime of any lamp, CFL or incandescent, depends on many factors including manufacturing defects, exposure to voltage spikes, mechanical shock, frequency of cycling on and off, and ambient operating temperature, among other factors.

CFL technology is constantly improving and colors are now closer to the warm, golden tones of incandescent lamps. Moreover, CFLs no longer have a significant delay in the time it takes them to light up. Another advantage of fluorescent window display lighting is that it has no marked adverse effect on merchandise. Compact fluorescent lamps, when combined with white mini lights, produce a good balance of white light while adding a bit of festive “sparkle” to windows and storefronts.

Proportions and Transparency

The proportions and transparency of the storefront are extremely important, as it is here that a business puts the majority of its advertising and visual displays. Architects from all different eras realized this, so most commercial buildings appear similar in that aspect. Typically, the display windows extend from the bulkhead up to the transom or lintel, and the entry doors are made primarily of glass. Nearly all display windows have a bulkhead at the base; it raises window displays closer to eye level to take advantage of the eight-degree peripheral line of vision.

When the proportions and transparency of a storefront are reduced, it not only destroys the overall context of the façade, but also prevents the passerby from seeing the goods or services available inside. Most people are hesitant, if not unwilling, to step inside a space they cannot see into first. In the past, many business owners thought that if burglars couldn't see into the store, they would be less likely to break in. More often than not, however, the reverse is true. A well-lit, transparent storefront sends a warning to burglars that if they break in, someone is sure to see them, thus increasing their risk. In addition, it has been proven that people are less likely to vandalize a place that looks well maintained, showing that someone “owns” the space. When a space appears shabby and neglected, the chances of vandalism or burglary are greater. The use of steel grates over display windows can have the same effect because they send a message that the area is dangerous, thereby driving legitimate customers away. Transparent windows make pedestrians feel more comfortable walking through the district and entering stores that appear safe because the interiors are visible. See Chapter 20, Clean and Safe Main Street Districts, to learn more about deterring crime through design.



© Andrea L. Dono

This traditional storefront in Franklin, Tennessee, shows how a bulkhead raises a window display so that merchants can effectively showcase merchandise and capture the attention of the passerby.

Some building owners reduce storefront window sizes to conceal the activities going on inside. Often, bars utilize this method. Sometimes it is done with the best of intentions, because the owner wants patrons to be able to drink in privacy. Too often, however, it is done to conceal the fact that illegal activities might be occurring. It is recommended, when privacy is an issue, that the storefront maintain the original percentage of glass area and storefront proportions, and instead install waist or shoulder-high curtains on the interior. And with all storefront or upper-window replacements, the new windows should always fill the entire original opening.

The same is true of vacant storefronts and service businesses. In the case of a vacant building, there still exists an opportunity to create attractive displays that boost the district's image and contribute to the area's vibrancy. In Uptown Butte, Montana, two local artists turned empty commercial spaces into the Butte Phantom Gallery Art Walk. One night a month these “phantom galleries” become destinations along an art walk that features displays in vacant spaces as well as in occupied businesses, along with music, performances, and food. Each year, organizers find more new businesses occupying these long-vacant spaces. Now, once-empty buildings have new businesses in them!

Vacant windows also offer Main Street organizations space to display before-and-after photos of a building or the district, or other displays showcasing the area's history or the revitalization effort. Main Street Perry (Oklahoma) found a way to promote local businesses, the revitalization, and the town's history through a single project—Whimsical Windows. The group fills vacant storefront windows with displays that depict turn-of-the-century Perry while promoting merchandise from local retailers. Signs are placed in the windows to inform interested customers where they can buy “the props,” and a brochure is produced to guide people through the town square so they can view the displays. Not to miss an opportunity, the brochure also features a map for out-of-town visitors and includes the organization's mission statement. These projects improve the appearance of the windows and boost the district's image, while property owners benefit from increased interest in their buildings.



The landscaping outside of this Hingham, Massachusetts, business is vibrant and inviting.

© Josh Bloom

Maintenance

One of the most important and often overlooked aspects of visual merchandising is maintenance. Countless business owners have one unfortunate habit in common—they park behind the store, enter through the rear entrance, and rarely, if ever, step out front to see what the storefront looks like. This is a mistake as unattractive storefronts create a negative first impression that might drive customers away from a business, or the district, altogether.

General untidiness and neglect inside and outside a store or restaurant doesn't make us want to shop or eat there. Window displays should be kept spotlessly clean. Cobwebs, dirt, dead bugs, dirty glass, and trash should be cleaned out; cracked glass should be repaired; burnt-out light bulbs and old carpet should be replaced; and paint should be fresh.

Outside the store, the sidewalk should be swept daily and hosed down when needed. Weeds growing through cracks should be removed regularly. Live, colorful potted plants at a store's doorway or in window boxes attract attention. Live plants, although they require care and need to be changed seasonally, make a better impression than weeds, fake plants, or nothing at all. Plastic or silk flowers or plants imply a cheap, low quality business.

Interior Design

Inside a business, everything from shelving to merchandising displays must appeal to customers and tastefully attract

their attention. Thoughtful color coordination of merchandise and themed presentations is important. Displays can also be based on materials or textures. For example, a salon or spa might display a luxurious white robe with a fluffy white towel and a bowl of bath salts against a cool, relaxing blue background that features a small water fountain. Cases filled with small items or wall displays using little vignettes can trigger a positive visual experience for browsers and influence them to make purchases. It is important that merchandise be visible and not disappear or become secondary to the setting.

Business owners should select paint colors that enhance their image, take advantage of people's psychological associations with colors, and make customers feel comfortable. Whether you are assisting local businesses with their five-year makeover or just helping them improve the customer experience, recommend colors that won't overpower the merchandise or make shoppers uncomfortable. For example, blue is a cool color; thus blue walls might make people feel less comfortable than cozier, warmer colors. Light reflects the colors of wall paints and will therefore alter the colors of merchandise and customer complexions. For instance, the green tinge that light reflects from green walls is inappropriate for stores that sell cosmetics and will ultimately impact sales. When in doubt, business owners can choose neutral colors and let the merchandise provide the color interest.

Lighting also subtly communicates quality and price point. The use of ambient lighting, which doesn't illuminate a particular object, but rather lights up the entire space, can range from the soft glow throughout a jewelry boutique to the jarring fluorescent overhead lighting in a second-hand shop. Lights also have other jobs to do besides making sure people can see a space. Accent lighting beams a ray of light on a specific object or area of an interior to direct people's attention to it.

There are various compositional lighting techniques that include downlighting, uplighting, backlighting, wallwashing, highlighting, grazing, and sparkle.

- Downlighting is directed down from the ceiling and provides even illumination with no distracting beams of light. It is used for lighting desks or tables and for distributing ambient light in high-ceilinged spaces.
- Uplighting is used to highlight objects.

Image, center © Timothy Bishop; image, right © Linda S. Glisson.



- Backlighting is a technique that diffuses light through translucent materials such as acrylic, silk screens, stained glass, stone veneer, etc.
- Wallwashing creates a visual unification of a wall with a sheet of brightness, creating directionality for the space. Diverse objects on the wall are drawn together; large quantities of gentle and indirect light are reflected into the space.



Above: DeRidder, Louisiana, Lobby of First National Bank, original slab marble details.
Right: Donaldsonville, Louisiana, original pressed metal walls, crown molding, and ceilings



Images © Leon Steele

- Highlighting creates more than five times the amount of brightness on a featured object than on the background. It can also be used as a directional device, for example, by highlighting a reception desk located in a dimly lit elevator lobby.
- Grazing light is angled light used to highlight textures of vertical surfaces such as those seen when a light source is close to the bottom or top of a brick wall. It is positioned to draw special attention to the construction, materials, and texture of the surface.
- Sparkle refers to the points of light from candles in a fireplace or on the dining tables in dimly lit restaurants.

Historic Interiors

Many Main Street businesses are located in older buildings. While some people embrace the history, architectural details, and charm of older buildings, others do not value these assets. Some property owners and tenants prefer to start with a blank slate when designing a building's interior. If we look at malls, we see how each new retailer will completely gut and rebuild the space with its own (usually) formulaic designs and fixtures. A store planner/designer for a chain store creates a shopping experience designed to appeal to a particular customer base and to complement the merchandise, the national retailer's image, and the customer lifestyle. As a result, customers of national retailers know what to expect and seek out that experience.

Main Street businesses, on the other hand, offer a different experience. The variety of unique stores and authentic atmospheres set Main Street commercial districts apart and are assets that must be leveraged. Main Street businesses offer more than commerce; they contribute to the sense of place and the collective experience that certain customers, tourists, and residents seek. True, Main Street and malls might share the same customers, but generally customers who come to Main Street districts are looking for something different in each place.

Completely gutting and rebuilding a historic building's interior not only creates unnecessary waste for landfills because reusable building materials are discarded, but it strips away all that is integral to the original interior design, which diminishes the overall Main Street experience. During rehabilitations, much attention is directed

toward preserving the buildings' exteriors in order to maintain the authenticity of the district. That sensitivity should extend beyond the façade into the building. Interior spaces that respect original architectural details will support, complement, and enhance the Main Street shopping experience and continue to tell the Main Street story.

Keeping Historic Details

A competent designer can incorporate historic elements within the interior design in a way that supports the district's image, yet still meets the needs of the occupant. You can contact your coordinating Main Street program to inquire about interior design assistance to help Main Street business owners select a sensitive design and build-out plan. Accommodating the needs of new occupants while preserving the integrity of a historic building's interior often requires seeking alternatives. For example, if an original pressed-metal ceiling is missing some panels, the ceiling can still be retained and incorporated in the design. If the occupant is interested in restoring the panels, there are several companies that produce pressed-metal components. Otherwise, a competent designer who is sensitive to historic architecture will be able to cleverly work around missing panels.

Consider another situation where alternative options can turn a historic element into an asset. Old fluorescent ceiling fixtures can look dated and dirty if they haven't been cared for over time. Thoroughly cleaning and refurbishing them can add interesting details to a store's interior. Depending on the needs of the business, other types of lighting can be added as necessary. Include historic interior design resources when building your program's business assistance library.

Continuing the Great Main Street Experience

This chapter emphasizes the idea that a customer's or visitor's positive experience in a Main Street community must extend beyond the street festivals and beautiful architecture. True to the comprehensive approach, high standards for customer service and designing attention-grabbing windows and attractive interior store designs continue that special Main Street experience off the street. A Main Street program should be poised to help local business and property owners embrace this concept and contribute to creating a unique and appealing commercial district.

RESOURCES

Website

Visual Store: This website is the domain of ST Media Group International, Inc., which generally has the market cornered on supporting retail design. The website offers resources for the retail industry such as a bookstore, free e-newsletter, subscription magazine, message board, vendor list, and free articles and photographs of retail concepts.
www.VisualStore.com

Articles

“Dressed Up Fitting Rooms,” by Susan Shaddox, *Main Street News*, July 2007. The design of fitting rooms help sell merchandise as much as the design of the store floor.

“Shining a Light on Window Displays,” by Scott Day, *Main Street News*, October 2006. Improve lighting, reduce glare, and maximize energy efficiency.

Books

Budget Guide to Retail Store Planning & Design, Revised 2nd Edition, by Jeff Grant (ST Media Group International Inc., 1995). This book provides a basic overview of store layout and design to help people open a new store or renovate an existing one. It touches on various topics including working with designers, lighting, color, in-store signs, and even working out lease agreements.

The Call of the Mall and **Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping**, by Paco Underhill (Simon & Schuster, 2004 and 1999, respectively). Both of these publications offer a humorous take on consumer culture and insights gleaned from years of field observations of the effectiveness of retail merchandising and marketing and shoppers’ reactions. Paco points out various merchandising and design techniques that are so effective, most people don’t even notice them.

Stores & Retail Spaces (ST Media Group International, Inc.). ST Media continuously updates this series of books that showcase the annual Institute of Store Planners’ award winners to provide inspiration for store design and show the use of the latest design innovations and technology.

Visual Merchandising (ST Media Group International, Inc.). ST Media continuously updates this series of books focused on retail design, separated out by retail category. They demonstrate effective use of in-store displays, graphics, fixtures, point-of-purchase displays, and more. They can provide business owners with visual cues and inspiration.

Visual Merchandising and Store Design Workbook, by Greg M. Gorman (ST Media Group International Inc., 1996). This workbook helps the reader evaluate the store’s identity and customers while planning for traffic flow, color usage, store window decoration, and other retail elements.

Visual Merchandising: Windows and In-Store Displays for Retail, by Tony Morgan (Laurence King Publishers, 2008). This illustrated publication discusses store design principles and delves into the details, including fixtures, mannequins, props, consumer behavior, and more.

Image, left © Joshua Bloom; image, center © Linda S. Glisson.



IMPROVING APPEARANCES

By Joe Lawniczak

The physical appearance of a downtown or neighborhood commercial district affects several aspects of its revitalization.

From storefront improvements to new mixed-use infill developments, when design projects are done with respect to their surroundings, they show that positive change is happening. The appearance of a district portrays its image, which affects how people perceive the district and whether they decide to shop or invest there. Therefore, the appearance of your district should communicate qualities like safety, vitality, and uniqueness.

Main Street design encompasses building improvements, new construction (or infill), signage, visual merchandising, public amenities, parking, transportation issues, and historic preservation. It will take education initiatives, incentives, guidelines, planning, cooperation, and most of all, patience, to improve appearances. Revitalization often requires many small improvements to signal to the public that things are happening and to inspire others to join the transformation. So with an eye on the big picture, your organization must start small, knowing that more dramatic design improvements will usually follow.

Design committee members need to become familiar with design issues so they can accomplish specific objectives and tasks such as developing design guidelines and incentives. Typically, the executive director, as the public face of the Main Street organization, acts as the liaison between building owners and the design committee. As with any committee work, it is important that volunteers handle their workload so that the director can focus on comprehensive Main Street issues; frequently, however, the committee and executive director will work in partnership on projects. A good director will constantly keep in touch with building and business owners, and while doing so, will remind them of available incentives and services, such as free design assistance or matching grants. But there are communities, such as the ones discussed in the sidebar about design assistance programs on pages 118–119, where committee members act as block captains or take on a more public role. The Main Street Center's *Design: Main Street Committee Members Handbook* is a good resource for understanding the committee's role.

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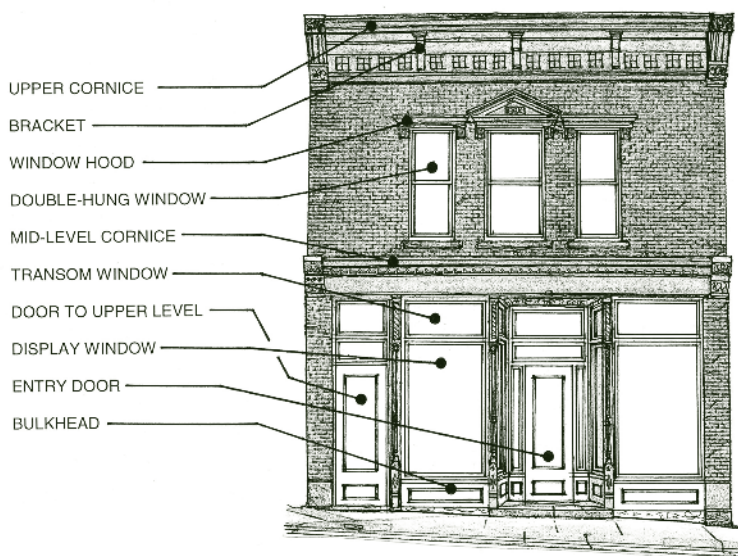
Main Street Architecture and Design

Unlike New Urbanist lifestyle centers that replicate the traits of historic districts, Main Street is “the real thing.” New Urbanist developments may mimic the density, pedestrian orientation, and aesthetic qualities of Main Street, but they lack authenticity. This presents an opportunity for your program to leverage the commercial district’s historic assets.

Main Street districts have evolved over time and their buildings reflect that history. While cohesiveness is important, design committees should embrace the architectural variety that has developed and never attempt to make the district’s buildings look as if they all come from the same era. Demolishing or retrofitting buildings that were constructed after the district was established would tell an incomplete story and promote an unauthentic community. Some places make the mistake of turning their historic downtowns into alpine recreations or Wild West towns. These random themes are generally inappropriate for Main Street revitalization and should be removed. When planning for the restoration of any building, study its individual history and style, and determine how it evolved. Only then can you determine the appropriate improvements to make.

Although architectural styles and their elements differ from building to building, and from region to region, most buildings were originally constructed with similar elements and divided into similar segments: the storefront, the upper facade, and the cornice. These elements and segments worked together to create a total composition. See the diagram of a typical Main Street façade below.

Understanding the various elements of a building’s original design can help determine what changes were



© Joe Lawniczak

The storefront, arguably the most important segment of a commercial building, is often the portion that pedestrians and drivers notice the most. Whether a building has multiple levels, or is one-story with a raised parapet, it always has an upper façade. On multiple-story buildings, the upper façade typically has a regular pattern of windows, echoing each other and neighboring buildings. This creates visual cohesiveness along the street. The cornice acts as the visual cap to the building, tying the entire façade together.

made in the past and what changes would be appropriate now. The “Evolution of a Façade” series of pictures on page 113 shows a fictional building’s evolution. Many buildings on Main Street have gone through similar changes. Each alteration was a direct result of either a change in social patterns or an attempt to adapt to current trends, imitate the competition, or create a false theme. But as is evident in the last image, often, the best course of action is to return the building to its original appearance, or as close as possible. By doing this, there will never be a need to change its appearance as design trends change. The building will be timeless; it will appear as it was originally designed, nothing more, nothing less.

But not all alterations of the past were inappropriate. Historic preservation doesn’t always mean restoring a building to its original appearance and original use, but rather to a logical period of its evolution. An individual building’s history and the significance of alternations made over time will determine how the current owner should rehabilitate the structure. For example, suppose an 1880s building has a 1920s storefront; even though that storefront isn’t original, it might be considered important and should be retained and repaired. If alterations have achieved significance in their own right, removing them could destroy a valuable resource and possibly cause a project to be denied for tax credit and local design reviews. Ultimately, the property owner needs to work closely with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the National Park Service (NPS) to determine the most appropriate rehabilitation, especially if tax credits or other incentives are sought, as well as working with the local design review board to make sure changes meet local guidelines.

Building Rehabilitation

Many communities use the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* as the starting point for guiding Main Street design. The 10 Standards for Rehabilitation (see the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards sidebar on page 114) and the accompanying guidelines were devised to ensure that work affecting a historic property would be consistent with the character of the building and the district in which it is located. These standards are used to determine if a rehabilitation project qualifies for certification as a historic structure and for the federal income tax credits authorized by the Tax Reform Act of 1986. As defined by the Department of the Interior, rehabilitation is: “... the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values.”

In traditional commercial districts, therefore, rehabilitation is a practical way to make commercial buildings economically productive once again. Rehabilitation blends a building’s original, distinguishing physical characteristics with the requirements of new uses and new tenants.

The Evolution of a Façade

The standards guide each treatment level of historic properties: preservation; rehabilitation; restoration; and reconstruction. The Department of the Interior defines each as follows:

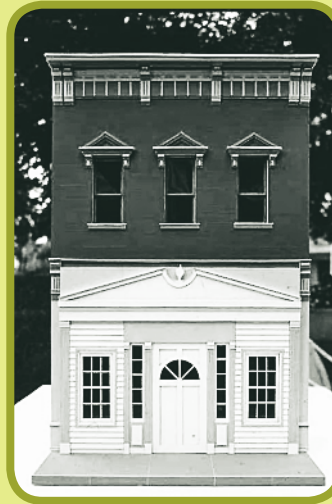
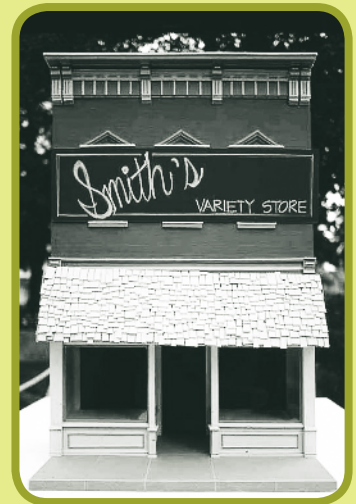
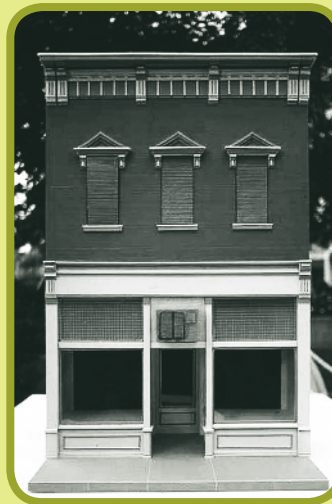
- **Preservation:** using measures necessary to “sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property.” Properties are stabilized, with sensitive treatment of bringing buildings up to code and upgrading systems, and ongoing maintenance is a priority.
- **Rehabilitation:** making repairs, alterations, and additions that allow for a compatible use of a property while still preserving historic, cultural, or architectural elements.
- **Restoration:** removing elements, as well as making repairs or reconstructing important missing elements, so as to depict a property as it appeared during a particular period of time.
- **Reconstruction:** replicating a non-surviving historic structure as it appeared at a particular time.

Building owners can complete minimal rehabilitations for less than \$10,000 by painting, maintaining the property, putting up new signs, and doing minor carpentry. Moderate/major rehabilitations are typically completed for less than \$50,000 and often include rebuilding the storefront, repairing upper windows, and doing in-depth carpentry. Complete rehabilitations can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and typically include large-scale construction both on the exterior and interior. Professional design services often cost thousands of dollars. Adaptive-use projects and projects utilizing rehabilitation tax credits often fall into this category.

Keep in mind that no matter how well an architect, designer, or contractor can handle new or residential construction, that doesn't mean they have experience with historic commercial buildings. Consult your Main Street colleagues and check the list of resources at the end of this chapter for places to look for qualified professionals. And to learn more about the technical aspects of preservation, look for guidance booklets by the National Park Service on topics ranging from preserving historic signs to removing graffiti from historic materials (also listed under Resources on page 126).

Encouraging Building Improvements

Because historic commercial districts are largely made up of privately owned buildings, revitalization in these areas cannot occur without the support and investment of these individuals. One way to gain their support is through education. As described in Chapter 13, Historic Preservation Tools, most Main Street programs develop design guidelines and financial incentives, both to encourage



Images © Kentucky Main Street.

building improvements and to make sure they are the highest quality possible. Design guidelines, when done correctly, are a one-stop resource for building owners to learn about proper techniques; local permitting procedures; available design assistance; financial incentives; and contact information for building inspectors, contractors, and sign manufacturers.

Once such a resource is created, talking to building owners about restoring their buildings becomes a lot easier. Telling building owners that their property needs work runs the risk of insulting them; instead, let them know about the incentives and free assistance available and show them compelling before and after photos. Using this strategy will position your Main Street organization as a helpful resource rather than a nag. All nagging or insulting building owners will do is drive them further away. With that said, no matter how inspiring or diplomatic you are, you will always have difficulty convincing some building owners that proper improvements will benefit them as well as the entire district. Choose your battles and focus your energy on helping the owners who appreciate the benefits of improving their properties.

The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

(Taken from the National Park Service's The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings)

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historical significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.
7. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.



Often, the transformation of the buildings brings in quality tenants and more customers, and building owners who were previously uninterested will have to make changes in order to remain competitive.

Some people, like property rights proponents, balk at the creation of local historic districts, preservation ordinances, and design guidelines, usually because they are afraid they won't be able to make changes to their buildings or that someone else will be telling them what to do with their property. But the truth is that these tools help protect the aesthetic integrity of the district and help stabilize or increase property values. This is because a single building in a district isn't an island; its value is affected by its surroundings. With effective tools in place, investors and property owners can feel confident knowing that building changes will benefit, not detract from, the district. Sure, no one likes someone else telling them what they can or cannot do to their buildings, but such restrictions or guidelines are necessary in order to protect these irreplaceable assets.

Inappropriate design changes in the district could negatively affect property and/or resale values of buildings and possibly hinder a property owner's ability to attract or retain quality tenants. Low-quality or poor design changes could disrupt the appearance of the entire district, and thus its desirability to potential shoppers, tenants, visitors, and investors. This is part of the reason why communities enact land-use regulations (see Chapter 17 for more on zoning).

To help your design committee succeed with its work, consult with preservation design experts whenever possible. These experts can include state Main Street architects and design specialists, SHPO staff members, or local architectural firms with experience in historic preservation and design.

Taming Teardowns and Demolitions

Property owners who have neglected to take care of their historic buildings might have a number of reasons for doing so. Perhaps they don't understand what proper maintenance is or how inappropriate changes negatively affect the entire district. Your Main Street program must communicate the importance of proper building maintenance and care so that the district's building stock lasts for generations to come.

Building maintenance and improvements are necessary for more than aesthetic reasons. They protect the building from deteriorating and failing over time. In fact, maintenance issues, such as roof repair, repointing (which is the repair and replacement of mortar between masonry units like bricks or stone), and structural repairs should be done before any aesthetic changes are begun. A fresh coat of paint may look nice, but if it is covering up water damage and the owner isn't repairing a leak, the problem will worsen with time and will probably lead to larger and more expensive problems. Some communities create minimum maintenance ordinances to ensure that buildings are maintained to at least a minimal degree. Other communities, as part of their financial incentives, such as façade grants or low-interest loans, allow a portion of the money to be used for maintenance issues or code compliance. Most communities address proper maintenance and repair techniques in

Building Restoration versus New Construction

Your Main Street organization will have countless instances during which to argue in favor of historic preservation—from fighting demolition threats to the master planning process. You will be charged with educating property owners, officials, developers, and others of the value of preservation. Your effectiveness relies on sound arguments and being able to speak their language—money.

The Economics of Historic Preservation: A community leader's guide by Donovan Rypkema presents 100 useful arguments for preservation, some of which include:

- Historic preservation reduces sprawl by using existing buildings and public infrastructure.
- It often requires less time to rehabilitate a building than to construct a new one, especially when demolition is required first. And to most developers, time is money.
- Reuse of vacant historic buildings will increase the owner's income from the additional rent and will stabilize the property value.
- Most historic buildings can be adapted to a mix of uses, which can help weather economic downturns.
- Many historic commercial buildings are inherently good at conserving energy. The large percentage of glass area allows more natural light and solar heat gain to enter the space, thus requiring less artificial lighting and heating. Historic materials such as wood and masonry have higher insulating values and absorb more heat than newer materials such as metal and vinyl. And buildings constructed with shared walls, retain more heat and have less air infiltration than stand-alone structures.

their design guidelines so building owners will know the most appropriate methods and avoid the damaging ones.

If a building is neglected for too long, the city may deem it unsafe and call for its demolition. Or a building owner may demolish a building with the hopes that a vacant lot will attract an investor. Obviously, demolition is damaging to the streetscape, and an irreversible action. Once gone, a historic building can never truly be replaced, and it leaves a hole in the urban fabric. Therefore, demolition should be a last resort for situations where the building has suffered irreparable structural damage and is a legitimate safety concern. Similarly, demolition of a historic building solely to make way for a parking lot is rarely, if ever, a legitimate reason.

When historic buildings in your community are threatened with demolition, preservation advocates, such as Main Street organizations, need to spring into action. There are several ways to stop the wrecking ball. None is easy, and very often, a demolition threat takes people by surprise, creating a “preservation emergency.” But with e-mail and the Internet, calling concerned individuals to action is much easier than in the past. In many cases, the party threatening a historic property doesn't want the negative publicity, so he or she may be willing to work with preservation advocates to find an alternate solution.

Before emergencies arise, however, preservation advocates should: organize; know the local process for obtaining a demolition permit and who makes those decisions;

Dealing with Contaminants

Three of the most common contaminants in older buildings are asbestos, lead, and mold. The presence of these materials can result in costly abatement measures (removal) as well as problems in insuring the structures.



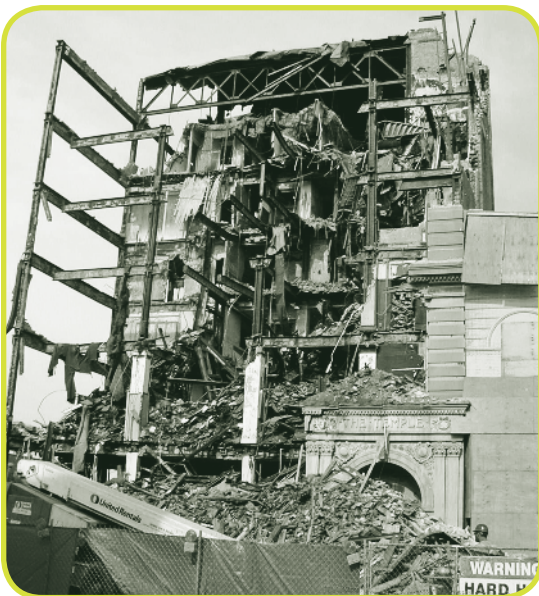
- Asbestos can be found in sprayed-on surface coatings, insulation, and products like floor tiles. Considering the widespread use of this material in buildings constructed from the 1920s to 1970s, there is a good chance asbestos will be present in many buildings. A certified professional should survey all asbestos-containing materials and decide if they should be removed or encapsulated to keep particles from becoming an airborne health hazard.
- Federal legislation banned the use of lead in paint, gasoline, and plumbing pipes in 1978. Most buildings have converted their lead piping to PVC and copper but a lot of lead paint has been painted over or covered with wallpaper. When lead paint is chipped, scratched, sanded, heated, or otherwise manipulated, it can release toxic particles into the air. There are several professional and do-it-yourself tests available. Keeping these paint layers encapsulated and then cleaning lead dust particle build-up can keep a building safe; however, if abatement is done, contact your municipality to find out where to dispose of the waste material. Use a professional who has access to proper safety equipment and High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) vacuums.
- Mold spores grow wherever there is moisture. Some building materials retain moisture more than others. For example, brick holds moisture and dissipates it well so mold has less of an opportunity to grow, but it is just the opposite for gypsum board. If you find mold, first identify the source of the moisture problem (repair leaks, correct drainage problems, etc.), remove the porous material and clean nonporous surfaces, remove dust using a HEPA vacuum, and dispose of waste materials properly. Be safe and contact a professional.

Insuring Buildings *During Construction*

Property owners know they need insurance to protect their buildings from losses due to catastrophes, but not all of them realize that they should have a builder's risk policy. The policy, which would be written for the project's duration, covers the existing structure as well as the tools, materials on site and stored off site, and soft costs (legal expenses, permit fees, architect fees, loss of income that results from delayed openings, etc.). Main Street programs should encourage property owners to talk to their insurance agents before the project starts.

know about local ordinances that may or may not allow demolition; educate local elected officials regularly on the value of preservation, not only during emergencies; and compile information on local historic resources so when threatened, you can prove their significance. Other tactics that can also produce a positive outcome: alert the media; start a petition; track the issue online through blogs; write editorials for local media; and meet with the party threatening the property to explore alternatives. For more ideas and strategies to tame the teardowns in your area, contact your state or local preservation officer and review the National Trust for Historic Preservation's resources on this issue online. Read Chapter 8, *Effective Advocacy for Main Street Programs*, for more information.

Sometimes a preservation emergency arises because a historic property has been vacant and deteriorating for so long that a call for its demolition arises simply because no other good ideas have been presented. In these instances, the Main Street organization can save the structure by seeking a suitable new economic use for the building by either recruiting a new tenant or helping an existing business expand. Another strategy is for the program to take the development reins itself. See Chapter 10, *Real Estate and the Main Street Business District*, to learn more about ways your Main Street program can get involved in real estate development.



Encouraging Appropriate Repairs

Design committees must also deal with inappropriate alterations, which come in many forms. In general, these are alterations that either spoil the overall composition of the building or destroy or conceal historic building elements. Examples over the years have included installing an aluminum slipcover over the facade, downsizing storefront or upper windows, concealing transom windows with oversized sign panels, or creating a false theme or style. Examples today include concealing original masonry walls with fake stucco, covering original wood siding and trim with vinyl, or replacing historic wood windows with new vinyl or metal windows that don't match the original. It is part of Main Street's job to educate building owners and even local contractors about appropriate historic building repairs and materials.

Concealing historic materials is a common repair mistake that negatively alters the overall character of the building and can be damaging as well. If structural issues are not addressed, they can lead to bigger problems that could jeopardize the entire building and become a safety issue. For example, suppose a property owner decides to apply stucco to a historic masonry wall that has been deteriorating due to water damage. For stylistic reasons, this stucco may be inappropriate if the building was not architecturally intended to use stucco. For physical reasons, covering up the problem wall rather than fixing it will trap the water between the stucco and masonry and ultimately compromise the structure's integrity.

Another inappropriate alteration is replacing historic materials unnecessarily. The golden rule for historic building elements is to repair rather than replace them whenever possible. Repairing the original element usually costs less and results in a longer lasting and higher quality product. Upper-floor windows are a perfect example. Most historic windows were made of wood, which is relatively easy and straightforward to repair, even when drastically deteriorated. While most new windows have the latest in energy-efficient glass, the framing itself has a low rating. Wood frames of historic windows have a much better insulating value than vinyl or metal. When air leakage occurs at historic wood windows, it is usually the caulking and glazing that need repair, not the window itself. And for upper-story windows, one of the best ways to improve the insulating value is to install either interior or exterior storm windows. Often, these steps will give the original window an equal or greater insulating value than any new window.

In addition, when most historic building elements are replaced, the new elements do not replicate the original in size, profile, material, or quality. Again, in the case of windows, standard new materials cannot duplicate the original profile of wood window framing, and thus should never be considered a "duplicate replacement." And in far too many cases, the replacement windows aren't even the same size or shape, especially if the originals are arched or uniquely shaped. The same is true of replacement siding, masonry, trim, cornices, etc. When historic elements are deteriorated beyond repair, the replacement should duplicate the original in all aspects.

Another important building improvement is the cleaning of historic materials. As a general rule, all elements should be cleaned using the gentlest means possible. This means no sandblasting or high-pressure water blasting, which damage historic building elements. For proper cleaning techniques, refer to the National Park Service's Preservation Brief #1 and #6.

Color is one area of design where a bit of leeway should be given to the property owners. It should not be the role of a Main Street organization to dictate a color scheme; rather, it should offer guidance on appropriate color selection. Your organization can refer building owners to paint companies that offer historic color palettes, which should be appropriate for most uses. In addition, you can offer a few tips. First and foremost, previously unpainted masonry should be left unpainted. If used, paint should complement the historic building materials (brick, stone, wood). While Victorian buildings historically have a lot of ornate detail and are painted in several colors, most other building styles are more appropriately painted in more subtle color schemes, using only two or three colors in most cases.

With all that said, however, it's important to understand why building owners make inappropriate changes. It's not because they want to destroy their buildings or decrease their property values. In most cases, they don't know they are doing anything wrong. This is why educational tools such as design guidelines, design review, one-on-one

consultation with a design professional, and design workshops are so important. The Charleston (W.Va.) Area Alliance has developed an annual mobile workshop/walking classroom to conduct walking tours with a design professional, volunteers, and property owners to identify façade elements and to recommend methods for improvements. But even with educational tools in place, many building owners still have excuses or reasons why they want to do something one way over another. Some of these reasons include:

- **Cost.** This is undoubtedly the most common reason, which is understandable. While every property owner must consider his or her budget, construction work based solely on cost is a dangerous thing. The adage "you get what you pay for" is true. Building owners need to understand that maintaining and repairing existing historic materials will usually produce a more stable structure and sometimes less frequent maintenance than any "quick-fix" or wholesale replacement.
- **Because it is trendy.** Nearly every inappropriate alteration in the past century was done because it was "the thing to do" at the time. By honoring a historic building's integrity and not succumbing to a trend, the owner won't have to make changes again when the fad fades in a few years.

CASE STUDY

*West Bend, Wisconsin
Riverside Brewery*



© Downtown West Bend Association

The importance of Main Street organizations working with business owners cannot be overstated. Having resources and information available for them when needed can sometimes turn non-supporters into staunch advocates, or take an entrepreneur's modest ideas and make them grander. Such was the case in West Bend, Wisconsin.

A young couple was looking to open a sports bar downtown, so they contacted the director of the Downtown West Bend Association (DWBA). Because DWBA had recently completed a market analysis, it was able to determine whether there was a demand for such an establishment. Based on the market analysis as well as market research conducted by Wisconsin Main Street, DWBA determined instead that the downtown needed more unique dining options, specifically an establishment like a micro brewery. So after taking a month to think about it and working with DWBA, the owners decided to open a micro brewery instead of the sports bar.

DWBA helped the owners find a building that would meet their needs and connected them with Wisconsin Main Street for free design and business plan assistance. The DWBA, along with the City of West Bend, provided financing through the West Bend Commercial Revolving Loan Program, and the DWBA sign grant and low-interest loan programs.

Today, the business continues to make a buzz throughout the community. Not only has it been profitable for the owners (after only three months, they had to increase their staff from 35 to 50 employees), but it has also strengthened the entertainment/dining cluster downtown. As an added bonus, it is located in an area that was potentially slated for demolition, but the success of this business has kindled a spark in the area, and new businesses are locating there. Were it not for the resources made available by DWBA, the city, local lending institutions, and Wisconsin Main Street, and the willingness of the owners to adapt, chances are the impact on the community and on the owners' bottom line wouldn't have been as great.

- *Because I want it to be “maintenance-free.”* If building owners could learn one thing, it should be that there is no such thing as a maintenance-free building material. There are low-maintenance materials, but some of the lowest-maintenance materials are those found in historic buildings.
- *Because I want a new look.* If building owners are itching for a change, show them what their buildings could look like with alterations that are compatible with the original style. Often, simple changes such as new paint, signs, and awnings can give a building a fresh new look. This may take some compromise on both sides, but with diplomacy, education, and persistence, common ground can usually be found. Most coordinating Main Street programs offer this type of design assistance to local Main Street programs.

Despite the challenges these excuses bring, by offering ongoing education, local financial incentives, design assistance, and historic preservation tools, you can give building owners who want to do the right thing the know-how and resources to do it right. And with a dedicated and determined Main Street program, hopefully the others will follow suit.

It’s Not Just the Façade: Improving Alleys and Rear Entrances

The alley-side and rear entrances of buildings are often forgotten aspects of building improvements. Originally designed as service and delivery areas, today many of these façades are visible to the general public and some rear entrances serve as secondary customer entrances. As much consideration should be given to the appearance of these areas as to the storefront.

Unlike the front façade, however, visual improvements here can often be done for less cost. Some communities host a clean-up day to remove trash as well as make minor repairs and improvements. Altus Main Street in Oklahoma sponsors an “Alley Cats” volunteer day to bring some excitement to mundane alley maintenance tasks. Volunteers, outfitted in shirts donated by a local screen-printing business, get an orientation to the project and goals and then set to work, stopping only for a food and beverage break, donated by local businesses.

Cleaning and/or painting the walls, adding lighting, replacing the entry door(s), and adding a simple awning can greatly enhance the appearance. In many cases, attractive enclosures that conceal dumpsters, meters, and condensing units make a world of a difference. Some business owners maximize the area’s fullest potential by creating outdoor patios or using landscaping to create safe and inviting entrances for their customers.

Alley improvements frequently become necessary during streetscape construction projects. More often than not, during construction, the front entrances to businesses are temporarily inaccessible. This could be devastating for businesses unless alternative entrances are provided. In other cases, if a front entrance is raised or has steps, rear entrances can often be retrofitted to create an accessible route into the building.

Often times, due to limited space, cooperation between neighboring business owners can help solve problems with clutter, functionality, and appearance of these alley-side spaces. The best example is shared dumpster enclosures. In many communities, a logical spot is designated for a shared dumpster location. This drastically reduces clutter throughout the alley. It also improves accessibility for waste management companies to service and empty the dumpsters.

Alleys often provide on-site parking for the building’s tenants or customers. This extra parking can be an important asset to the entire district so the appearance and

Local Design Assistance

Many communities have utilized local talent and expertise to develop comprehensive design education and assistance programs. Here are some creative examples of design education programs throughout the U.S.

- The Claremore (Oklahoma) Main Street Design Committee gets very involved with property owners through its Façade Squad Subcommittee. Over the years, this group has removed more than 125 feet of mansard awnings, rebuilt transom windows, and hand-scraped tin ceilings, among other projects. Design Committee volunteers use their computer graphics skills to show the owners multiple options for renovations, color schemes, and other design improvements. These renderings, as well as hands-on assistance from the Façade Squad, have prompted many of the property owners to proceed with the actual renovations.
- The Sheboygan Falls (Wisconsin) Main Street Design Committee has a comprehensive design assistance program in place. In addition to state Main Street design assistance, the committee offers a “buddy system” through which committee members keep in contact with property owners to provide assistance, gather project estimates, and encourage them to make improvements. The committee serves as the



maintenance of these spaces are important. These areas should be well lit at night and signage should clearly indicate the type of parking (private or customer).

Accessibility and the Americans with Disabilities Act

Prior to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, most states and building codes had accessibility provisions, but those rules only applied when construction was initiated by an owner. With ADA, owners of existing buildings that are occupied by “public accommodations” have an obligation to make their buildings more accessible whenever they have the resources to do so—that is, whenever accessibility is “readily achievable.” A “public accommodation” is any business that provides goods and services to the public, such as hotels, restaurants, shops, and doctors’ offices. Both ADA and building code provisions that regulate accessible design features, dimensions, and standards are virtually the same, with the difference being ADA’s retroactive application and its enforcement through the U.S. Department of Justice.

Most property owners believe they only have to worry about ADA when renovating their buildings or when the work results in a change of use. (“Change of use” means that the space changes from one use, like office space, to another, like retail.) However, the “readily achievable” rule applies to existing buildings, even when no other work is being done, as long as it can be done without much difficulty or expense. If the work will cause considerable loss of profit, would destroy historic elements, or is structurally infeasible, then it doesn’t need to be done unless other renovation work is being done. Work usually considered readily achievable includes lowering paper towel dispensers in restrooms, installing offset hinges to

make doorways wider, replacing door knobs with lever handles, installing ramps, and other modifications.

From the beginning, ADA legislation was never meant to make everything compliant by a certain date. The government realized that while there would be obstacles that couldn’t be overcome, we could move in the direction of making places more accessible. These obstacles include the owner’s financial constraints for barrier removal, as well as structural or historical barriers in existing buildings.

When barrier removal is not readily achievable, business owners can use alternative measures to provide people with disabilities access to the business’s goods and services. For example, business owners could offer home delivery until such time as it is readily achievable to make the space accessible, if ever. Historic sites could have displays and signage in the visitor’s center or on the grounds to interpret spaces that cannot be made accessible.

The federal Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) apply to alterations to existing buildings and to new construction. Keep in mind that any new construction must comply fully. Historic buildings are in no way exempt from ADA guidelines, however. Property owners are advised to first review the structure’s historical significance, including its features and materials, and then assess the structure’s existing and required accessibility features. They should also check into state and local codes. For existing buildings, there may be instances where it is technically infeasible to construct certain accessible elements.

If standard ADAAG requirements cannot be met without harming the historic elements, minimal requirements can be met. By working with people with disabilities as well as with preservation professionals, engineers, and building inspectors, the property owner can identify modifications that will create the greatest accessibility without compromising the building’s historic integrity. If, after consulting with the SHPO, it is agreed that compliance with the minimum requirements would “threaten or destroy the signifi-

design review board for all grant or loan applicants and also maintains an “idea file” filled with examples and information on successful projects. Probably the most visible aspect of the program is the Falls Face Lifters work crew. This is an all-volunteer crew that removes inappropriate alterations to prepare projects for construction. The entire program has been a tremendous success, and today, most of the buildings downtown have been completely restored.

- The Elgin (Illinois) Downtown Neighborhood Association Design Committee prepared a Downtown Block Walk Report for the entire district. In 2005, committee members walked through the entire downtown, looking at safety concerns and maintenance issues, and making aesthetic recommendations. In the end, the committee drafted a comprehensive report outlining each block’s issues and recommendations, from building maintenance problems, to dumpster locations, to sign clutter. The city and property owners refer to this report as a maintenance manual.

- Main Street Millville (New Jersey) expanded a standard Main Street New Jersey (MSNJ) service called Design Days. The MSNJ design consultant meets with local volunteers and property owners on an architectural walking tour, suggests improvements, helps develop committee goals and priorities, and gives an evening presentation. In Millville, the Design Committee took this concept a step further and developed a Design Makeover Program—a contest for property owners interested in receiving design assistance. The top three receive the state assistance, and the others receive slightly less formal assistance. For each of the three winning projects, a Design Committee member is assigned to guide it through construction. The entire process has garnered a lot of press and attention, and has not only encouraged good design, but also spurred further investments throughout the district.

CASE STUDY

Portland, Michigan

© Portland Downtown Development Authority



In 2004, Portland, Michigan, received a \$100,000 Michigan Cool Cities catalyst grant for a boardwalk construction project that had been on hold since 1999 due to a lack of funding. Portland's Main Street is located at the confluence of two rivers, but the commercial buildings faced the street, not the water. The boardwalk created an opportunity to give businesses a second storefront with space for outdoor cafés and other amenities to take advantage of the waterfront. The walkway also provided a connection to the city's river trail system. The Portland Downtown Development Authority offered grant money to help business owners build out their rear facades and also supported the construction of upper-story lofts. Before the boardwalk opened to the public with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in May 2007, 11 new lofts had already been built, one new business had opened and another existing business had expanded, bringing new investment and jobs to the community, which has the local Main Street program anticipating more positive changes.

cance of the property,” then alternatives may be employed. Historic building owners are allowed to make their properties accessible using various technical alternatives that are not available to non-historic buildings. Among the most important of these is the concept that the accessible entrance does not have to be the main front door of the building if another entry can more easily be turned into the accessible entrance. Historic buildings are also generally allowed to keep the original doorways rather than widening them.

For property owners planning upper-story renovations, the ADA has specific provisions that do not require elevators to the upper floors of small-scale buildings (i.e. fewer than three stories or under 3,000 square feet on each floor), typical of those found on most Main Streets. Of course, not every upper-floor renovation is intended to create housing units; however, if that is the case, the property owner should review the Fair Housing Act's provisions on accessibility and housing.

When a portion of a building is being altered, everything along the accessible route to that altered space must comply, unless the cost is disproportionate to the overall

cost of the alteration. This is the “disproportionality rule.” It states that when renovating an existing space, an owner only needs to spend 20 percent of the total alteration cost on providing an accessible route to the altered area. For example, in many cases, installing an elevator would cost more than 20 percent. In this case, other accessible features and elements must be installed to make up the 20 percent. It is best to learn about your state and local laws so that your organization can provide thorough information to property and business owners.

Below are some easy ways business or property owners can make their buildings more ADA compliant:

- Complete and continually update a checklist that identifies ADA-related deficiencies in a building and lay out a plan for making readily achievable corrections. If building owners are sued, this can help immensely to show that they are making a good faith effort. An ADA checklist can be downloaded from www.ada.gov/checkweb.htm.
- Provide alternative means to access goods and services (curb service, home delivery, etc.).
- Keep the path of travel in stores or hallways free of obstacles or clutter.
- Educate employees about ADA regulations and what to do if a person with disabilities needs assistance.

Financial Incentives

Fortunately, there are tax credits and tax deduction programs available to make accessibility more achievable for building and business owners. The first is the Architectural/Transportation Tax Deduction, which allows business owners to take a tax deduction for expenses incurred to remove barriers. Eligible expenses include providing accessible ramps, curb cuts, parking spaces, restrooms, and drinking fountains, and for widening entrances and routes. The deduction can be up to \$15,000 per year, but



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cannot be used for new construction or for accessibility work already required as part of a renovation. Technically, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars can be used for ADA in some instances, but typically only in conjunction with a related HUD or CDBG project.

There is also a Small Business Tax Credit, which is available to businesses with less than \$1 million in gross receipts in the previous year or with 30 or fewer full-time employees. Eligible expenses are the same as the tax deduction but also include sign language interpreters, assistance for the blind, Braille, etc. The tax credit cannot be used for new construction or for accessibility work already required as part of a renovation. The credit is 50 percent of expenditures over \$250, but less than \$10,250, for a maximum credit of \$5,000 per year.

Littleton Main Street in New Hampshire participated in the Littleton Model Community Project in partnership with the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability to address disability issues from a planning perspective. As a result, the Main Street program was able to give local business owners small grants to help pay for accessibility improvement projects.

New Construction

Over the years, due to fire, owner neglect, or demolition, many Main Streets have “holes” in the built environment. These vacant lots present exciting opportunities for new infill construction. While there is no clear blueprint for the design of a new building or an addition to an existing building, it is generally agreed that it should not pretend to be historic by too closely mimicking older, adjacent facades. Instead, it should still complement the character of its neighbors.

There are two main reasons for this. First, a new building or addition that appears historic will compromise the authenticity of its truly historic neighbors; people may not be able to distinguish historic buildings from new ones. Secondly, historic commercial districts evolved over time and as a result, many different architectural styles exist. A new building should look new, although it should be designed to fit in with existing structures. This may sound confusing, but essentially, your guidelines should allow architects freedom of design while still maintaining the existing character of the district. See the sidebar on the next page for the new construction principles that should govern the visual relationship between new and old.

Signs and Awnings

Signs on Main Street project an image of the buildings, businesses, and the district as a whole. Signs must reflect the character of the business they represent; must fit in with the building to which they are attached; and must be compatible in scale, quality, and design with the other signs on Main Street. This is a lot to ask of sign

designers, but signs should promote a viable, unified business district and communicate a high-quality image.

Many Main Street communities establish design guidelines and design review for new signs, and most review and recommend changes to their local sign ordinances. A sign ordinance is a powerful tool. For example, when a national retailer comes in and says it needs to install the same pole-mounted, internally lit sign to a Main Street building as it has on the strip, communities that have these tools in place are able to say no. Signs on Main Street will be smaller than those on businesses located along the freeway because they are designed to blend in with the architecture and are oriented toward pedestrians and slower-moving traffic.

A sign ordinance should regulate size, location, height, width, quantity, and type of sign allowed. It should include permit requirements, appeal procedures, and descriptions of what needs to be done with non-conforming, deteriorated, or abandoned signs. Be careful, however, to ensure that the ordinance does not dictate content, since this is protected by the First Amendment.

Appropriate Signs

In general, signs should have a simple design and limited information so they are easy to read. The following are examples of appropriate sign types for Main Street.

- **Projecting signs:** These are two-sided signs, often made of hand-painted, medium-density overlay (MDO) plywood; wood; foam; or metal. Typically, they are mounted at least seven feet above the sidewalk, and project out three to four feet from the building face. The most effective strategy is to use a projecting sign with either a flush-mounted or window sign. Both projecting and flush-mounted signs are typically lit externally by separate light fixtures, such as gooseneck lights. These are the easiest signs to see on a street.



© Linda S. Glisson

- **Flush-mounted signs:** These signs are attached to or painted directly on the wall, canopy, or cornice. They are often made of hand-painted MDO plywood, sandblasted or carved wood, sandblasted or carved foam, raised letters, or metal. Size and placement are crucial for this type of sign. They should not conceal important building elements. This sign type is the easiest to see from directly across the street.

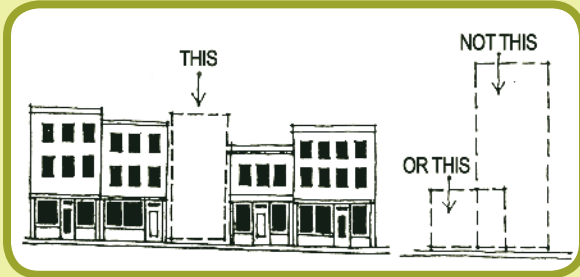


© Joshua Bloom

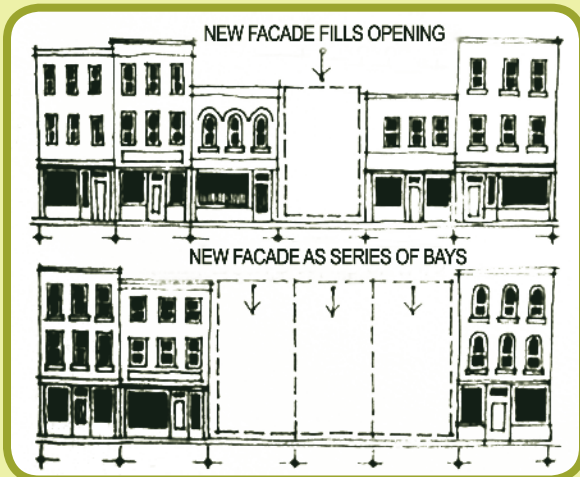
- **Freestanding signs:** This sign type is often located on the fringes of downtown or at gas stations where

New Construction Principles

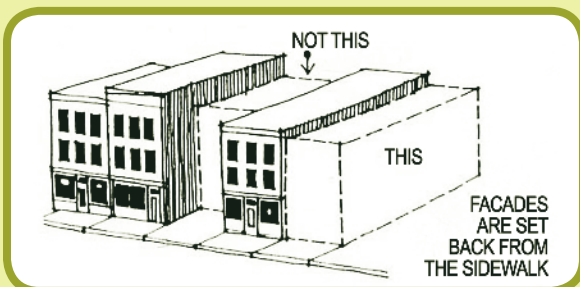
- Height.** If a new building is surrounded by buildings that are all the same height, it should be the same height. If the heights on the block vary, then it should reflect the heights of the buildings directly adjacent to it. The following illustration shows how infill construction can blend well with the height of adjacent buildings.



- Width.** If a vacant space exists on a lot that is as wide as the other lots on the street, then the new building should fill the entire width of the lot. There are two options for a space where several buildings in a row are missing: the infill can include multiple new buildings; or a single building can be designed with multiple parts, or bays. Each bay should reflect the width of the existing buildings on the block.



- Setback.** Chances are most buildings on most Main Streets extend right up to the sidewalk. This is called zero setback. Historically, this was done to maximize the use of the limited land available in an existing commercial district. As a result, Main Street developed a so-called “street wall” of buildings. This street wall has a subconscious, psychological effect on pedestrians. If there are gaps in this street wall from demolished buildings or from buildings set back from the sidewalk, a pedestrian’s instinct is to stop and turn around. Typically, all new construction fronting Main Street should adhere to this zero setback.



This infill building replaced two buildings that were lost to neglect. Its design fits in with the surrounding buildings due to its compatible architectural elements.



© Joe Lawniczak

- Composition and rhythm.** The composition and rhythm of buildings on a street create a cohesive look. Therefore, the wall-to-window ratio; storefront height; window spacing, height, and type; roof and cornice forms; and other architectural elements in new construction should reflect the composition of existing buildings.



- Materials.** While each building on Main Street has a different architectural style, there are surprisingly few types of original materials used. While there are exceptions, such as Cararra glass, stucco, terra cotta (as pictured below), and even tin, the majority used brick, stone, or wood. The materials used in new infill construction should complement the materials of adjacent buildings.



Image top, © Michael Dono; Image bottom, © Linda S. Glisson.

there isn't a zero setback. These signs should not be the pole-mounted signs seen along highways, but should be scaled for pedestrians. They are often made of MDO plywood, wood, or brick and/or stone columns surrounded by landscaping.



© Joshua Bloom

- Window signs:** There are two main types of window signs: window lettering painted or applied directly to the interior side of the glass and interior-hung signs. Both are appropriate, but neither should take up more than 25 to 30 percent of the glass area, which allows shoppers to see inside. This sign type is highly effective in attracting the attention of pedestrians.



© Linda S. Glisson

- Neon signs:** Neon signs add light and vibrancy to the street at night. In some parts of the country, neon signs are appropriate, such as in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where Route 66 runs through the historic district. Both exterior-mounted neon signs and neon signs placed inside windows can be used. Neon window signs should not take up more than 25 to 30 percent of the window area. Prefabricated signs, such as “open” signs, should be allowed, but they ideally should be custom designed, using no more than two or three colors.



© Linda S. Glisson

- Historic signs:** These original signs should be restored and preserved when possible. Many sign manufacturers have the capabilities to perform such restorations.



© Linda S. Glisson

- Wall murals and ghost signs:** Ghost signs, located on the blank side walls of historic buildings, were used in the past as advertisement space. Whenever pos-



© Chippewa Falls Main Street

Chippewa Falls (Wisconsin) Main Street trained volunteers to restore a 1930s wall mural.

sible, these signs should either be preserved in their current state or restored to their original splendor.

New murals that are done well can become sources of pride, especially for those who worked on them. The Community Bridge mural project in Frederick, Maryland, transformed a plain concrete bridge into a symbolic and beautiful public art project. A team of volunteers asked community members to describe what community means to them and used their ideas in the design. Thousands of people submitted their ideas of symbols that represented the spirit of community—in fact, people from all over the world participated. The artist painted 160 symbols using trompe l’oeil techniques. The bridge was part of a larger catalyst and flood control project that included infrastructure improvements to remove downtown from FEMA’s flood plain and create a linear park along Carroll Creek. The improvements attracted millions of dollars in new development in the now-safe district, and the bridge symbolizes the inclusive nature of the revitalization project.

- Banners:** Most communities include banners, frequently on lampposts, as part of their streetscape improvements, as is discussed on page 144. But banners can also be used as signs.



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- Sandwich boards:** This sign type is, in essence, a portable freestanding sign and can effectively capture the attention of pedestrians. They should be custom made and reflect the character of the business. Their placement should not interfere with pedestrian traffic.



© Leon Steele

Inappropriate Sign Types

Inappropriate signs send a negative image about the district and the businesses within it. Many business owners

who choose inappropriate signs do so in order to attract customers' attention. Your job is to show them that there is a difference between standing out and sticking out. Help them visualize how high-quality, appropriate signs will improve the look of their buildings and attract as much attention as a flashy, inappropriate sign.

Now, which signs don't belong on Main Street?

- **Internally lit signs:** Internally lit signs are discouraged because the plastic and aluminum materials used in this type of sign do not blend well with the natural building materials of historic buildings. Many are prefabricated signs with no individuality so they don't contribute to a unique sense of place. If internally lit signs are allowed, the background should be opaque, with transparent text and logo, which is the opposite of most existing internally lit signs.



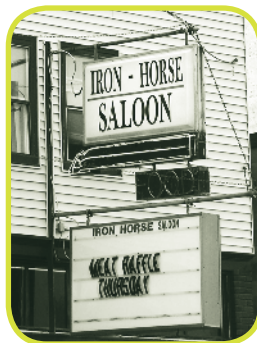
© Andrea L. Dono

- **Oversized signs:** In nearly every community, there are signs of all types that are too large for their buildings. Signs should never conceal architectural elements; they should fit within logical spaces on a building and match the proportions of the building's elements.



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- **Reader boards/electronic signs:** Reader boards or electronic signs are typically located on a portion of a sign where changeable lettering can be applied to advertise such things as dinner specials, upcoming events, and sales. They come in two forms: individual letter tracks and rolling LED. There are very few instances on Main Street where tasteful reader boards could be allowed; these include theater marquees, churches, schools, and community centers. With the exception of theater marquees, reader boards on signs, when allowed, should be limited to no more than 20 percent of the total sign area, including the sign structure.



© Joe Lawniczak

- **Flashing signs:** Signs on Main Street should be compatible with each other; none should stand out over the rest. The most drastic example of this type is a flashing sign, with a series of individual light bulbs around the perimeter. In order to maintain a level of continuity, flashing signs should not be allowed.

- **Poorly crafted homemade signs:** Arguably the most inappropriate sign type is the "homemade" sign. Some people are adept at crafting hand-lettered signs; and, in some cases, such design styles appropriately match the business type. More often, however, homemade signs have a low-quality look and give a negative impression of the district. If the latter is the case, encourage the business owner to take advantage of sign grants and other resources to hire a professional sign designer or manufacturer.



© Joshua Bloom

Awnings and Canopies

Awnings have been used for centuries on Main Street, and serve many purposes. They are designed to protect the entryway and customers from the elements, to control the amount of sunlight allowed into the building, and to provide additional signage space. Depending on when your Main Street buildings were constructed, older awnings were typically made of canvas stretched over a fixed or retractable steel frame or of corrugated metal held up by brackets or poles. Retractable awnings allowed the merchant to open the awning on sunny days and retract it on cloudy days. Canvas was often used, primarily because it blended well with the natural building materials.

Vinyl awnings, on the other hand, should be avoided on Main Street. These awnings were fairly popular in the latter half of the 20th century, but because the material contrasts drastically with historic building materials, they detract from the overall design of the façade. In many cases, vinyl awnings are internally lit, which creates even greater contrast with the façade. This awning type is better suited to strip shopping centers where buildings are more modern, and the signs and awnings need to be seen from farther away.

Fixed awnings are acceptable, although, in some cases, they are not as practical as retractable awnings because they are susceptible to strong winds and heavy snow loads. Strong winds put a lot of stress on the semi-rigid frame, and the fabric suffers excessive wear and tear when it flaps in the wind. Similarly, heavy snow loads can put excessive pressure on the frame and can accelerate the deterioration of the fabric.

As with any building material, fabric awnings need frequent maintenance. It is not uncommon for fabric to need replacement within eight to 10 years. Fortunately, the steel frames have been known to last for decades and can often be reused.

Awning fabric comes in numerous colors and patterns. The awning color should suit the natural building elements and building trim colors. Be aware that dark awnings will

fade more quickly and may need to be replaced more often than lighter colors.

In many instances, awnings also double as signs. Typically, simple lettering is applied to the awning valence. In other cases, a simple logo or lettering can be applied to the main sheet of the awning. But as with any other sign type, size and placement are important. The lettering or logo should fit seamlessly with the overall awning design in both size and color.

Some Main Street buildings have fixed canopies instead of awnings. These are often made of metal and wood, and are fastened to the façade using steel rods. Canopies can be appropriate alternatives to awnings on more monumental buildings, such as the main entrances to hotels or theaters, but they do have some drawbacks. Canopies are more expensive to build and install than awnings, they require a great deal of construction and structural work, they are not retractable, and they have flat roofs on which snow and rain can accumulate. If designed properly, however, canopies can add to a building's character.

Mansard roofs are one type of canopy that is not appropriate. Part awning, part canopy, these elements were nearly always installed as inappropriate alterations to storefronts, often concealing transom windows and other elements. Mansard roofs have no relation to the original historic structure and are heavy and clumsy in appearance. Whenever possible, mansard roofs should be removed to reveal the original building elements or replaced with a fabric awning and steel frame.

Conclusion

Clearly, tackling design issues in your commercial district involves a wide scope of activities, from the installation and maintenance of awnings to building rehabilitations. For any building improvement project, large or small, the overarching idea is that the design appropriately fits in with existing elements of the district, respecting community character and adhering to standards of high quality.

Awnings: Do's and Don't's

There are appropriate ways to fit an awning to a building (above). These two separate awnings reveal the building's ornate piers and transoms without wrapping around the corner. The awnings are integral design features of the façade.



DO

In contrast, the large awning (below) is an example of the wrong way to design a storefront awning. It is so large that it conceals important building elements and separates the storefront from the upper façade—passersby cannot see the upper façade when they are underneath the awning.



DON'T

RESOURCES

Websites

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation: This advocacy group advises the President and Congress on historic preservation policy. Its website provides information on current issues relating to preservation nationwide and by state. www.achp.gov/index.html

American Industrial Hygiene Association: Provides information about mold. www.aiha.org

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): The U.S. Department of Justice's website provide information on the ADA. www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm. You can download the Standards for Accessible Design: ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) from www.ada.gov/stdspdf.htm

Blue Book of Building Construction: Lists U.S. contractors, manufacturers, architects, and engineers, including those with experience in building restoration. www.thebluebook.com/cl/all3513.htm

The Environmental Protection Agency: The EPA has information about lead, asbestos, and mold. See www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/nlic.htm for an online form for more information on lead or call 1-800-LEAD-FYI; www.epa.gov/iaq/asbestos.html for more information about asbestos; and www.epa.gov/mold/moldresources.html for more information about mold.

Historic American Building Survey/Historic American Engineering Record: This Library of Congress website provides documentation, such as measured drawings, photographs, and written historical information, on more than 37,000 U.S. sites and structures. www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer

Index of Historic Preservation Design Guidelines: Provides an index of design guidelines from communities throughout the U.S. www.uga.edu/sed/facilities/owenslibrary/designguidelines.htm

Indoor Air Quality Association: Offers tips for finding a qualified professional to deal with mold. See www.iaqa.org

National Alliance of Preservation Commissions: Provides links to online design guidelines from many U.S. cities. www.uga.edu/sed/pso/programs/napc/napc.htm

National Trust for Historic Preservation: Provides preservation news and information on funding opportunities, taming the teardown trend, and advocacy. www.PreservationNation.org

National Park Service (NPS): The NPS has a series of Preservation Tech Notes and Preservation Briefs that focus on a different aspect of restoration and preservation. www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm and www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/technotes/tnhome.htm

Preservation Directory: An online resource for historic preservation, building restoration, and cultural resource management in the U.S. and Canada. www.preservationdirectory.com/HistoricalPreservation/Home.aspx

Rehabilitation Tax Credits: Provides information on the federal rehabilitation tax credit program. www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/brochure1.htm

Scenic America: Provides information on billboard and sign control, community planning and design, model ordinances, scenic easements, scenic byways, transportation planning, and design guidelines. www.scenic.org

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation: An illustrated version of the standards can be found at www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/rhb/index.htm

Traditional Building: Provides information on products and services for commercial, civic, institutional, and religious building projects. www.traditional-building.com/index.htm

Transportation Enhancements: The National Transportation Enhancement Clearinghouse has developed a free manual on information about the federal transportation enhancement funds. www.enhancements.org/misc/TEGuide2002.pdf

Article

"Inappropriate Building Materials on Main Street," by Joe Lawniczak, *Main Street News* (Nov. 2005). Learn all about building materials, the importance of design guidelines, and how you can persuade property owners to make sensitive improvements.

Books

Design: Main Street Committee Members Handbook, by Doug Loescher and Teresa Lynch (National Main Street Center, 1996). Explains the Main Street approach, the committee's purpose, and typical responsibilities.

Guiding Design on Main Street: The Professional's Manual for Managing Design, by Richard Wagner (National Main Street Center, 2000). Teaches the design-related aspects of commercial district revitalization, including design guidelines, regulation and review, design incentives and financing, public outreach, and compatible design.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION TOOLS

By Joe Lawniczak

As a Main Street organization, your mission is to facilitate historic preservation-based economic development by becoming a clearinghouse for resources that are available.

Your community may have programs in place that support local preservation efforts, so your design committee's first step is an easy one—to determine which resources and tools already exist. Then, it should create whichever necessary programs that are missing or work in partnership with stewards of existing programs to realize their fullest potential. For example, a city or village will most likely have a sign ordinance, but it may need to be revised to fit the goals of the revitalization effort. Or, there may already be a Landmarks or Historic Preservation Commission that fulfills the duties required by a landmarks or preservation ordinance, such as designating local properties, establishing design guidelines, and acting as a design review board. Learning what exists and what is needed is vital for an organization to plan its activities, avoid duplication, tap into the experience and expertise of other groups, and avoid stepping on any toes. In addition, members of these partner entities could be great design committee volunteers.

The following are the most common tools that can help Main Street programs protect irreplaceable assets. Most coordinating Main Street programs or state historic preservation offices have examples and information for each.



Design Guidelines

Façade and sign design guidelines create a blueprint for all future developments and improvements. Most property owners would like to do the right thing as far as restoring their buildings and designing their signs, but many simply do not know how. Design guidelines will help property owners do the right thing, as well as benefit contractors, carpenters, sign manufacturers, and other trades people who may not have experience rehabbing old buildings or designing appropriate signs for historic districts.

Effective design guidelines outline proper techniques for a vast array of design issues. Areas of focus include façade restoration, including all elements of a façade (storefront, upper façade, doors and windows, masonry, cornices, etc.); paint selection; dealing with alterations from the recent past; masonry cleaning; signs; awnings; the Secretary of the Interior's Standards; energy efficiency; alleys; accessibility; lighting; visual merchandising; and more). In addition to building restoration, design guidelines should address new infill development and building additions to ensure that the height, width, proportions, setback, composition, rhythm, and materials respect and reflect the surrounding historic architecture.

In addition to the above, truly effective guidelines also include specific, local information. Design guidelines should be a “one-stop” resource for property owners, contractors, and other people working on rehabilitation and infill projects and should include:

- A map of the district;
- Local building styles;
- Pertinent local ordinances;
- Pertinent local and state building codes;
- Local permit procedures;
- Local design review process;
- Contact information for building inspectors, code officials, bankers, contractors, etc.;
- All local incentives and application processes;
- All available assistance; and
- Anything else a property owner would need to know in order to obtain a building permit, complete the building improvement, and find help along the way.

Your community is unique; writing design guidelines will help protect its authenticity. Contact other organizations, such as historic preservation commissions and other Main Street programs, to request copies of their design guidelines so you can get a better idea of the issues and scope of work; however, your own guidelines should be customized to best reflect local building styles, history, and issues.

Giving Guidelines Teeth

Guidelines, on their own, are actually just suggestions. They are not legally binding in any way.

One way to make them binding is to incorporate the guidelines into a local historic preservation or landmarks ordinance, a sign ordinance, and any other local land-use ordinance or overlay zoning requirements that affect the district. As a result, all proposed building improvements, new construction, and signs within a designated area (i.e. Main Street or local historic district boundaries) would have to follow these guidelines before a building permit is issued. Often, these proposals are reviewed by a design review board.

Another recommended method is to incorporate the guidelines into financial incentive programs, which will be discussed in the next section. Only proposals that meet the design guidelines would be eligible for incentives. Similar to ordinances, the proposals are reviewed by a design review board.

Since all design review board decisions will be based on these guidelines, it is important that they address as many issues as possible. With that said, though, it is impossible to foresee every possible issue. With time, the design review board may come across issues that may warrant a revision of the guidelines. It is for this reason that guidelines should be reviewed annually, and revised as needed. It is important, however, that you don't make the guidelines too stringent, or too weak. They should still achieve the goal of guiding proper development and improvements and should protect the area's historic integrity.

Local Financial Incentive Programs

Establishing local financial incentives, such as low-interest loan pools or matching grant programs, and awarding incentives to projects that adhere to design guidelines are great ways to give them teeth. These incentives also help offset the additional costs of proper restoration versus sub-par alterations, and thus act as a “carrot” to encourage proper design. For these financial programs to be effective, the proposed project must be approved by the design review board before it receives any of the incentives. Loan pools and grants are two common financial incentives many Main Street programs develop.

Loan pools. There are two fairly common types of loan pools: façade improvement loan programs and building improvement loan programs. A façade improvement loan program is used for façade renovations, signage, etc. A building improvement loan program is frequently used for building maintenance, code compliance, interior renovations, structural repairs, etc.

Typically, several local banks pool money that is earmarked for the program(s). Often, there is a per-project cap of anywhere from \$25,000 to \$100,000. Rates are typically set at either a percentage of or a number of points below prime (75 percent of, or 2 points below).

Grant programs. Typically, these are 50-50 matching grants for improvements such as façade renovations, signs, awnings, etc. Grant programs generally range from

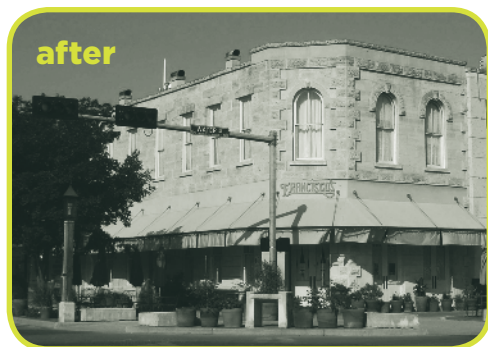
\$500 to \$5,000 or more per project. The money for these programs often comes from various fund-raising efforts, CDBG funds, and private foundations. Many donors want their contributions to be used for programs that will produce positive physical changes. Grant programs fall into that category. Again, all projects requesting grants must adhere to the design guidelines.

Design Review

Design review is often the last step in assuring that building renovations, new construction, and signs fit within the context of your historic district. In many Main Street communities, some design committee members also serve on the design review board. With the advent of Historic Preservation Commissions (HPC), many communities defer this responsibility to the HPC. An HPC is created through a historic preservation or landmarks ordinance and its members are appointed by the chief elected official of the municipality. This type of ordinance is vital in identifying, designating, preserving, and protecting a community's historic resources.

Typically, the HPC is given a set of powers and duties that include preservation education and marketing, as well as designating local properties as historic and providing design review for renovations to those properties. It is recommended, when a community has both a Main Street organization and an HPC, that some design committee members serve on the HPC. If, for some reason, they don't get on the committee, they should encourage HPC members to become involved in Main Street. Thus, while all design review would fall under HPC jurisdiction, there would be consistency between Main Street and HPC goals.

A design review board is responsible for reviewing the plans for any proposed building renovation, new construction project, or signage within designated boundaries. In some instances, design review is required by an ordinance; in other instances, it is part of the approval process for local grants, loans, or other incentives. Ideally, the plans are reviewed based solely on established design guidelines. If approved, the review board issues a Certificate of Appropriateness,



which is forwarded to the local building inspector or the entity providing the funds, depending on who requires the review. If the plans are not approved, the applicant must make any necessary changes and resubmit the proposal.

Design Review Board Members

The most effective design review board has four or five members. That may seem small, but having more than five members can lead to overly long discussions and make reaching consensus difficult. If this group is established by an ordinance and functions as an extension of the local government, it must notify the public before holding its meetings; therefore, property owners must allow time for permit reviews when starting on projects. If your design committee is reviewing building projects as part of a financial incentive program, then the group can usually meet on an as-needed basis, depending on the organization's bylaws and ability to meet quorum. Each board member should understand and appreciate historic preservation. People with appropriate experience include architects, landscape architects, interior designers, planners, graphic artists, preservationists, historians, building inspectors, contractors, sign manufacturers, and sometimes developers. They must be able to offer workable alternatives to inappropriate proposals.

The members of a review board must be diplomatic because their decisions directly affect what people can or cannot do with their property. Members must be able to compromise when appropriate, yet stand firm when needed, all the while treating applicants with respect. The line between being too lenient and being too stringent is a fine one. A design review board that is too lenient may jeopardize the historic integrity of an entire district, and lose its credibility. On the flip side, a board that is too stringent and unwilling to compromise when appropriate may gain a reputation as an obstacle in the permit process. As a result, potential developers and investors may choose to invest elsewhere, or property owners will decide not to improve their buildings simply to avoid the "headache" of dealing with the review board. Both situations are counter-productive to revitalization. All compromises need to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Documentation

It is a fact of life that some applications will be rejected. When a project is not approved, the applicant must be given written documentation explaining why. Each portion of a project that doesn't adhere to the guidelines should be itemized. This process will create transparency and build credibility for the board. Don't just say "not approved." Instead refer the applicant to specific sections of the guidelines, and, if possible, offer suggestions that can help the applicant make changes in order to gain approval.

Whenever the review board makes a compromise, it should be documented. Explain exactly why something was allowed in a given situation to avoid setting unwanted precedents. The biggest fear of a review board is having an applicant who was not approved ask, "why do they get to

do this, but I don't?" Documentation will also help when revising the guidelines. For example, if a building owner proposes something that is not covered in the guidelines, and the review board must make a judgment call, address that issue in the next revision.

Preparing Applicants

Any permit process takes too long in the minds of property owners, developers, and contractors. Anything that can be done to minimize the time it takes to go through all of the channels should be considered. Seek feedback and continually improve your guidelines and the assistance you give the public.

Make it clear to the property owners and developers that they need to review guidelines before designing their projects. Prior to the actual design review, the applicant should be given all material required for the application, whether it is an application form or a reference slip from the building inspector or banker. The applicant should also know what materials to bring to the review. Typically, they consist of a colored rendering or working drawings, paint selections, material samples, and any specifications the applicant may have. Assisting applicants presents a fantastic opportunity for the Main Street program to facilitate the process and increase the willingness of developers and property owners to invest in the district.

Becoming a one-stop information source and acting as a liaison with municipal offices will also help build support for your organization. In Kansas, Emporia Main Street's Business Enhancement Committee coordinates a "Code Service Team" that includes the fire marshal, building inspectors, architects, Main Street representatives, and other stakeholders who meet with business and building owners and developers to discuss the project on-site. This meeting saves the developer time and money because costly plans no longer need to be drawn up and submitted to separate agencies. A permitting process that once took months now only takes a few hours and the developer can walk away knowing all the requirements to move the project forward.

Rehabilitation Tax Credits

Since 1976, the National Park Service (NPS) has administered the federal historic preservation tax credits program in partnership with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and state historic preservation offices (SHPO). These tax incentives attract new private investment to the historic cores of cities and towns across the U.S., and also generate jobs, enhance property values, and provide additional property tax revenues for local governments. Through this program, abandoned, underused, and deteriorated properties have been restored to life in a manner that maintains their historic character. Tax credits were created to make historic preservation as attractive as new construction.

The federal portion of this program provides a 20 percent tax credit for the rehabilitation of historic structures. In addition, many states offer a supplement-

tal tax credit in addition to the 20 percent. The rehabilitation must be substantial and must involve a depreciable building. (These terms will be explained later.) There is also a 10 percent tax credit for the rehabilitation of non-historic, non-residential buildings built before 1936.

A tax credit lowers the amount of income tax owed by the property owner. This differs from a tax deduction, which merely lowers the amount of income subject to taxation. In general, a dollar of tax credit reduces the amount of income tax owed by one dollar. The amount of tax credits provided relates directly to the amount spent on rehabilitation.

With the 20 percent federal tax credit, the project must be a certified rehabilitation, meaning it must follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Certification, which is done by the SHPO and the NPS, should be sought before beginning any work on the building. It must be a certified historic structure, meaning the building must be individually listed in the National Register, be eligible for listing, or be a contributing building within a National Register historic district. It must be a substantial rehabilitation, meaning the rehabilitation costs must be equal to or greater than the adjusted basis of the property, or \$5,000, whichever is greater. The adjusted basis, in very general terms, is the purchase price of the property, minus the cost of the land, plus improvements already made, minus depreciation already taken. And the building must be depreciable, or income producing. Uses can include offices, commercial, industrial, agricultural, or rental housing, but the building may not be the owner's private residence.

Rehabilitation costs include construction, architectural, engineering, site survey, legal, and development fees as long as they are added to the basis of the property and are determined to be reasonable and related to the project. Rehabilitation costs do not include furnishings, new additions/construction, parking lots, sidewalks, landscaping, or out buildings.

There is a three-part application process. The first and second parts should be submitted as quickly as possible, preferably at least 60 days before the rehabilitation is due to begin. However, it is recommended that the SHPO be consulted during the design stage. The application is first submitted to the SHPO, who has 30 days to review it; then it is sent to the NPS, which has 30 days to approve or deny it.

Step one of the application is to determine if the building is a certified historic structure. If the building is already individually listed in the National Register, the first step is unnecessary. This step is required if the building is in a National Register historic district or is not yet individually listed in the National Register.

Step two is to determine if the owner's rehabilitation plans will qualify as a certified rehabilitation and meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Once the first two steps are submitted and certified, then the actual rehabilitation can begin.

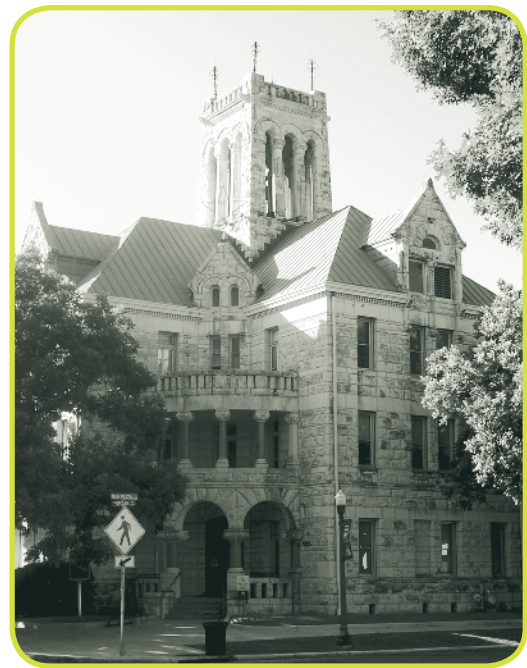
Step three takes place after the rehabilitation is complete. The SHPO and NPS determine if the completed project qualifies as a certified historic rehabilitation. They check to see if it was done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards by following the plans submitted in step two. This step requires photos and a description of the completed work.

Once completed, the building must be placed in service (returned to use). The date the building is placed in service is critical in determining when the tax credits will be allowed. From that date, the owner must keep the building for five full years and must not perform any unapproved alterations during that time. If the building is sold, or if unapproved alterations are made, the IRS can recapture all or part of the tax credit. During this five-year period, the SHPO or NPS can inspect the building at any time. Because there are so many factors involved in the use of the rehabilitation tax credits, the building owner should consult a knowledgeable accountant.

Ten Percent Non-historic Tax Credit

The IRS has made a 10 percent non-historic rehabilitation tax credit available for buildings that are not listed in the National Register (although they may be eligible). While there is no formal review process for this credit, the following criteria apply: the building must have been built before 1936, the rehabilitation must be substantial (adjusted basis or \$5,000), must be depreciable, must be for non-residential use (rental housing not allowed), and must be in its original location (never been moved). In addition, the following applies to the retention of walls and framework: at least 50 percent of total existing walls must remain in place. At least 75 percent of existing external walls must remain in place as internal or external walls, and at least 75 percent of the internal framework must remain in place.

The 10 percent tax credit must be claimed on IRS form 3468 for the tax year in which the rehabilitated building is placed in service. Consult an accountant for assistance.



National historic districts: Historic districts are geographically definable areas that possess a significant concentration of sites or properties united aesthetically by design or past events. Most historic districts have both contributing and non-contributing buildings. Generally, contributing buildings must retain historic exterior integrity and be at least 50 years old; however, exceptions can be made for younger structures that have achieved significance because they are deemed of extreme importance. In order to be established, historic districts need the approval of property owners within the district; if more than 50 percent of the owners object, they can block the listing.

National landmark designation: This type of listing is reserved for buildings, sites, structures, and objects of national significance to American history or culture. All National Historic Landmarks are included in the National Register, and examples range from Pearl Harbor to Mount Vernon. The NPS generally identifies potential landmarks but other federal agencies, SHPOs, and individuals have submitted successful applications (which use criteria and procedures different from the National Register).

The benefits of National Register listing include:

- **Protection of investment.** In 2003, a study was done in 18 historic districts in Florida. In none of the districts studied did the historic designation depress property values. In fact, in 15 of the 18 cases, the value of property in historic districts appreciated more than in comparable non-historic districts.
- **Incentives.** Owners of individually listed or contributing buildings may be eligible for state and federal rehabilitation tax credits, tax deductions for easement donations, and property tax abatements for the rehabilitation of their buildings. Federal and individual state requirements vary.
- **Grants.** The owners of individually listed or contributing buildings may be eligible for certain public or private preservation grants.

National Register of Historic Places

Probably the most misunderstood preservation-related tool is historic designation. Most people automatically assume that having a building within a historic district or individually listed in a historic register means they will be told what they can or cannot do to their property. However, this is not always the case. First of all, it depends on the type of listing. There are three types: listing in the National Register of Historic Places, listing in a statewide register, or local designation by a historic preservation or landmarks commission.

The National Register is the official list of the nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. Entries are officially nominated by the SHPO and submitted to the NPS. Nomination forms are prepared by local citizens, building owners, historic preservation consultants, or by the SHPO itself. There are three types of National Register listings:

Individually listed properties: These types of listings are “important” in American history, culture, archaeology, or architecture. They are typically of regional or statewide importance, however, not necessarily of national importance. For instance, the building may represent a unique architectural style, or it may have been the site of an important event or the home of a significant resident. The NPS has online and print resources that detail the criteria for listing properties as well as various exceptions.

- **Protection of property.** Listing provides limited protection from adverse effects by federally funded, licensed, or assisted projects, such as demolition for a federal highway project.

Contrary to popular belief, simply having a building listed in the National Register generally does **not** prohibit the owner from demolishing the building, nor does it dictate what can or cannot be done to the building. The exceptions are school districts that receive federal funds, or city, county, and state governments (unless covered by a state preservation law) that obtain federal permits, funds, or licenses for a project. It is only when a local landmarks or preservation ordinance is in place, or when the owner is utilizing rehabilitation tax credits or other financial incentives, that any restrictions above and beyond standard building codes apply.

State registers of historic places: Most states maintain a state register of historic places that, for the most part, mimics the National Register. Listing in these registers does not restrict the building owner from demolishing or altering the building (unless covered by a state preservation law), but does provide limited protection from adverse effects by state funded, licensed, or assisted projects, such as demolition for a state highway project. Again, it is only when a local landmarks or preservation ordinance is in place, or when the owner is utilizing rehabilitation tax credits or other financial incentives, that any restrictions above and beyond standard building codes apply.

Local designation: Local historic designation and local landmarks or preservation ordinances provide the best protection for historic resources and regulate what can be done to historic buildings, including demolition. Typically, the task of designating local historic districts or properties falls to the historic preservation commission or landmarks commission, which itself is formed through a preservation or landmarks ordinance.

But in some cases, when a building is threatened with demolition, and there are no such ordinances or commissions in place, this type of designation is community driven. However, it is always best to have these tools in place to avoid preservation emergencies. The designation of local historic districts requires a majority of the affected building owners' support. This almost always requires that the HPC conducts a vigorous educational process before attempting to designate any properties.

If a majority of the building owners agree, then all properties designated, either individually or as part of a district, are subject to design guidelines and design review. A typical historic preservation or landmarks ordinance will include:

- A statement of purpose;
- Definitions of terms used;
- Description of the make-up and length of office of the historic preservation commission;
- The powers and duties of the commission;
- The criteria and procedures for designating historic properties or landmarks;
- The procedures and guidelines for regulating alterations to designated properties;
- The procedures and guidelines for regulating the demolition of designated properties;
- A summary of other powers and duties;
- Methods of enforcement; and
- Provisions for recognizing and marking designated properties and landmarks.

Certified Local Government (CLG) status: This certification by the SHPO and the NPS recognizes that your community meets certain criteria for historic preservation tools and activities.

By definition, any city, village, or town is eligible to receive CLG status if it establishes and enforces a local preservation or landmarks ordinance, has a qualified HPC, has conducted an architectural/historic building survey, provides for public participation and education on historic preservation, produces an annual report each year, and provides the SHPO with meeting minutes.

To apply in most states, the mayor or chief elected official must submit a letter supporting the protection of historic properties, a copy of the historic preservation ordinance, a list of locally designated historic properties and districts, a list of HPC members and their qualifications, and a copy of the most recent comprehensive plan.

A CLG community is eligible to apply for Preservation Fund Subgrants, and can formally comment on National Register nominations before they are sent to the SHPO. The Preservation Fund Subgrants typically range from \$2,000 to \$8,000 and are set up on a reimbursable format, contingent upon proof they were used for approved activities. The subgrants can be used to pay for architectural/historical surveys, National Register nominations, educational activities, comprehensive planning, and administration of preservation programs.

RESOURCES

Please refer to the list at the end of Chapter 12, Improving Appearances.

REVITALIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

By Tom Liebel, AIA, LEED AP

Rehabilitating existing structures is recycling on a grand scale and inherently sustainable in and of itself.

By encouraging public and private property owners in your community to rehabilitate existing buildings, preserve treasured historic and cultural assets, and focus on energy efficiency, you will be well on your way to creating a sustainable commercial district.

There is no shortage of compelling reasons to embrace sustainability. By finding new economic uses for older buildings, we not only protect our culture, but also stimulate the cycle of reinvestment. Revitalization is smart growth because by turning existing communities into vibrant places to live, work, and play, we give people alternatives to sprawling suburban development, prevent the demolition of existing infrastructure, and leverage our initial public and private investment. Smart land use not only preserves undeveloped land and natural landscapes but also keeps building materials out of landfills. Clearly, revitalizing an established commercial district has many benefits, including its impact on the community's sustainability.

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© Imagery by Dimension IV

On Broadway, Inc., in Green Bay, Wisconsin, purchased a 22-acre industrial site and plans to turn it into an economically and ecologically sustainable mixed-use community.

There are three aspects of sustainability that contribute to truly successful projects:

- Environmental;
- Economic; and
- Social.

Known as “planet, profits, and people,” typically these three attributes are mutually reinforcing: a building that is rehabilitated and reused takes advantage of existing infrastructure (reducing the building’s impact on the environment), incorporates sensitive design to promote public interaction (social sustainability), and helps spur additional investment in the community (economic sustainability).

Environmental Sustainability

Reusing a historic building is the ultimate form of recycling. As preservationists, Main Street programs educate the public about why adaptive-use projects are important—including the environmental benefits. With new construction comes the need for processing materials, energy consumption associated with manufacturing and shipping materials, site excavation, and possibly the development of new infrastructure. While new buildings can strive to make a lighter environmental footprint by incorporating recycled materials or energy-efficient systems, a lot of already expended energy and expenses went into constructing existing buildings. When historic buildings are demolished, their embodied energy, which is the amount of energy associated with extracting, processing, manufacturing, transporting, and assembling building materials, is lost and building material waste is hauled to landfills.

Sparked by the energy crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation commissioned a study that quantified how much energy was saved by rehabilitating buildings. One example showed that the Grand Central Arcade in Seattle, Washington, embodied 17 billion BTUs (British Thermal Units of energy) and that a new building equivalent in size would require 109 billion BTUs to construct. Therefore, the study concluded that preserving this historic structure saved 92 billion BTUs or 730,000 gallons of gasoline¹.

We’re not only throwing away thousands of dollars of embodied energy; we are also replacing historic structures with new developments that use vinyl, steel, aluminum, and other energy-consumptive materials. Reusing our historic buildings will almost always be more environmentally responsible than building new structures, even if those new structures are “green build-

1. Source: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, *Assessing the Energy Conservation Benefits of Historic Preservation: Methods and Examples*, Washington, D.C.: 1979.

What Can You Do in Your Community?

Not every project that focuses on sustainability has to be a large-scale green rehabilitation project. See what some innovative Main Street communities have worked on:

- In 2002, the Village of South Orange received a \$720,000 transit village grant (federal funds administered by the NJ DOT) for new jitneys. The program has been well received and has expanded from one jitney line to three.
- Downtown Boulder, Inc., (Colorado) uses solar panels to power a free wireless Internet network downtown.
- Cambridge Main Street (Illinois) built a rain garden in College Square Park that features native plants and collects rain water to reduce water runoff and provide innovative storm-water management.
- Mission Hill Main Street in Boston participated in an Elder Friendly Business District pilot program that worked with neighborhood senior citizens, medical and educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, business owners, and city agencies to survey the district to identify and improve problematic areas such as broken crossing signals, poor sidewalk conditions, missing handrails, and other issues.
- The San Luis Obispo Downtown Association in California surveyed the health of downtown trees. An urban arborist assessed the condition of all trees and made recommendations about which trees should be pruned, replaced, or left as is. Any tree that was removed was replaced by a species indigenous to the Californian environment. The new trees are less prone to disease and will mature in a way that won’t tear up the sidewalks or block entire storefronts.
- Lafayette, Indiana, has taken care of its urban forest, too. As part of its Columbia Street Model Block streetscape project, the city used “structured soil” to extend the life of street trees by creating better drainage.

ings.” Mike Jackson, an architect with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, has calculated that if a building were demolished—even if some of its materials were salvaged—and replaced by an energy-efficient building, it would take 65 years to recover the energy lost demolishing one building and constructing another. Most new buildings don’t have a life span that long and therefore cannot recoup the energy expended in their construction.



Sustainability is not a modern concept! Historic buildings can use natural light and awnings to maximize energy efficiency.

Inherently Sustainable Design

Many historic buildings were constructed with features that made use of specific building materials and the local climate to maximize their performance. Up until the post-World War II era, buildings were designed to operate on much lower energy budgets and take advantage of natural elements. High ceilings, natural light, and windows for cross ventilation; shutters and canopies for controlling sunlight; and a variety of other traditional design elements are being rediscovered today as effective means to reduce a building’s energy consumption. By removing insensitive modifications, such as dropped ceilings and fixed-pane windows, and allowing the building to function as originally designed, building owners can significantly reduce energy consumption. Property owners might consider removing inappropriate additions as well as reinstalling energy-conserving components that were removed during previous renovations, such as over-door transoms, ceiling fans, and awnings.

Making improvements to a building’s exterior walls and roof—called the building envelope—can reduce the heating and cooling demands on a building’s mechanical systems. Typically, these improvements take the form of adding storm windows or replacing original window panes with insulated glass units, adding insulation to perimeter walls and attics, and sealing up the building to reduce drafts.

While these improvements can effectively reduce energy consumption in older buildings, property owners must be aware of the implications of modifying the original fabric of a building. Changes cannot violate the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation if the project plans to pursue historic preservation tax credits; inappropriate alterations include replacing historic wood windows with new aluminum, fiberglass, or vinyl frames that contain insulated glazing units. The designer must also understand the impact the modifications will have on the existing fabric. Just as inappropriate changes to a historic building can ruin the architectural design or cover up a structural problem rather than fixing it, inappropriate modifications in the name of energy conservation can harm a structure.

For example, a classic problem occurs when additional insulation is installed in perimeter walls without adding a functional vapor barrier. If not carefully considered, the addition of insulation can change the condensation point within the wall assembly²; the moisture from air infiltration condenses in the wall cavity, soaking the insulation and creating a potential source of mold and rot. Because these concepts can be very technical, your Main Street

organization should encourage property owners interested in sustainable design to interview architects and engineers with experience integrating sustainable design strategies into historic properties and to work in partnership with the State Historic Preservation Officer to ensure that sustainable design concepts don’t sacrifice historic elements and prevent the project from receiving historic tax credits.

Preservation and LEED

Some people believe that rehabilitating an older structure is less “green” because rehabs do not always incorporate new, sophisticated technology. They may also think that historic buildings cannot easily earn certification under green building standards, such as the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, because traditional design would not be compatible with new green standards.

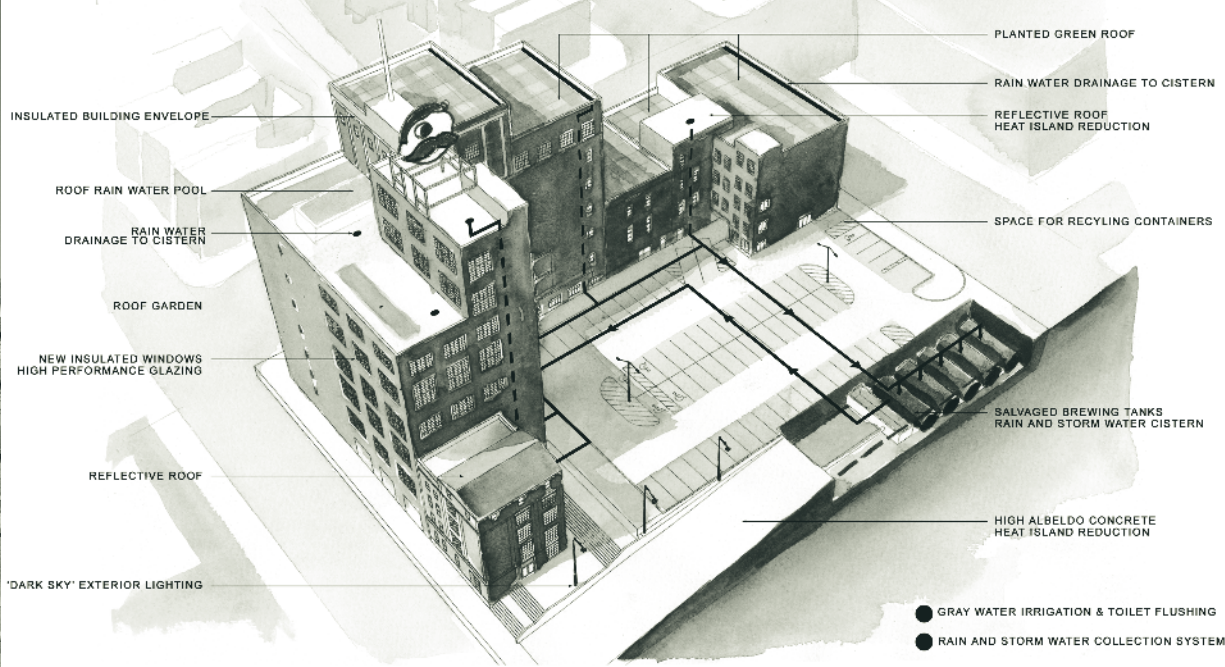
The LEED rating system is a point-based system that rates five primary categories (Sites Sustainability, Water Efficiency, Energy and Atmosphere, Materials and Resources, and Indoor Environmental Quality). There are a total of 69 points available, and of those 69 points, a project must obtain 26 points to be LEED Certified, 33 points for LEED Silver Certification, 39 points for LEED Gold Certification, and 52 points for LEED Platinum Certification. Historic preservation projects can fare well under LEED. In fact in some instances, historic projects actually have an easier time earning points than new construction. For example, historic buildings often readily earn points for density and connectivity to existing infrastructure, such as public transportation.

Historic preservation and adaptive-use projects, by taking advantage of existing infrastructure, the reuse of existing structures, and the selection of simple items that have low- or no-cost impact (such as using low-VOC paint), can easily secure 18 to 26 of the 26 points required for LEED certification.

Economic Sustainability

Buildings that consume fewer resources inherently cost less to operate. By advocating wise stewardship of existing resources, historic preservation advances this goal.

2. Source: Mike Jackson, “Embodied and Operating Energy: Balancing the Eco Equation – Presentation,” St. Paul, Minn., Oct. 5, 2007.



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The Brewer's Hill project (left) and planning sketch (right) illustrate many of the "green" initiatives incorporated into the mixed-use complex.

Sustainable Baltimore

Many communities have already begun to embrace sustainable design principles in their redevelopment projects. Baltimore, Maryland, for example, has a variety of excellent examples that integrate adaptive use and sustainable design principles into preservation projects. One large-scale example is the \$120 million renovation of the former National and Gunther Breweries Brewer's Hill project, which created 750,000 square feet of office and retail space while utilizing both Historic Preservation and Green Building Tax Credits as well as obtaining LEED Certification.

One of Baltimore's oldest adaptive-use projects to integrate preservation and sustainability is the American Can Company site, located near the harbor east of downtown. The Can Company exemplifies the spillover effect successful projects can have, as this project has spurred revitalization throughout the surrounding neighborhood. A 2002 economic analysis of the project commissioned by the developer, Struever Bros. Eccles & Rouse, indicated that the project created significant direct and indirect benefits for the community. Total building permits in the area surrounding the Can Company site rose from 14 in the four years preceding the completion of the Can Company project in 1999 to 45 over the next four years. The economic impact of the project's two-year construction period was calculated at \$44,007,435, with more than 400 jobs created.

A new project that has taken the cause of sustainability even further is the rehabilitation of the historic H.F. Miller & Sons Tin Box and Can Manufacturing Plant. Located in a transitional neighborhood in northern Baltimore, this magnificent brick factory, now renamed Miller's Court, sat vacant for nearly 20 years. Through a combination of historic preservation tax credits and enterprise zone credits, the structure is being redeveloped (on a tight budget) as a mixed-use facility that will also achieve LEED-NC Gold Certification. However, what makes this facility unique is not its focus on environmental and economic sustainability, but its focus on social sustainability. Approximately 35,000 square feet of space has been redeveloped as office space for nonprofit organizations that support Baltimore city schools. Approximately 40,000 square feet



The Can Company project—successfully sustainable.



© Patrick Ross Photography

has been developed as below-market rent apartments targeted at Teach for America participants. Through extensive interviews and surveys of Teach for America participants, a series of key elements was designed into the facility to create a supportive, collaborative environment that will create a sense of community for the residents and tie the building into the surrounding community.

As with so many other effective adaptive-use projects, these rehabilitations removed a blight, which spurred investment in the surrounding neighborhood. Since the rehabilitation, an interesting cycle has developed. Improvements to the rehabilitated structures led to improvements throughout their neighborhoods, which have now led to further improvements to the originally developed properties, with higher-end tenants moving into the ground-level retail and upper-level office spaces as they become available.

Improving the energy efficiency of historic buildings, as discussed earlier, is also economically sustainable for building owners and users. Over a 30-year period, the cost to operate and maintain (heat, light, cool, and clean) a typical office building will average three times the cost to design and construct the facility. Prudent investments in quality construction upfront can have long-term positive economic benefits over the life span of a building. Property owners can install low-flow water fixtures, solar panels (where appropriate), high-efficiency HVAC units, and other building systems and appliances that feature higher energy efficiency to cut utility bills and energy consumption. Money saved through the reduced consumption of utilities can be invested in more important items such as reduced rent and staff salaries.

The Big Economic Picture

Economic sustainability goes beyond saving individual building owners money, however. The effect of reclaiming a blighted property can extend well beyond property lines and spark the revitalization of an entire neighborhood. Historic preservation-based revitalization can be a catalyst for economic development. When a property sits vacant and neglected, it can drag down the surrounding area. Conversely, a successfully renovated project can have spillover effects well beyond the property line, leading to neighborhood improvements that in turn will further improve the specific

building being developed (see the sidebar on Sustainable Baltimore on page 136). In 1998, David and Barbara Listokin and Michael Lahr researched the economic benefits of historic preservation. They found that for fiscal year 1997, the National Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit certified investment was \$688 million, which generated \$762 million in income and \$319 million in taxes.³

Older neighborhoods, typical of Main Street communities, tend to be denser, with a wider variety of uses than new developments. The revitalization of existing neighborhoods and downtowns, many of which feature pedestrian-friendly streets, access to public transportation, and mixed uses, helps discourage sprawl and promotes efficient land use. Reclaiming underutilized older buildings allows us to use existing infrastructure, reducing the demand to extend basic services such as water, power, roads, and sewers into undeveloped areas, thereby reducing the pressure of suburban sprawl. Saving the cost of extending infrastructure and services into the suburbs and beyond directly benefits the developer or the taxpayer—if improvements are publicly funded.

What’s more, the concentration of commercial and residential buildings in Main Street communities allows people to find shopping, housing, jobs, and entertainment all in one place. The mixed-use nature of Main Street districts gives people the ability to meet their needs without

3. Source: David Listokin, Barbara Listokin, and Michael Lahr, "The Contributions of Historic Preservation to Housing and Economic Development," *Housing Policy Debate* 9, no. 3, 1998, pg. 456.

CASE STUDY

Port Townsend, Washington Sustaining the Old with the New



When the city staff of Port Townsend outgrew their office space in the 114-year old city hall, instead of moving to another site or constructing a new building, the city worked with the community and the local historical society to rehab the historic building as well as build an annex to create more space. The final project not only saved the treasured local landmark, but it also incorporated sustainable design concepts into the new annex so that it earned a LEED Silver Rating. The annex, which was designed to be architecturally compatible with city hall, also provides seismic support for the historic building. The project leaders used local contractors as much as possible and incorporated many sustainable design features, including:

- A highly reflective roof that deflects UV rays and thus absorbs less heat;
- More than 50 percent of wood materials that were Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified (which promotes responsible forest management);
- An optimized HVAC system;
- Low-flow and waterless fixtures;
- Regional manufacturing of more than 60 percent of the materials used;
- Recycling 50 percent of construction waste;
- Purchasing green power for 100 percent of energy needs; and
- Using low-VOC (Volatile Organic Compound) emitting materials (VOCs are chemicals that “offgas,” such as those found in some paints, adhesives, and sealants, thus emitting harmful chemicals into the air).

Sustainable Small Businesses

By Andrea L. Dono

How can local businesses become more green? The Andersonville Development Corporation (ADC), a nonprofit community development organization that supports the Andersonville neighborhood in Chicago, asked itself the same question and ended up launching the “eco-Andersonville Sustainable Business Certification Program,” on Earth Day (April 22) in 2009.

The program helps local business owners set goals for sustainability and provides the technical assistance and area resources to help them achieve those goals. In order to get certified, businesses get points for sustainable business practices in three areas: people, planet, and prosperity. When the program launched, it included 171 practices that recognized the ability of a business to create a sustainable workplace; give back to the community; reduce usage of energy, water, and hazardous materials; maximize recycling and reduce waste; improve air quality; adopt best practices for business visibility; and account for the welfare of the planet in products sold and purchased. Participants in the program not only learn how to become more sustainable, a quality that local consumers want, according to an ADC survey, but they would benefit from strong marketing and promotions.

So, what are sustainable business practices? Here is a sampling of some of the 171 metrics used by ADC:

- Participate in a shop local campaign;
- Offer employees medical benefits;
- Encourage employees to walk, bike, or take public transit to work;
- Donate to local nonprofit organizations that support community initiatives;
- Regularly check the water bill for spikes in water usage, which could indicate a leak;
- Use environmentally friendly, low-toxic hand soap and cleaning products and avoid using aerosols;
- Print with soy or vegetable-based inks;
- Use at least 40 percent natural, recycled, or renewable materials;
- Create a green space outside of the building to help reduce stormwater run-off;

- Use video-conferencing and conference calls whenever possible instead of traveling;
- Reuse or recycle shipping materials;
- Conduct a waste audit to determine which materials could be recycled;
- Replace disposable items with permanent items (e.g., mugs, towels, utensils);
- Use eco-friendly take-out containers (e.g., replace Styrofoam containers with paper or cornstarch containers);
- Maintain adequate liability insurance;
- Develop and maintain a marketing plan;
- Maintain an annual business plan with goals and budget;
- Buy supplies from other nearby businesses;
- Refer customers to other local businesses;
- Make sure at least 20 percent of products sold are environmentally responsible; and
- Buy at least 30 percent of paper and business supplies (e.g., toilet paper, wrapping paper, bags) made with 35-100 percent post-consumer waste or biodegradable/recyclable materials.

As you can see, businesses can achieve sustainability on many different levels, and your program can communicate the variety of sustainable business practices without instituting a certification program.

Business owners would benefit greatly from instruction on ways they can maximize energy efficiency, whether you educate them through a workshop or resource materials. Give them specific activities they can do. For example, explain to businesses owners that they can save on their energy bills by installing blinds, drapes, shutters, and/or awnings as appropriate. For a minimal cost, they can apply weatherstripping in window gaps to seal the top, bottom, and meeting rails; replace glazing putty to keep window glass securely in its frame; and caulk holes in the material around their windows. Remind them that things they do at home, such as fixing leaky faucets or cleaning vents and sealing parts of mechanical systems, should be done at their business as well.

Images © Linda S. Glisson



traveling to the fringe of metropolitan areas, which in turn reduces our dependence on fossil fuels. The denser, more compact nature of historic commercial districts and their typical multi-storied buildings result in lower utility costs, which lead to less demand for fossil-fuel-dependent power, light, and heat.

Preservation also supports economic sustainability by encouraging reinvestment in existing communities and local economic bases. A number of studies have demonstrated that historic preservation is a powerful catalyst for additional investment in communities and creates opportunities for heritage tourism, resulting in more jobs and a stronger tax base. Historic commercial districts are also prime locations for new entrepreneurs and business incubators because small businesses can fit better in the smaller spaces in historic buildings and find them more affordable than the often larger, more expensive space of new commercial developments. In June 2006, the Small Business Association reported that there were 25.8 million small businesses in the United States and that small businesses employ 50.6 percent of America's private-sector work force.⁴ Smaller, independent businesses are good for Main Street: they create jobs and keep more dollars in the local economy instead of sending profits to distant corporate headquarters.

Social Sustainability

Historic preservation protects and celebrates the social and cultural resources that define and unite us as a nation, and ensures that they will survive to enrich our communities, and our lives for generations to come. Protecting our heritage is integral to social sustainability. By maintaining key elements of the original built fabric of our communities, we ensure that our children can actually experience their heritage and history instead of just reading about it on a plaque.

By preserving and reinforcing the qualities of traditional, dense mixed-use neighborhoods, we can continue our collective legacy of social sustainability and civic engagement. Pedestrian-oriented communities promote social interaction and community building, which facilitate the bonds and personal relationships that are at the

4. See the Small Business Association's website for small business trends and statistics - <http://www.score.org>.



heart of social sustainability. What's more, Main Street districts that have unique businesses, a full calendar of events, beautiful historic buildings, trails and connections to green spaces and waterfronts, and historic and cultural assets contribute to a high quality of life.

Your Main Street program can have a huge influence on your community's livability. A volunteer-driven organization by its very nature makes civic engagement easier, and fun, for local stakeholders. Participating in community planning activities or becoming a Main Street volunteer gives people a say in how the district will evolve over time and ensures that initiatives and projects reflect local values and meet local needs. It is an excellent way to get people involved in civic activities and ensure that the long-term goals of your municipality support community character. This involvement helps prevent your Main Street from becoming Anywhere, U.S.A.

Conclusion

There is no shortage of opportunities that your Main Street program can use to promote all three areas of sustainability. Workshops and educational materials will inform property and business owners about ways they can make their buildings, businesses, and lives "greener." Effective sustainable design strategies incorporated into the rehabilitation or adaptive use of existing facilities will reinforce environmental, economic, and social benefits. Sustainability has become recognized as a smarter way of building communities, with historic preservation playing a major role in achieving sustainability goals.

Getting Started with "Green" Rehabs

- Undertake an energy audit to determine the building's baseline performance and measure improvements to the building.
- Assess your project and look for ways to achieve sustainability. Use LEED point charts when considering specific sustainability elements that you could incorporate.
- Research case studies and products.
- Contact the NPS, SHPO, and local preservation officer to determine ways to make your historic building "green" without harming the integrity of the structure.
- Analyze the systems or products your project could employ to meet your specific goals.



RESOURCES

Websites

The American Institute of Architects: AIA Best Practices has dozens of free documents on historic preservation, sustainable design, and energy analysis topics that provide basic information and case studies. www.aia.org

The Association for Preservation Technology International: Offers training and publications, like *APT Bulletin*—a peer-reviewed journal that explores preservation technology topics and is published three times a year. *APT Bulletin* Volume XXXVI, No. 4, published in 2005 is dedicated to preservation and sustainability. www.apti.org

Energy Star: This joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy offers energy rating systems and resources to help promote energy efficiency in buildings. www.energystar.gov

Environmental Protection Agency: Offers a variety of informational resources, tips, and research on sustainability and smart growth. www.epa.gov

National Park Service Preservation Brief #3: Conserving Energy in Historic Buildings. www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief03.htm

National Park Service Preservation Brief #44: The Use of Awnings on Historic Buildings. 2004. www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief44.htm

National Trust for Historic Preservation: The NTHP's sustainability initiative seeks to educate historic property owners on green rehabs and advocate for adaptive-use projects and reinvestment in older communities. This website offers resources and additional links for more information.

www.PreservationNation.org/issues/sustainability

U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC): Explains the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ (the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high-performance green buildings). Find research data, technical information, and the process for LEED certification. www.usgbc.org

U.S. Department of Energy: The Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy program provides many online tools and resources for improving the energy efficiency of buildings, using solar energy and compact fluorescent bulbs, software simulation tools for determining how much a renovation project will save in energy, help with finding sustainable design specialists, and more. Its "Rebuild America" program also saves money for business and property owners by conducting energy audits of their buildings and helping them find ways to improve energy efficiency. www.eere.energy.gov

U.S. General Services Administration: Provides a variety of information about its Sustainable Design Program, including green roof examples and information on energy and water conservation through its Environment Program. www.gsa.gov



chapter 15

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

By Joe Lawniczak

Public improvements include all streetscape elements, from lampposts and benches to parking and pedestrian amenities.

While these improvements can make a visible difference, they cannot revitalize Main Street alone. Their design must complement the surrounding architecture as much as serve the pedestrians and motorists who will use them. When done correctly, these projects can greatly improve the appearance of a district, reinvigorate local business owners and residents, and send a message that the public sector is willing to invest in the area, which can be vital in motivating building owners to improve their properties as well.

It is incumbent upon the Main Street organization to encourage municipal investment in public improvements and to work with the local government to ensure that the improvements meet the goals of the revitalization effort and benefit the entire community. Upgrading public amenities not only improves the district's safety and appearance but also increases the willingness of the private sector to get involved. For example, a consultant with a site selection firm met with economic development and chamber of commerce representatives in Louisiana and told them the CEO of a large corporation was considering a new location and would be interested in touring small towns. When the CEO drove through a community that met all of his requirements, such as work force and location, he saw the town itself looked unkempt. Sidewalks were crumbling, weeds were growing all over the town square, and litter was everywhere. Based on appearances alone, the CEO didn't give this small town a second thought.

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Pedestrian malls were once created to imitate enclosed shopping malls. Blocking auto traffic also discouraged foot traffic, which led to the widespread removal of pedestrian malls—such as the one pictured here in Parsons, Kansas.

Many misguided cities installed single, low-impact projects like a public sculpture or expensive benches in an attempt to attract pedestrians. As the Main Street approach advocates, a comprehensive strategy is needed; no single big or small-fix project can bring a struggling commercial corridor back to life. People need a reason to come back, such as recreation or shopping. Then they will admire the public art and sit on the new benches. Improvements to public infrastructure and beautification initiatives are just one piece of the revitalization puzzle; the Main Street organization should be involved from day one in the planning process and remain involved through completion.

This chapter will discuss the following aspects of public improvements: streetscape improvements and wayfinding systems.



Downtown Encinitas MainStreet Association Streetscape Success

Encinitas, California, embarked on a \$5.2 million streetscaping project to improve pedestrian safety, traffic flow, parking, and the appearance of the historic downtown. The project included new sidewalks, streetlights, and street furniture; new bike lanes; landscaping; sidewalk bump-outs; curb repairs; and new signage. The Downtown Encinitas MainStreet Association (DEMA) reported that there was no sales tax reduction during the nine-month project that ended in 2002. In the year before the project was completed, sales tax revenues were \$64.9 million; by 2007, they had exceeded \$110 million. Encinitas has seen both property and sales taxes increase since DEMA began using the comprehensive Main Street approach to revitalize the district in the late 1980s.

Streetscape Improvements

The streetscape improvements necessary for your district will depend on current needs and plans for future growth. While there may not be much activity on Main Street when a program starts, the number of residents, shoppers, and employees may drastically increase once revitalization occurs. All of these factors need to be considered before any public improvement project begins.

The design of the streetscape depends on a number of factors: local history, architectural diversity, population, current uses, and future uses. When selecting amenities such as benches, lampposts, and trash receptacles, make sure they reflect local history and character. They should not be off-the-shelf items with no correlation to what exists now or what existed years ago. In addition, they should reflect the architectural diversity of the area. If the architecture is rich and varied, the streetscape should serve as a subtle foreground for the buildings. If the architecture is nondescript, streetscape amenities should add character and a visual focus to the area.

In addition to improving the appearance of the streetscape, the Main Street approach focuses on making the district more pedestrian friendly by widening the sidewalks, providing pedestrian amenities, creating buffers between auto and pedestrian traffic, improving the visibility and safety of crosswalks, and slowing down auto traffic (traffic calming). These topics will be addressed in Chapter 18, Managing Traffic on Main Street. The design of public spaces also affects the security and perception of safety in an area, which are topics covered in Chapter 20, Clean and Safe Main Streets.

Streetscape Amenities

While most municipalities will make the final decisions about design, product selection, budget, and contracting for streetscape improvements, it is essential for Main Street organizations to be involved from the start to make sure that improvements will benefit the commercial district. Sometimes this is easier said than done, so forming and maintaining strong relationships with city planners, public works directors, and other agency staff members is vital.

In some cases, when the street being improved is a state highway, the state department of transportation will be making decisions. In this situation, too, the Main Street organization should be at the table—even if you have to ask to be included—to make sure the business district's needs are met. While state transportation agencies in the past often tended to be insensitive to the needs of historic commercial districts, many have realized that the best designs occur when there is community input and have changed their strategies to reflect that. To learn more about transportation issues, see Chapter 18, Managing Traffic on Main Street.

Several common streetscape amenities can be found on Main Street. First and foremost are lampposts. A

Planning Public Improvements

The extent to which public improvements are needed in any business district varies according to patterns of use, levels of activity, population density, and the scale of the buildings in the area. Small communities with traditional Main Streets usually have sidewalks and small public spaces that adequately accommodate existing levels of activity. Larger cities with intensively active commercial districts may need expanded pedestrian spaces and additional amenities. These districts, as well as urban centers, may also be able to support extensive improvements such as plazas, parks, fountains, and monuments.

Successful public improvements result from careful deliberation and are tailored to the specific needs and character of the commercial district. Although the impetus for the program can come from anyone, broad participation is necessary for it to succeed. A public improvements program can be triggered by general concern about the condition of the business district or by a specific event, such as the closing of an important downtown store, the opening of a regional shopping mall or discount store, or the deterioration of utilities. In general, a combination of city staff, elected officials, business owners, community leaders, property owners, citizens groups, and consultants may need to be involved. Strong leadership and citizen participation are essential throughout the entire process.

Goals and priorities will vary among districts but should be used to determine strategically which public improvements are needed. A good way to get started is to take an inventory of current elements in the public space and note their condition, usage, and impact on the business district. In addition to conducting an inventory, collect any existing studies on present or forecasted patterns of use in the commercial district, such as pedestrian and/or traffic counts, parking usage, and plans to upgrade public infrastructure. Also review your district's master plan, if one exists. This information will help your community decide which projects are needed.

After developing the goals, put together a list of priorities for each goal. Keep the following considerations in mind:

- Correct problems with existing infrastructure before adding new public improvement elements to the district.
- Try to find management solutions to problems before considering design solutions.
- Plan and implement major improvements so as to cause the least disruption.
- Make sure that new public improvements are visually, as well as functionally, compatible with existing elements.
- Consider maintenance concerns when upgrading or adding new public improvements.

Your program will work in partnership with the municipality to solicit public input on these improvement projects and might have a supporting or even leading role in implementing them. Public improvement projects involve:



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The plaza in Millville, New Jersey, is an example of a well-designed, expanded pedestrian space.



© Donna Dow

These corner “bump-outs” in Durant, Oklahoma, add to pedestrian safety and to the attractiveness of downtown.

- Planning the scope of work (including ADA improvements);
- Designing the project;
- Securing funds;
- Soliciting bids from contractors and selecting consultants (the bidding process might be subject to municipal or federal policies depending on your funding source);
- Collaborating with other district entities, such as utility companies;
- Obtaining appropriate permits and easements;
- Getting public approval and promoting the district during construction;
- Working as a liaison among construction companies, residents, and business/property owners;
- Developing a timeline for improvements that causes the least inconvenience for the community; and
- Setting up a maintenance plan.

Excerpted from *Main Street 101: Public Improvements on Main Street, Part I* by Kennedy Lawson Smith (Main Street News, June 2000).

major consideration when selecting a lamppost design is that it must illuminate the street as well as the sidewalk, which usually can be achieved with one fixture. There are certain requirements concerning the wattage needed over a specific area, which affects quantity, type, height, and placement. Selecting a lamp with insufficient wattage, for example, will mean that more lampposts will be needed to meet those requirements. Most state departments of transportation or local public works departments can provide these requirements for you. And if a planner or engineer is designing the streetscape improvements, he or she should be familiar with these requirements and be able to make selections accordingly.

To ensure that your new lampposts reflect the history and character of the area, study historic photos to determine the style of lamp used in the past. If historic photos are not available, the lamppost style should reflect the district's current character. This will prevent the designer from selecting a "trendy" style that is bound to fall out of favor in a few years or an off-the-shelf style used by countless other communities. For districts that are more urban and "hip," however, it may be appropriate to select contemporary amenities.

Many communities install planters or hanging baskets on lampposts to add color and vibrancy to the streetscape. You can find many new fixtures with hangers or brackets but there are also vendors who make hardware that can be installed on existing lampposts. It is extremely important to develop a maintenance plan that identifies an agency or volunteer group who will plant and water flowers on a set schedule.

Main Street programs also design and hang banners to add color to the streetscape, announce events, or promote the district's image. Most communities have designs for various seasons, events, or holidays. Check with the public works department on the process and regulations for hanging and changing banners.

The Downtown Encinitas MainStreet Association (DEMA) in California started a public art fund raiser



© Mike Dono

called Arts Alive—a public banner program. Artists design the banners and the city hangs them from the lampposts along Hwy 101. The original works of art are auctioned off and the proceeds go to the chamber of commerce, the artists, and the local arts group. An online gallery of the banners shows off the beautiful works of art as well as provides details on the artists and stories behind the banners.

It is usually easier to select additional fixtures once lampposts have been chosen because their design cues the style of other elements. Of these additional amenities, the most common are benches, which are visual indicators of a pedestrian-oriented street. They provide a resting place for shoppers, a spot to converse and "people-watch," or a place to wait for public transit. Benches should be located where people will feel comfortable using them. Avoid placing them too close to automobile traffic, or in spaces where people may feel vulnerable to crime. Select benches that are resilient to wear and tear or vandalism. Many communities choose benches with an armrest in the center to prevent people from sleeping or skateboarding on them.

Another amenity is the trash receptacle. Consider its placement as much as its design. If people have to walk more than half a block to throw away trash, most will not do it. While the design of trash receptacles should complement the character of the other amenities, they need to be easily maintained. Trash bags should be easy for sanitation workers to remove, yet be secure and resistant to vandalism and wind.



© Leon Steele

Many streetscapes use trees because they soften the hardness of the built environment, provide shade, and boost the image of the district; it has even been shown that sales increase at businesses that have trees in front of them. There are many things to consider when selecting the type of tree for Main Street. While a professional trained in regional horticulture or urban forestry should be consulted, here are some general guidelines: The tree should have a light canopy so that it does not block the view of storefronts and signs, yet should provide sufficient shade. It should also have a small root system to prevent damage to the sidewalk, curb, and underground utilities.





© Mike Dono

Buried utilities, clean sidewalks in good repair, and trees complement the rehabbed storefronts in Franklin, Tennessee.

One of the keys to creating an attractive streetscape is to avoid clutter. A common example is the vending machine. Whether they are beverage vending machines or newspaper dispensers, if there is no consistency in design or placement of these fixtures, they can clutter up the streetscape. In general, beverage vending machines should be limited strictly to public spaces, such as parks or recreational areas. If placed on the sidewalk directly outside of private businesses, they give the street a shoddy appearance. When vending machines are put in public spaces, the illuminated front panel should be a custom design consistent with other streetscape elements or signs throughout the district; for example, it could incorporate the district's logo. For newspaper dispensers, a similar approach should be used. Instead of dozens of different colored and shaped dispensers, it is recommended that they all be of identical design, with only small, uniform signs to differentiate among them.

The goal of any streetscape improvement should be to increase the vitality of the street by making it inviting for people. One of the best ways to create activity on the street is to give people places to interact comfortably, or just to sit and watch the world go by. The benches discussed earlier help achieve this at the public investment level, but private businesses can do this as well. Outdoor dining is one of the best ways to make a street vibrant by creating the impression that something is always going on—that the district is a great place to be a part of the urban experience. When outdoor seating is allowed, however, the amenity zone, needs to be wide enough to accommodate it, while at the same time allowing enough room for pedestrian traffic.

Wayfinding

After all the time and effort that your program has devoted to improving the commercial district, don't you want visitors to find it? Wayfinding signage is a great tool to lead people not just to the district, but to various amenities and attractions as well. Unlike the typical street signs that we see on our roads and highways, wayfinding systems include gateway and trailblazer signs that not only direct people to points of interest but also convey an image or sense of place. These signs generally have a

particular design that reflects your community's character and helps determine a visitor's experience and impressions of your district.

A unified system of signs not only enables people to find parking and destinations but also delineates the district's boundaries. If tourists or customers cannot easily find your district from the highway, they might give up before they ever reach it. And once they get there, if they get lost or can't locate parking lots because of poor or non-existent signage, they may not return.

Wayfinding systems start with gateways, which are markers at community entrances designed to show visitors that they've arrived some place distinct. Gateways should be developed at strategic points along tourist routes to welcome and direct people to your community. Gateway treatments that accentuate the main entrance(s) into an area can include:

- Entry signage welcoming people to the district;
- Attractive landscaping around the signs;
- Monumental treatments, such as pillars or arches; and
- Art or statues.

In larger cities, a gateway can help separate one commercial district from another, or a commercial district from the residential area. In smaller communities, it may attract the attention of motorists driving along an adjacent highway, bypass, or thoroughfare. Similar to all other streetscape elements, gateway designs should reflect the character of the district and its amenities and signage. Depending on the design of the primary gateway, secondary gateway signs might be installed on other streets that lead to your district but aren't necessarily major roads. They might simply consist of well-designed signs on attractive posts. Consider complementing the gateway design treatment with the design of other elements and signage in your community to create a unified, cohesive look.

Once people are within the boundaries of your community, trailblazer or directional signs help point pedestrians and drivers to Main Street, parking, public transportation, public restrooms, the visitor's center, library, and other attractions or anchors. Signs meant to



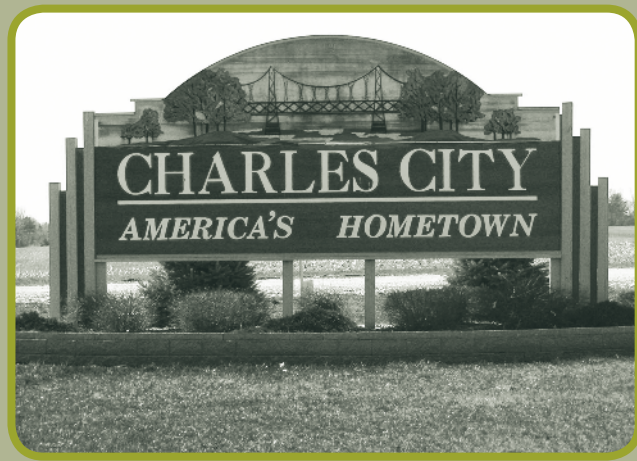
© Diana Kenney

Gateway Signs Set the Tone

The compact-sized and modern-looking gateway of Lawrenceville, a historic neighborhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, complements the urban environment. The larger, more traditional gateway to Charles City, Iowa, is appropriate for its placement along the highway.



© Lawrenceville Corp.



be viewed from vehicles need to be readable from afar so that the driver can safely make a decision. They should be placed at least 20 yards before the intersection and use lettering that can be read from a distance. Your community may have guidelines for lettering, but the rule of thumb generally is to have one inch of letter height for every 40 feet of desired readability. Signs intended for pedestrians can use smaller lettering; however, they still must be readable and clearly convey information. For any sign, the fewer words the better; also use simple fonts for text. Arrows, icons, and symbols will help visitors get around more easily.

Historical markers and interpretive signs can also communicate a sense of place and generate activity on the street. One example: The Pineapple Grove (Florida) Main Street program used a National Endowment for

the Arts grant and other funding to develop The Delray Beach Cultural Loop. The Loop is a 1.3-mile walking trail that links the cultural history and contemporary life of the white, black, and immigrant communities. It uses maps, markers, and artwork to guide visitors throughout 22 blocks of cultural and historic sites.

When working on a wayfinding system, put yourself in the shoes (or car) of a visitor, and try to experience your district from the perspective of someone who has never been there before. Try to find the historic district from the highway using only signs. Try to read signs as you are driving past them in traffic. Look for outdated and unhelpful signs. Are there locations where signs or better signs would be helpful? Are there too many signs? A rule of thumb is to locate signs at every major intersection and at other logical points throughout the district. Re-creating a

Information Kiosks: What happens when visitors get out of their cars?

© Kathy Frazier



Information kiosks placed throughout your district can pick up where your signs leave off. Visitors can use kiosks to find more information about amenities, attractions, and events, which is especially helpful if you don't have a visitor's center or if it is closed.

When designing this streetscape amenity, use materials that are weather resistant and deter vandalism. Incorporate a design that complements your architecture and wayfinding system and consider lighting the kiosk to assist visitors who are out enjoying the nightlife. Keep text clear and short—people shouldn't have to read copious amounts of text to figure out where points of interest are located or decide what they want to see first. Also, be sensitive to various groups who visit your community. Consider using multilingual text to aid visitors who are not proficient in English. If the kiosk is a Main Street project, put your logo on it and tell people who you are.

Elements that you can include:

- Maps with points of interests;
- Public transit stops, routes, and schedules;

- Calendar of events;
- An emergency call box;
- Slots for brochures, walking tour maps, Main Street program brochures;
- Interactive touch screen interface; and
- Community bulletin board.

Just like your website and business directories, your kiosk has to stay current in order to be helpful. If you list the district's businesses, you will have to keep on top of the turnover when stores open or close. Instead you may want simply to indicate streets that have concentrations of shops or show where your "restaurant row" is located. Also, if you use a bulletin board, keep it tidy and up to date. Decide which types of flyers—size, design, and content—are appropriate and remove any that aren't. Post guidelines on your website.

Place your kiosk(s) near parking, intersections, and destinations. Think about where your visitors arrive and where they might park and place kiosks along widely used paths.

newcomer's tour will help you decide which assets, parking areas, and attractions should be highlighted; where the most confusing areas in your community are; and which streets will take visitors back to main roads or highways. Once you decide which signs are needed and where they should be placed, you are ready to design them.

Signs should be uniform; they can include the district logo and/or an image, with no more than five lines of text below. Work with a graphic designer to choose a clean, clear design that represents your town or district. The *Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, published by the Federal Highway Administration, sets the standards for signs and other transportation-related elements. It has many guidelines that can help you design highly visible signs that promote safety. Some tips include using text with simple, readable lettering and arrows large enough to be read from an appropriate distance. When installing signs, make sure they won't be blocked by parked cars or any streetscape amenities, such as flower baskets. Your wayfinding system won't just help people move throughout the district; it is part of the brand or image that you are marketing. It helps you build a sense of place. Coordinating wayfinding signs with banners and other design elements will unify the appearance of the entire district. Work in partnership with your municipality and department of transportation.

Conclusion

Your Main Street program has a variety of design tools that can make the streetscape look inviting and send a message to visitors, potential investors, business owners, and others that your community is a thriving and attractive place. By working in phases to make your commercial district and its attractions easy to navigate and visually appealing, you can turn your district into a reflection of the commitment stakeholders have in the revitalization effort.



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Funding for Public Improvements

Because a public improvements program is often carried out incrementally, funding for various stages of the program can come from different sources. Public funding commitments can be used to leverage private contributions. A local government, for example, might offer to fund part of the cost of street and sidewalk improvements if local property owners agree to finance the rest through a special assessment district. Common sources of funding for public improvement projects include:

Public Funding

- Bond issues;
- General revenue funds;
- Special taxing districts that levy a tax on the property owners who most directly benefit;
- Tax-increment financing, in which future increases in tax revenue are allocated to pay for improvements;
- Special sales or food and lodging taxes;
- Federal grants and loans for projects that benefit low-to-moderate income residents, create additional jobs, or finance the rehabilitation of deteriorating infrastructure; and
- Federal funds through TEA-21, the transportation enhancements act, for projects that improve the streetscape and make roads and intersections safer.

Private Funding

- Foundation grants; and
- Donations for the purchase of items such as pavers, benches, or public art.

Excerpted from *Main Street 101: Public Improvements on Main Street, Part I* by Kennedy Lawson Smith (Main Street News, June 2000).

RESOURCES

Website

Society for Environmental Graphic Design (SEGD): An international, nonprofit, educational organization that provides resources for design specialists. SEGD has publications, magazines, and other information on design issues and wayfinding and directional sign systems. www.segd.org

“Selecting a Streetscape Consultant,” by Donna Dow, *Main Street News*, March 2008. Discusses everything you need to know about selecting and working with a consultant, including meeting specific requirements if you are using federal funds.

Articles

“Community Wayfinding,” by Kathy Frazier, Kathy Moore, and Sandy Hanger, *Main Street News*, December 2006. Discusses using wayfinding to promote your district’s image, guide visitors, and create a visually cohesive look.

“Denny Triangle: Building a Gateway and Building Community,” by Kyle Vixie, *Main Street News*, November 2006. Discusses how a community organization developed a grassroots approach to create a neighborhood gateway that supported its image.

“Designing a New Look for Your District,” by Donna Dow, *Main Street News*, April 2008. Discusses the design phase of a streetscaping project.

“From Planning to Promotion: Surviving Streetscape Construction,” by Bill McLeod, *Main Street News*, January 2007. Looks at Barracks Row Main Street’s 15-month project that required a lot of communication and coordination to successfully transform this urban neighborhood business district.

“Funding Your Streetscape Project,” by Donna Dow, *Main Street News*, November 2007. Discusses how to use Transportation Enhancement (TE) funding as well as creative sponsorship ideas to raise matching funds.

“Preparing for Streetscape Construction,” by Donna Dow, *Main Street News*, July 2008. Discusses the planning phase of a streetscaping project between the design and construction phases, including timing of the project, collaborating with utility companies, the bidding process, requirements for using federal funds, and more.

Books

Building the Streetscape Training Presentation, produced by the National Main Street Center (2002). This 40-image PowerPoint presentation shows you how to improve a Main Street district’s streetscape.

Design: Main Street Committee Members Handbook, by Doug Loescher and Teresa Lynch (National Main Street Center, 1996). This handbook was developed especially for Main Street design committee members to teach them the Main Street approach, the importance of design, the committee’s purpose, and the foundations of good design.

Guiding Design on Main Street: The Professional’s Manual for Managing Design, by Richard Wagner (National Main Street Center, 2000). Written for Main Street professionals, it explains design-related aspects of commercial district revitalization, including developing design guidelines, regulation and review, design incentives and financing, public outreach, and compatible design.

Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices: Traffic Signs for Streets and Highways, Standard Highway Signs Book, New Clearview Typeface Federal Highway Administration Rules (CD-Rom), by the Federal Highway Administration (2003). This is available from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials’ website bookstore. It offers hyperlinks for easy navigation, bookmarks, search capabilities, and the ability to copy and paste text and graphics.



chapter 16

MASTER PLANNING:

Advancing the Future for Main Street Communities

by Nicholas P. Kalogeresis, AICP

Local Main Street organizations develop and adopt master plans to determine a long-term vision for their commercial districts and set the course for future community decision making about commercial district development and investment.

For instance, with a good master plan, a Main Street community can:

- Plan efficiently for major short and long-term physical improvements to public spaces and infrastructure, including streetscapes, streets, parks, plazas, parking facilities, and special environmental features like waterfront areas;
- Address historic preservation issues such as encouraging the rehabilitation of historic commercial buildings through special financial incentives and design guidelines;
- Identify potential sites for mixed-use infill development; and
- Recommend changes to existing zoning codes to remove regulatory barriers to reinvestment or to adopt new zoning mechanisms, such as zoning overlays that control first-floor uses and guide new development.



A good master plan encapsulates and promotes a compelling vision that builds community enthusiasm and strengthens consensus about the district's future. Main Street organizations from small rural downtowns to urban neighborhood districts should be involved in community planning activities regardless of whether they are a program that is just starting out or a mature program that has been around for years. Since your organization represents the business district, your feedback and perspective are important. While a master plan provides strategies for revitalization and long-term growth, the process of involving the general public in guiding the district's future is just as important as the final document itself. Public input in building a powerful vision for your business district will ensure that the plan reflects local values and needs.

Essentially, a commercial district master plan is a course of action mutually agreed upon by the municipality, local stakeholders, and the private sector for guiding decision making and types of projects that should take place. In some states, however, once adopted, master plans become official municipal law.¹ Either way, a master plan is a statement of a community's vision for its future and a plan with strategies to achieve that vision.

When investigating master planning in your community, you might learn that your city's master plan has been sitting on the shelf for 20 years. Or, you may find that the city does not have a master plan, perhaps because it does not have a local planning department. These are all good reasons to initiate a master planning process in your Main Street community.

Benefits of Commercial District Master Planning

Commercial district master plans help get everyone on the same page—your organization, the municipality, and the private sector—and help build vision and community consensus for future revitalization initiatives and projects. Without a clear vision, your community may not be able to marshal the strategies, resources, and activities needed to revitalize the commercial district to its fullest

1. States of Oregon and Washington.

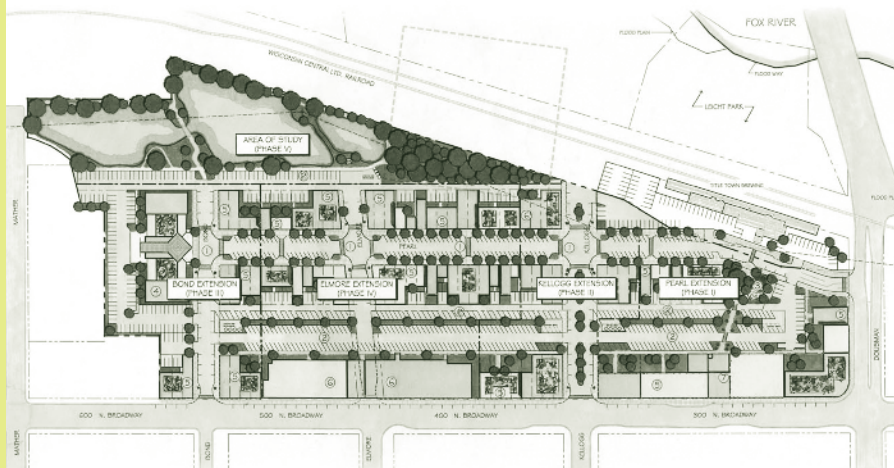
Master plans: Bigger than annual committee work plans!

A master plan can help Main Street programs address various aspects of revitalization more comprehensively than annual committee work plans, which typically focus on short-term initiatives and projects.

A master plan can provide specific tools and strategic direction for revitalization activities and dealing with complex issues. For example, it could address a streetscaping design or a market analysis to determine adaptive-use options for a white elephant building. A master plan helps your Main Street organization determine appropriate short-term work plan projects to achieve the community's vision for the commercial district.

potential. The lack of a strong vision could also open the door to inappropriate planning decisions that could threaten the long-term health and viability of the business district. Let's take a more in-depth look at how master planning can benefit your Main Street district.

- Guiding physical improvements.** Historically, master plans have focused almost exclusively on physical improvement needs, such as streetscaping, road and parking facilities, and other public space elements like parks and plazas. While master plans of the past often included schemes for urban renewal and demolition of existing building stock to accommodate new development, today's planners have recognized the important roles historic buildings play in revitalizing traditional commercial districts. In addition, wayfinding signage, identifying infill development sites, and plans for special environmental and landscape features like waterfronts and courthouse squares are increasingly common elements included in downtown or neighborhood commercial district master plans. Guidelines that manage the design of new infill development as well as encourage the proper rehabilitation of historic building resources are also common elements.
- Diversifying economic uses.** Master plans offer more than just guidelines for new streetscapes; they also are effective tools for creating new economic opportunities and spurring new investment in the district. A master plan can address economic development issues such as business recruitment and retention, appropriate new land uses, and incentives and finance mechanisms that encourage reinvestment and development. To assess economic development planning goals and opportunities, a master plan may include market analyses for retail, office, and housing; and studies and recommendations for developing special financial incentives or new sources of revenues, such as tax-increment financing (TIF). For instance, a market analysis may determine that upper stories could be converted into residential or office uses. A planning process will



The Larsen Green master plan for Green Bay, Wisconsin.

A master planning process lets stakeholders establish a community vision as well as leverage assets like waterfront areas and upper-floor spaces.



give your community a more complete understanding of potential economic development strategies than the economic restructuring committee's work plans.

- **Introducing and revising land-use regulations and zoning.** Most master plans recommend the development of new zoning codes or the revision of existing regulations, especially if certain provisions restrict commercial district reinvestment. The municipal zoning code is usually categorized as an “implementation element” of a master plan. (We will discuss elements of master plans later in the chapter.) In some instances, a zoning code can hinder revitalization efforts if it prohibits certain uses, such as residential, office, or light manufacturing, from locating on upper floors. Another example is a zoning code parking requirement that mandates more parking spaces for new developments and upper-floor residential conversions than are actually needed. Therefore, revising zoning codes and ordinances can remove barriers to reinvestment. New zoning and land-use regulations can also accomplish other revitalization goals, such as protecting old buildings through a historic preservation ordinance or encouraging appropriate signage and awnings through a special overlay zone. In addition you can use the master planning process to determine if new zoning is needed to restrict formula businesses and non-retail establishments from occupying valuable storefront space.
- **District revitalization and sustainability.** One of the most significant reasons for creating a master plan is to ensure the long-term sustainability and economic vitality of your commercial district. Rather than allowing sprawling growth on the fringe of your community, a good master plan can explore ways to accommodate growth and new economic uses on Main Street, whether it is in the form of reinvestment in older commercial buildings or through new development. The master plan, in essence, becomes the community's policy statement for revitalization and the role the Main Street district should play within the municipality's overall economic and community development efforts.
- **Addressing threats.** Many Main Street communities use the master planning process to address specific threats to the well being of the commercial district. For instance, perhaps a new lifestyle center or Wal-

Mart is being developed near the Main Street district, or a new mixed-use development project with an inappropriate design is slated for construction on a vacant lot. Both scenarios represent possible threats that have to be addressed through planning activities.

- **Vision and consensus building.** The most important reason for undertaking a commercial district master plan is the opportunity it affords to engage the broader community in determining the vision for your district's revitalization and development over time. The end products of a master plan are more than recommendations, strategies, and studies; they should offer a compelling vision that motivates the community to take action. In addition, it is this consensus-building aspect of planning that can help you build a stronger constituency and stakeholder partnerships that support your revitalization projects and initiatives.

Elements of a Commercial District Master Plan

So, what's actually in these master plans?

In general, comprehensive commercial district plans are composed of several chapters, or elements, depending on the number of planning and revitalization issues that are being addressed. Therefore, the size and content of the final plan are determined by the number of planning elements and the plan's scope of work. In some respects, large commercial districts, especially in more urban areas, often have more complex revitalization issues and need a multi-element plan to address them. Smaller downtowns, with less challenging, more straightforward planning concerns, may create a master plan with only a few elements or chapters. Overall, plan elements can be categorized in three ways: physical plan elements, economic plan elements, and regulation/implementation plan elements. Specific physical, economic, and implementation plan elements are described in detail in the following sections. It should be noted that in many master plans, the implementation plan elements, which focus on zoning and land-use regulations, are often produced as a separate document. In some cases, the implementation plan is developed after the rest of the plan has been completed.

Physical Plan Elements

- **Land use.** Land use is perhaps the most common chapter included in commercial district master plans

because it examines current usage of Main Street's land and buildings and explores ways the district's land can be used more productively to strengthen the economy and the overall urban fabric. Master plans look at potential historic preservation and adaptive-use projects as well as at vacant and underutilized land parcels where new development can occur. One aim of these planning activities is to introduce new land uses. The issue of land use is critically important because it deals not just with the physical development of land but also its potential for diversifying the economic base.

- **Streetscape and infrastructure.** Many commercial district master plans focus almost exclusively on streetscape improvements, such as sidewalks, lighting, wayfinding, and pedestrian amenities. In addition, recommendations for infrastructure upgrades, including road improvements, bridge replacements, and sewer systems might also be included in this chapter. In many Main Street communities, the streetscape and infrastructure chapters are often developed in response to plans by state, county, and local transportation and public works departments to upgrade roads and other infrastructure. Generally, this chapter focuses on streetscape design concepts rather than full construction and engineering documents, which are completed separately after the master plan has been officially adopted.
- **Historic preservation.** This chapter examines ways to encourage the rehabilitation and reuse of historic commercial buildings as well as the feasibility for historic district designations, whether for the National Register of Historic Places or a local district through a local historic preservation ordinance. Design guidelines that outline standards and procedures for the proper reha-

bilitation of historic commercial buildings may also be included. A historic preservation element can be critically important for many Main Street communities, especially those that are experiencing development pressures and want to protect their irreplaceable historic resources and overall sense of place.

- **Design guidelines.** Building and infill development design is another common planning issue usually addressed with a set of guidelines that outlines appropriate building design standards. These design guidelines should focus not just on new development but also on building rehabilitations and improvements, especially if the master plan does not have a historic preservation chapter. In many master plans, design guidelines provide only general information and few, if any, graphic or photographic images that can demonstrate how to effectively manage building design. As a result, local Main Street organizations and their municipal planners usually develop additional design guideline materials and publications after the adoption of the master plan. During the planning process, your organization should strive to develop a comprehensive set of design guidelines that includes standards for both historic commercial buildings and new construction.
- **Transportation and parking.** Because parking, traffic, and various other transportation issues affect the pedestrian-friendly nature and accessibility of Main Street districts, you will likely handle them with parking and traffic management studies as well as pro formas for constructing new parking facilities. For suburban downtowns and urban neighborhood districts in particular, master plan parking and transportation chapters may include studies on the con-

Who Plans?

Now that you understand the benefits of master planning, let's talk about where your organization fits into the process.

The actual development and adoption of a commercial district master plan and administration of a zoning ordinance are the responsibilities of the local municipality and its planning commission. A Main Street organization generally participates in the master planning process as an advocate for commercial district stakeholders, typically through a planning task force or advisory group that works with the municipal planning commission.

In addition to the planning commission, there may be other groups involved in the planning process and zoning ordinance administration; in many cases, these roles may be defined by state-enabling legislation. These entities may be responsible for preparing and adopting the zoning ordinance, determining when plan and zoning amendments are needed, and issuing zoning variances and conditional use permits. These other players are listed at right:

- **Local city council or legislature.** In almost all communities, master plan documents, new zoning codes, and other plan implementation mechanisms are ratified at the city or village council level. No new plan or zoning code can be implemented without the local legislature's approval. The city council also reviews and adopts zoning amendments, overlay zones, and other ordinances establishing appearance review and historic preservation commissions.
- **Municipal planning and economic development staff.** Municipal planners and economic development staff play critical roles throughout the master planning process. They often work with members of the city council and local stakeholders in determining the master plan's scope of work, selecting outside consultants, and preparing the budget for the planning process. In some instances, components of the master plan may be developed internally by planning staff in order to save financial resources.
- **Planning commission.** Under most state-enabling laws, municipal planning commissions have two primary responsibilities: to prepare and adopt master

struction of new mass transit stations or the improvement of existing ones. As with infrastructure issues mentioned previously, road construction and enhancement projects are often planned by outside agencies, such as state and county transportation departments, which frequently triggers the need for a transportation chapter in the commercial district master plan.

- **Open space and parks.** Chapters on improvements to public spaces such as parks, plazas, and squares are frequently included in master plans. Depending on your community, you may need to involve the local park district or the parks and recreation board of the municipality, township, or county. In some cases, a separate park district administration may already have a master plan for its parks and recreation facilities. Relevant sections of that plan, especially those that affect Main Street facilities, can be incorporated into the commercial district master plan, subject to any revisions that might be needed. Alternatively, this chapter could propose the creation of new open space features or facilities.
- **Municipal and government facilities.** City halls, police stations, libraries, post offices, and other government facilities are key anchors, and many Main Street communities are concerned about retaining these facilities in their commercial districts. Keeping such facilities in the business district, however, often revolves around accommodating their expansion needs, especially if available land is scarce and there is strong market demand for other land uses. For these reasons, many commercial district master plans incorporate a specific chapter that discusses how and where government offices and facilities can be expanded so they will remain key anchors.

plans and zoning regulations; and to determine if new developments meet district planning goals, the zoning code standards, and requirements established by the ordinance. The commission also conducts public hearings for variance and conditional use requests, overlay zone adoptions, planned unit developments, and zoning amendments. Planning commission members are usually appointed by the mayor or the municipal legislature and are assisted in their deliberations by staff planners or consultants.

- **Zoning board of appeals.** Consisting of five to seven members, the zoning board of appeals usually hears appeals in cases where zoning permits or variance requests are denied by the planning commission. A person denied an appeal from this board may appeal the decision to the city council or other legislative body.
- **Appearance review and historic preservation commissions.** Generally, these commissions administer overlay zones or separate design review and historic preservation ordinances. New developments in these zones are reviewed to determine if they meet certain established or codified design standards. In the case



The plaza area where Tuesday Tunes concerts take place in Livermore, California, used to be a median and right-turn lane before the district's streetscape project.

- **Special features and issues.** Enhancing, conserving, and revitalizing waterfronts and other landscape, environmental, and historic resources are often significant issues addressed by separate chapters of a commercial district master plan. Main Street communities often grapple with how to fully utilize and leverage such resources without compromising their intrinsic value and integrity. Common components of these chapters include waterfront development studies that focus on physical improvements, such as walking paths, festivals, and public gathering spaces, as well as market analyses and pro formas for new marinas, harbors, mixed-use developments, and the adaptive use of historic waterfront warehouses.

of historic or landmark properties in a historic overlay zone, permits or certificates of appropriateness are issued if changes to the properties meet certain standards. Historic preservation commissions are also empowered to conduct public hearings for demolition requests and hardship cases. Appeals of these cases are usually forwarded to the city council or, in some communities, to the planning commission or the board of appeals. See Chapter 13, Historic Preservation Tools, for more on historic preservation commissions and design review.

- **Zoning administrator or zoning examiner.** Some communities employ a zoning administrator to manage various administrative aspects of zoning and land-use regulations. The administrator may also have limited powers to grant variances on behalf of the zoning board of appeals. A zoning examiner can conduct hearings on zoning matters and make recommendations to the planning commission, the board of appeals, or the local legislature. As in the case of the administrator, an examiner's review powers may be limited to certain projects or other land-use matters.

Economic Plan Elements

- **Market analysis.** Most commercial district master plans include a retail market analysis to determine opportunities for strengthening the area's retail base. The more comprehensive plans also include market analyses for residential and office development, especially if the community wants to find out if the market can support new developments and additional land uses. These studies are critical to determine how the local economy can be fully diversified. Main Street and smart growth principles emphasize that growth and development should be concentrated in existing districts rather than expanding into greenfields or along the outskirts of the community. You can use your master plan to intensify usage of commercial district land by introducing new uses, reusing existing buildings, and encouraging appropriate new development on Main Street.
- **Catalytic projects.** This has become the standard planning phrase to define specific economic development projects that are expected to stimulate other development and investment activities. In many cases, a catalytic project may be a new mixed-use project or the rehabilitation of a white elephant building. Your organization must make sure that a catalytic project does not lead to the removal of important historic resources to make way for new development.
- **Development pro formas.** Like market analyses, pro formas for potential development sites, vacant white elephants, and underutilized buildings have become increasingly common in master plans. Pro formas provide a high level of information and cost data for a municipality or a Main Street program interested in facilitating community-initiated development (CID) projects, especially those that may have been identified as catalytic projects in other chapters. They are also important in determining how public dollars such as tax-increment finance revenues or other financial incentives can be used to improve the feasibility of CID or other development deals. Refer to Chapter 10 for more information on Main Street real estate.

Implementation Plan Elements

In most cases, a master plan's implementation chapter includes a set of recommendations and strategies outlining how and when the major planning goals should be implemented. In other cases, these recommendations are incorporated within the individual plan elements.

Implementation activities, from revising the local zoning code to initiating streetscape improvements, take place after the master planning process has been completed and the municipal governing body has ratified and adopted the final plan.

The most common mechanisms for implementing commercial district master plans include zoning codes, capital improvement programs, and special development finance and incentive programs. Each state has its own planning-enabling legislation that may allow local communities to use other types of implementation mechanisms if they meet particular revitalization and planning needs. While there are many ways a commercial district master plan can be implemented, the most common mechanisms are described below.

- **Zoning ordinances and overlay districts.** In traditional commercial districts, local zoning ordinances regulate the types of uses permitted and the basic building standards for new construction, such as building setback, height limits, minimum lot coverage, and even building materials. Because zoning deals specifically with how buildings are constructed and used, it is a critical implementation tool. Communities may also adopt special overlay districts that act as a secondary layer of land-use and building design regulations in addition to the base zoning code requirements. Typical commercial zoning overlays may regulate signs and awnings, first-floor occupancies, building setbacks and height, and building materials.
- **Design and appearance review ordinance.** This overlay tool allows a local municipality to review new construction or changes to existing buildings, usually through the establishment of a design review board or commission. A set of design guidelines and standards is developed as a component of the master plan or after the plan is adopted to guide the design review commission.

Images: Left, © Steve Shaluta; Right, © Gina Tominia.



Implementation and economic plan elements help communities retain key anchors like courthouses in the district, strengthen the local economy, and encourage new mixed-use developments.

Arcata, California: Cap on Formula Restaurants

In June 2002, Arcata, California, enacted an ordinance that caps the number of formula restaurants to nine at a time. Proponents of the ordinance included Arcata Main Street, the city's planning commission, city attorney, and others who argued that the ordinance would meet Arcata's comprehensive plan goals of reducing auto-dependent activity, protecting the community's character, encouraging sustainable development, and fostering local investment in food establishments that meet local needs.

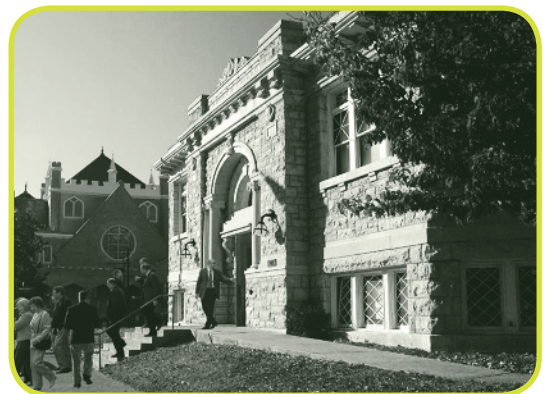
- **Historic preservation ordinance.** Generally, historic preservation ordinances include provisions to set up a historic preservation commission with powers to designate local historic districts and landmarks and to review changes to the exteriors of landmark buildings and contributing resources within a historic district. These ordinances also have a set of design guidelines used by the historic commission to ensure that building projects in historic districts adhere to proper preservation methods and procedures. Unlike design review ordinances, a historic preservation ordinance typically restricts or forbids demolition of historic buildings and resources.
- **Capital improvements program (CIP).** Most municipalities develop one-to-five-year plans for spending general tax revenues and funds from other sources of financing on capital improvements. Streetscape enhancements and other capital improvements recommended in a master plan are usually scheduled for financing and implementation through the municipality's capital improvement program.
- **Financing programs.** Master plans may recommend that a financing program be developed to implement various planning goals and objectives. Common among them are:
 - Façade grant or loan programs that encourage the rehabilitation of historic commercial buildings;
 - Business improvement districts (BID) that help fund commercial district management and marketing activities;
 - Tax-increment financing (TIF), which underwrites capital and infrastructure improvements; and
 - Impact fees levied on new development to help underwrite the construction of new parking garages or other physical improvements.

In many cases, federal and state planning laws and other legislation govern how some financing programs work, including TIFs, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), and statewide revolving loan funds and grant programs for economic development.

- **Design and engineering.** If a master plan proposes a new streetscape, roads, infrastructure improvements, new public facilities, amenities like parking garages, or waterfront enhancements, the final project design, engineering, and construction documents will need to be prepared and paid for before actual implementation. Again, this process takes place after the adoption of the master plan and is usually funded through the municipality's capital improvement program, general revenue fund, TIF revenues, or through outside sources such as state and federal grants.
- **Design assistance programs.** In addition to façade grant and loan programs, communities often provide no-fee design and architectural assistance as an incentive for business and property owners to undertake façade and storefront rehabilitation projects. Many Main Street programs already provide this service as part of their participation in a Main Street coordinating program, whose staff may include professional designers and architects. Both design assistance and façade grant and loan programs are effective tools for encouraging building improvements and the preservation of important historic resources.
- **Land assembly.** You can include recommendations and proposals for new development, whether in an infill setting or on a vacant site. In some cases, the assembly and consolidation of several land parcels into one developable site may be required. Municipalities can assist developers in land assembly with TIF funds or other sources of revenues when needed and appropriate. Municipalities decide when and how to use eminent domain procedures to acquire properties for land assembly and development purposes.

Levels of Master Planning

Developing a commercial district master plan can be a time-consuming and expensive endeavor. The more chapters you have, the longer the planning process will take and the more expensive it will be. The groups responsible for developing the master plan must determine the commercial district's specific planning needs and available funding.



Historic preservation ordinances allow historic preservation commissions to designate local historic districts and landmark buildings.

How Main Street Organizations Can Implement Planning Goals

Main Street organizations are effective mechanisms for implementing the major revitalization and planning goals outlined in a commercial district master plan. Your Main Street program can help lessen the municipality's workload and financial burden by sharing leadership in implementing various aspects of the master plan and assisting with fund raising.

Additionally, Main Street programs can undertake various business and real estate development activities in order to implement the master plan's economic development recommendations.

Not all communities need an expensive, multi-element commercial district master plan. Typically, rural Main Street communities with small downtowns don't need a multi-element, multi-chapter master plan because the number of planning issues is limited. Larger communities may need a more comprehensive master plan with several chapters to address more complex issues.

Regardless of size, your community may decide it only needs to focus on a specific issue. If that is the case, it may be advantageous to conduct a small-scale strategic planning process rather than a long, multi-element master planning process.

The good news is—you have options! Different levels of planning activities are available to address immediate or long-term planning issues. These activities include:

- **Community visioning process/strategic planning.** Typically, commercial district visioning and strategic planning processes build consensus among stakeholders regarding short and long-term community planning goals and revitalization strategies. You would embark on this type of planning process to deal with development pressures and threats to the commercial district or to respond to opportunities for new development and investment that necessitate proper planning. Sometimes, the visioning and strategic planning process serves to rally the community and various stakeholders behind a compelling vision for the revitalization. The process for developing a vision and strategic plan is generally shorter and much less expensive than a typical multi-element master plan and uses public workshops and charrettes to solicit maximum public participation. The final plan document includes a vision statement and detailed descriptions of recommended revitalization strategies and action steps. Because this type of planning must often take place quickly to respond to a threat or opportunity, a realistic timeframe can range from two to six months.
- **Small-scale master plan.** Your community can also address a small number of planning issues to advance specific revitalization efforts. These issues may include the need for new streetscaping and road improvements, public space enhancements, maintenance of

the historic building stock, business development, and design guidelines. Therefore, small-scale or limited-element master plans typically consist of one to three chapters. Usually, these plans focus on physical design issues, such as streetscaping and parking, rather than market analyses and transportation and engineering studies. Small-scale plans sometimes include a visioning component as well. Time is not usually of the essence and the process for developing and adopting a small-scale plan can take from six months to one year.

- **Full-scale, multi-element master plan.** Multi-element commercial district master plans usually include more than three chapters. Communities with large commercial districts that are experiencing multiple planning and revitalization issues are most likely to develop this type of plan. Some of the common elements found in these master plans include design guidelines, market analysis, development pro formas, transportation and parking, streetscape improvements, facilities planning, and open space. As you might imagine, these are the most expensive plans and the planning process itself may last more than a year. But the resulting plan lets you tackle many issues at one time and produces a comprehensive multi-year action plan for your municipality and Main Street program. One disadvantage is the lack of detailed, in-depth recommendations and information, which are often characteristic of small-scale plans. Full-scale master plans often fail to provide nuanced analyses of multiple issues because the cost is prohibitive.



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Putting the Master Plan Together

The process of developing a commercial district master plan is initiated and directed, in most instances, by the municipal planning commission, which is established by law to develop comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, or by a combination of the planning commission and a citizen task force or advisory committee. The Main Street program should participate in a task force if one is formed or, at the very least, serve as a technical resource provider and advisor to the planning commission and the municipality. Alternatively, the Main Street program should strongly advocate for the development of a master plan if board leaders and stakeholders believe that long-term revitalization issues as well as immediate threats would be more effectively addressed through a master planning process. In some instances, the Main Street program can lead a district master planning process if the municipality is initially reluctant to participate; however, the municipality must be an active, willing partner in developing the plan if it is to be implemented successfully. The planning process generally includes the following steps.

1) *Visioning process and statement.*

A visioning process has become a largely accepted method of developing community consensus and participation and is a prerequisite for starting a commercial district planning process. Additionally, whether the final result is a strategic plan, or a small-scale or multi-element master plan, the vision statement is the central goal from which all subsequent plan recommendations follow.

A vision statement can be developed through a series of workshops and other activities that may include design charrettes, visual preference surveys, focus groups, and community surveys. The vision statement, once accepted by all parties, signifies the community's preferred scenario for revitalization and development of the Main Street district. It then serves as the starting point for investigating and determining how that preferred scenario will be achieved through each of the plan's components. The Main Street program can serve an important role in the planning process by sponsoring or organizing the visioning process, in partnership with the municipality, and by encouraging the strong participation of stakeholders.

2) *Assessing conditions.*

While some assessment of conditions may occur during the visioning process in order to explore the district's issues and opportunities, additional data collection and analysis may be necessary to analyze trends and draw conclusions. Assessing current conditions is a critical step for almost all small-scale and multi-element master plans.

Typically, data and information gathering may include land-use and building inventories; demographic analysis; an assessment of the economic base, infrastructure, and environmental concerns; and an evaluation of traffic patterns and transportation systems. Municipal staff members usually handle these activities, but the Main



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Street program can help by providing building and business inventory databases and supplying market analysis information. The retail market analysis, in particular, can help the planning commission or task force understand the potential for business development. It is during this process that revitalization and planning issues will be identified.

3) *Developing future projections/scenarios.*

This step predicts future scenarios for the commercial district based on the conditions assessment. Critical questions are answered at this stage and the answers ultimately frame the goals and objectives of the master plan. What should new development look like? Where will it occur? Does the community want to encourage new uses, such as upper-story housing? How should parking be addressed?

These are some common questions a planning commission or task force tries to answer during this stage of plan development. Once solutions are proposed, alternative scenarios may be devised to examine different strategies.

4) *Developing planning goals and strategies.*

The accepted planning solutions will then become the master plan's goals, which are general statements of what the district should become; these goals should be clearly related to the overall vision. Now comes the real work—devising objectives and strategies to accomplish the goals. If the goal is to maintain and encourage the rehabilitation of historic commercial buildings, should the community create a façade grant fund or adopt a historic preservation ordinance? To influence the way new developments are built, should design guidelines be developed or should the zoning ordinance be amended to include more design standards? These are some of the typical strategies employed to accomplish planning goals. Once this step is complete, a draft planning document can be produced.

5) *Producing the final plan.*

Public sessions should be held to solicit comments and revise the draft before the report is ready for final production and adoption by the task force, the planning commission, and the city or village council. As it is an official city document, elected officials and planning staff are obligated to follow and implement the recommendations. By no means is the adopted plan inalterable; it can be amended and should evolve with the community. However, changes to the plan should not undermine its underlying policies and vision.

Making Your Master Plan Effective

Commercial district master planning has come a long way since the days when most plans recommended a “big fix” project to cure Main Street’s ailments. Today, historic preservation, good building design, mixed-use development, appropriate enhancements, and investment in the public realm have become predominant and sensible planning principles. As your community starts its planning process, there are several principles that should be included in the development of the master plan.

- **The commercial district plan’s relationship to the community comprehensive plan.** Many comprehensive master plans include only a section or chapter on the downtown or neighborhood commercial district. Such sections are often called “sub-area plans” and may include all or some of the chapters found in a stand-alone community master plan. Sub-area plans, which typically focus on a few planning issues such as land use, transportation, or streetscape improvements, have one advantage in that they are developed in conjunction with the comprehensive plan. One problem that often occurs with stand-alone downtown or neighborhood business district master plans is that commercial district planning goals may diverge from the larger community’s comprehensive plan. Therefore, you must consider how your commercial corridor’s planning policies relate to the community’s comprehensive plan.

For example, does the comprehensive plan call for additional commercial land uses outside the commercial core or on the fringe of the community? This development may have a negative impact on the long-term economic health of the downtown or neighborhood business district and must be resolved.

- **Avoid “borrowing” plans from other communities.** It may be tempting to “piece together” a master plan by borrowing parts from other towns. But, will someone else’s entertainment district work in your district? Will a parking deck plan that’s needed in another downtown be necessary in yours? Obviously, the adage of not reinventing the wheel does not apply here. Your commercial district master plan should be tailored to meet your community’s unique needs, conditions, and vision.
- **Engage the public in the planning process.** Public participation creates a sense of ownership over the planning process. Visioning sessions, design charrettes, and other public forums and meetings that allow citizens to comment on the plan’s goals and strategies, or even assist in developing it, are key elements of the process.
- **Use historic preservation as the prime economic development policy.** Traditional commercial district master plans are effective tools for emphasizing redevelopment and historic preservation as the prime economic development policy. The planning process is an ideal time to incorporate historic preservation as a planning policy. Too many plans fail to consider how vacant or underutilized commercial and industrial buildings can be put to productive use. Numerous mills, factories, theatres, and warehouses have been converted into apartments, senior housing, office and retail complexes, hotels, and government offices.
- **Intensify land use.** Intensifying the use of land in the commercial district should be another priority of your Main Street work. Essentially, underutilized or vacant land should be considered for future development or for other uses that will benefit the district. In

CASE STUDY

Bainbridge Island, Washington Planning a Sustainable Future



The people of Bainbridge Island, a Washington State Main Street community, took stock of recent changes, including two large developments and population projections that anticipated 10,000 new residents over the next 30 years. This small town of two square miles decided it was time to manage progress and protect its past by launching a master planning process.

To find participants, the mayor’s office ran an ad in the local newspaper. In 2004, the city appointed 125 stakeholders to participate in a 13-month-long, citizen-driven planning process. The Winslow Tomorrow Community Congress was established to collaborate on a visioning process and to draft recommendations for the city council.

“As a Main Street organization dedicated to the vitality of our downtown, this was the perfect opportunity to involve all of our stakeholders—businesses, residents, and property owners in planning for our future,” says Cris Beattie, executive director of the Bainbridge Island Downtown Association. “As we decided what we wanted our town to become, the steps to achieve that vision became clearer.”

The downtown association assisted in facilitating the visioning process, planning meetings, participating in charrettes,



Selling the Master Plan Elements

It has become increasingly common for both local municipalities and Main Street programs to develop special marketing materials and initiatives to “sell” the major reinvestment and development opportunities proposed in a master plan. For example, a developer recruitment package might highlight potential investment projects ranging from key historic commercial buildings to available infill sites. Some communities have used packages, websites, and other ancillary marketing materials and brochures to recruit outside financial contributors and donors for special streetscape and public improvement projects.

Image © Lisa Cashan

quite a few Main Street communities, with the exception of dense urban neighborhoods, land is vastly underutilized, especially in blocks surrounding the downtown core. If your district has parking, vacant, or underutilized lots within the core, you should be planning for infill development in order to identify the highest and best use for the land. Parking probably can be accommodated in other parts of the district.

- Choose pedestrian-oriented uses over auto-oriented uses.** Whenever possible, new infill development should be designed to strengthen the streetwall in order to promote pedestrian traffic and circulation. Specifically, new construction should always meet the sidewalk (zero setback), with no intervening setback from adjacent historic commercial buildings. Examine local zoning provisions to ensure that they prohibit setbacks and provide for new construction that reinforces the district’s overall pedestrian character. Use your zoning regulations to keep the streetwall intact by prohibiting auto-oriented uses such as drive-throughs or gas stations in the commercial core. (For more on

creating pedestrian-oriented streets, see Chapter 18, Managing Traffic.)

- Allow light industry.** Your community’s zoning ordinance could allow light manufacturing in the upper stories of commercial buildings. For example, a jeweler could use space above the shop for creating custom jewelry.
- Plan rationally for parking.** When examining land-use patterns, consider how a combination of on-street, rear-yard, off-site, and shared parking could be implemented. If parking is adequately planned, it will improve circulation by making traffic patterns safer. See Chapter 19, Parking on Main Street, for details.
- Ensure good design.** Zoning overlays, historic district designations, and design guidelines are necessary components of a Main Street plan to encourage proper rehabilitation of historic buildings, sensitive design, and appropriate new developments.

and promoting and communicating with the public about the process. The planning process also involved bringing in outside experts to educate participants and answer questions about technical topics.

“Main Street is involved in planning for future residential growth and parking, increasing the livability of our downtown by recalling its historic connection with the waterfront and harbor, developing alternative transportation modes, and connecting parks and pathways to maintain the small-town atmosphere,” says Beattie

The final recommendations sought to make Winslow a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use town center with increased housing. These recommendations, which ran the gamut from incentives for Main Street retail and public art to new zoning codes and sustainable building standards, offered comprehensive and specific strategies to achieve the community’s vision.

In the fall of 2005, the city council unanimously adopted the recommendations. The Puget Sound Regional Council recognized the project with a VISION 2020 award and the governor presented the city with an award for its efforts to create a livable community.



RESOURCES

Websites

American Planning Association (APA): APA is a nonprofit public interest and research organization that offers policy guides and other free and member-only content. www.planning.org

Cyberbia: Online message board and community for people involved in planning. Provides images of buildings and streetscapes and links to various resources like comprehensive plans. www.cyberbia.org

Municipal Code Corporation (MCC): Publishes codes of ordinances, land use codes, and charters for local governments. www.municode.com

National Charrette Institute (NCI): This nonprofit organization explains the charrette process. www.charretteinstitute.org

Planetizen: A planning and development online network and resource hub. www.planetizen.com

Smart Growth Network: Website offers news, events, and current information on smart-growth topics ranging from parks to New Urbanism to schools. www.smartgrowth.org

Articles

“Beyond Visioning: Developing a Comprehensive Downtown Plan,” by Nick Kalogeresis, *Main Street News*, August 2000. Learn how to develop a plan that benefits revitalization efforts.

“Form-based Zoning: Bringing New Urbanism to Main Street,” by Nick Kalogeresis, *Main Street News*, March 2008. Shows the non-planner how form-based zoning can help Main Street reach its goals.

“Smart Growth: Temporary Development Controls,” by Leslie Tucker, *Main Street News*, October 2002. Enact temporary development controls while strengthening existing planning and zoning laws. Discusses development moratoria, interim protection provisions, and legal issues.

“Zoning Practices in Traditional Commercial Districts,” by Nick Kalogeresis, *Main Street News*, November 2004. Describes zoning basics and explains how appropriate zoning can promote Main Street-friendly real estate development, parking scenarios, and preservation.

Books

A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction by Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, and Murray Silverstein (Oxford University Press, 1977). This classic publication shows how the design of our built environment impacts human interaction.

Design Charrettes for Sustainable Communities, by Patrick M. Condon (Island Press, 2007). This step-by-step guide shows how to productively convene community members in order to meet planning goals.

The Death and Life of Great American Cities, by Jane Jacobs (Vintage Books, 1961). In this landmark book, Jacobs changed the way we look at urban planning and advocated for dense, mixed-use spaces that support inherently livable neighborhoods.

The Great Neighborhood Book: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Placemaking, by Jay Walljasper and Project for Public Spaces (New Society Publishers, 2007). Strategies and case studies show how communities can be transformed, especially through civic involvement and initiating small changes.

The Charrette Handbook: The Essential Guide for Accelerated, Collaborative Community Planning, by Bill Lennertz and Aarin Lutzenhiser (American Planning Association, 2006). Step-by-step manual for planning a charrette from A to Z.

Planners and Politics, by Roger Waldon (APA Planners Press, 2007). Learn how to get things done in a politically charged environment and deal with issues ranging from how to react to a poor public decision to revisiting an earlier planning decision.

Image, right © Donna Dow



chapter 17

ZONING AND OTHER LAND-USE REGULATORY TOOLS

By Nicholas P. Kalogeresis, AICP

Don't let interested developers walk away from projects in your commercial district because of outdated or unfavorable zoning requirements and land-use regulations.

Many communities are discovering that their zoning ordinances forbid certain uses or stipulate parking requirements that make building reuse and other development projects infeasible. Other communities find that their zoning regulations inadequately protect historic commercial buildings or fail to promote good design of new development. That's why it's imperative that you examine local ordinances.

In what ways can your municipality revise zoning ordinances to support Main Street? They can:

- Allow a variety of uses on upper floors;
- Reduce parking requirements to make adaptive-use projects more feasible;
- Institute new design overlay regulations to better manage the appearance of existing buildings and new developments; and
- Adopt new zoning techniques to control the use of storefront spaces.

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Revising and adopting zoning regulations and monitoring their effectiveness is not just the realm of city planners; these tasks have become part of the revitalization agenda for many Main Street organizations.

As with master planning, you must review and amend your own zoning ordinances; copying codes from other communities is not an option. Why? Different state-enabling legislation means that what is permitted in one state may not be allowed in others. Also, zoning is a revitalization tool that you can use to address your own issues and challenges; taking another city's codes won't necessarily meet your needs. Therefore, Main Street programs and urban planners must work diligently to determine which of the allowable zoning techniques will help create a vibrant business district. Several constitutional requirements govern zoning; these requirements ensure that zoning legislation does not infringe on certain rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

All Main Street communities can benefit from reviewing their zoning ordinances and working with their local governments to draft new codes that encourage appropriate development. While zoning is a complex subject, the following section will explain basic zoning practices and tools.

Zoning Basics

What is zoning? Zoning regulates the types of land uses allowed within a defined area.

What does it mean for you? Within the context of Main Street, zoning regulations should allow a range of uses like retailing, offices, and entertainment venues.

It's the Law!

Understanding the way zoning works requires understanding your state's enabling legislation. All states have enabling laws that determine the kinds of zoning powers—design overlays, performance-based zoning, and planned unit developments, for example—that local communities can exercise. The legislation also outlines the roles of the municipal planning commission and the zoning board of appeals, the procedures for issuing zoning variances and dealing with nonconforming uses, and the way a local zoning ordinance correlates and conforms to the community's comprehensive plan.

Another wrinkle to state enabling laws pertains to home-rule states in which municipalities can basically self-govern and develop and enact zoning techniques beyond those expressly authorized in the legislation. This gives local communities the flexibility to develop and adopt zoning codes that can address revitalization and development issues. In non-home-rule states, communities can only enact forms of zoning explicitly authorized by the enabling laws. Because zoning practices vary in every state, be sure to learn your state's home-rule status and study the enabling legislation before considering revisions to your zoning regulations.

Besides land use, zoning regulations also control the basic look and feel of the district. Various requirements regulate how much three-dimensional space a building can occupy on a particular zoned lot. You can control shape and density of new buildings and other development through height, bulk, and site planning requirements. While height and bulk limits are fairly straightforward, site planning regulations usually govern building setback, rear and side-lot requirements; minimum lot coverage; and, most common in suburban communities and urban neighborhood districts, floor area ratios (FAR). Typically, Main Street-friendly zoning codes do not allow front or side-lot setbacks in order to encourage a continuous building-to-building street wall.

If your Main Street district is already built out, don't think you are off the zoning hook. You may not be especially concerned with these requirements, but they do come into play during infill or other new development projects. Existing site, bulk, and height requirements for new buildings can have a major impact on the commercial district's overall design quality. In addition, zoning also regulates parking. The zoning ordinance usually specifies how much parking must be provided for each type of allowable land use in the business district. Because parking is one of the trickiest issues Main Street organizations face, it will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Now that you know what zoning can do, let's look at what it can't do.

- First, zoning regulations are not design guidelines; they only regulate the three-dimensional space a building can occupy on a lot, not its design and architectural style. That's why many communities adopt design and historic preservation "overlay zones," which require developers and building owners to meet specific design standards. Design standards may focus on such areas as storefront rehabilitation, window restoration, new construction, building material maintenance and use, and signage and awning design and placement.
- Secondly, zoning, in general, regulates land use and where certain land uses are located within a given community. When it comes to locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) such as adult-oriented businesses, check-cashing establishments, and liquor stores, the U.S. Constitution provides a minimal level of protection that guarantees that such businesses have a reasonable right and opportunity to locate in a community. These types of places cannot be banned outright in most circumstances. For many Main Street programs, regulating LULUs can be tricky. In some cases, especially if adequate space is available elsewhere within a community, unwanted land uses can be relegated to other commercial or industrial areas outside the Main Street district. If adequate space is not available, communities can then implement zoning requirements that can disperse them within downtown or the neighborhood district to minimize their presence and impact.



While less desirable businesses, like check-cashing establishments, have a right to be in your district, there are limited land-use regulations for controlling their location.

- Zoning ordinances do not take the place of a comprehensive plan. Rather, they are the primary tools for implementing local land-use elements of a master plan.

If a Main Street community decides to develop a master plan that includes a new set of land-use planning goals, zoning regulations would then be revised or rewritten by the city's staff planners, legal staff, or in consultation with planning consultants. It is customary for most communities to reexamine and revise their zoning codes after a major planning process, although minor adjustments and revisions to zoning ordinances may take place over time as the

master plan is implemented. Some states, notably Oregon and Florida, require consistency between a town's comprehensive plan and its zoning and land-use regulations.

Types of Zoning

Most traditional Main Street commercial districts were built before modern zoning came into being. Back then, Main Street buildings were often constructed with the same materials, were of similar or varying height, and were built right next to each other and next to the sidewalk to meet the needs of pedestrians. Furthermore, Main Streets accommodated a multitude of land uses, from retail to industrial.

The traditional downtown as a center of land-use concentration began to change, however, when the automobile was introduced in the early 20th century and when conventional zoning came into being in 1926, the year the U.S. Supreme Court legalized municipal zoning through the landmark case, *Euclid, Ohio versus Ambler Realty Company*. This case determined that local governments had a valid interest in regulating land uses to protect the common welfare.

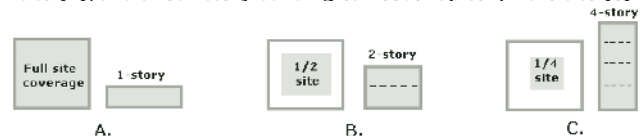
Modern conventional zoning, or Euclidean zoning as it has come to be called, intended to separate dirty smoke-stack industries from residential neighborhoods and down-

Common Zoning Terminology

- **Amendments** are simply changes to the zoning ordinance. Zoning amendments are often proposed by the planning commission and then enacted by the legislative body.
- **Permitted uses** are the allowed uses within a zoning area or district as of right. In zoning, the term "as of right" means that a property owner has the right to develop or use the property according to the designated land use. A district zoned "single-family residential" dictates that the land can only be used for single-family homes. A district zoned "mixed-use business commercial" signifies that, while the primary land use is commercial, other uses such as upper-story housing, offices, and even light manufacturing, may be permitted as well.
- **Conditional uses** are allowable uses within a district, but they must be approved by the planning commission and the village or city council. For example, a new development would only be permitted if it meets traffic impact, noise, and appropriate design conditions.
- **Variances** grant an exception from zoning rules. In the strictest sense, variances are only granted when there is a hardship to the property—where some aspect of the property cannot be used for the purposes that are zoned. A variance may also be allowed if it is deemed acceptable to the public good, if it is in accordance with the master plan, if the hardship is not self-imposed, and if the variance is the minimum necessary to satisfy the hardship. Variances and conditional use differ in that the latter is a lawful use permitted by the zoning law, while a variance is a land use prohibited by zoning law but granted for a particular reason.

Floor Area Ratio

Floor area ratio (F.A.R.) is the relationship between a building's total floor area and its site coverage. For example, a F.A.R. of 1.0 means that there is a one-to-one relationship between allowed floor area and site coverage. To illustrate, a one-story building can cover the full site (A), a two-story building can cover up to half the site (B), and a four-story building can cover up to 1/4 the site (C).



- **Floor area ratio (F.A.R.)** measures the intensity of building coverage on a particular lot. It is determined by dividing the gross floor area of a building on a lot by the area of the lot. These ratios are useful when the value of land is significant enough to warrant a more intensive use of property beyond two or three stories.
- **Zero-lot line** means that a building rests directly on the lot line rather than being set back from the street. Zero-lot-line zoning is vitally important, as buildings need to be located at the front of their lots to encourage pedestrian circulation.
- **Nonconforming uses** are building uses that exist prior to the passage of the zoning ordinance (or amended ordinance) and do not conform to its provisions. Zoning ordinances can allow these uses to continue unless they are destroyed or amortized and discontinued after a certain period of time.

towns, thus making communities cleaner and safer. Despite their good intentions, these modern single-use-based zoning ordinances have led to both sprawl and the separation of retail, office, civic, and residential land uses. And, as a consequence, it gave rise to the ubiquitous un-pedestrian-friendly roadways, which connect these separated land uses by automobile. Additionally, most recent single-use zoning codes require new developments to supply an excessive amount of off-street parking; large setbacks from the sidewalk; curb cuts to accommodate new driveways from arterial roads; and most of all, the prevalence of single-use, single-story buildings. As a result, strip malls, gas stations, and other auto-oriented uses that place parking lots in front of buildings, promote traffic congestion, and discourage pedestrian circulation often line the roads leading to and from commercial districts.

While various aspects of single-use zoning forms still predominate in many Main Street communities, some towns have adopted other zoning systems and techniques that provide greater flexibility in addressing specific land-use conditions and achieving certain revitalization objectives. These zoning techniques not only allow a diversity of land uses in a traditional district but also let communities effectively shape and manage the architectural design of existing historic commercial buildings as well as new development. The following sections discuss some of the more common forms of zoning in use today.

Mixed-use Zoning

Since traditional commercial districts historically were built as mixed-use centers, most downtown zoning codes permit a mixture of land uses, including retail, service businesses and office uses on the first floors; and office, residential, and even some forms of light industrial uses on upper floors. Mixed-use zoning is in direct contrast to Euclidean zoning, which dictates that only one land use can exist in a particular zone. When revising zoning regulations, your Main Street program should always ensure that a maximum number of desired land uses are allowed in the commercial district, especially if the local market can support them. All too often, commercial district zoning codes prohibit certain uses, such as upper-floor housing and light industry. At the same



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New infill project in downtown Rochester, Michigan.

time, a Main Street community should also ensure that unwanted land uses, such as storage and drive-through facilities, are not permitted in the core commercial area.

With mixed-use zoning's benefits come a few challenges. Your municipality will need to accommodate parking for each use in an environment with an already limited parking supply—a feat that will be even more challenging if the district has excessive parking standards that are more suitable to strip mall parking lots. Another possible impact of mixed-use zoning is that certain building form requirements, like height and lot requirements, may be too inflexible to allow variations in the design of new developments.

Performance-based Zoning

Developed in the 1980s, performance-based zoning differs from single-use zoning in that it focuses less on land use and more on the characteristics of each use and how it performs and impacts the immediate environment. In a Main Street setting, typical land-use and building restrictions would be replaced by performance standards that a developer must meet to get planning commission approval. Usually, the standards stipulate minimum or maximum standards for density, setbacks, building height, floor-area ratio, and lot coverage. Sophisticated performance-based zoning may also include standards for ground-floor windows, storefront entrances, awnings and signs, and, of course, parking, although in most cases, parking standards will require fewer spaces. Additionally, as long as the zoning standards are met, a new use or a new development will be allowed.

Communities that opt for performance-based zoning find that it offers significant advantages, including less administrative time for the planning commission because variances, appeals, and zoning amendments aren't necessary. Performance-based zoning is thus a useful tool for communities planning to develop or redevelop properties. Several Main Street communities have added performance standards to their conventional zoning ordinances to manage new development and enhance their distinctive design character. Clovis, New Mexico, for example, uses performance-based standards in its "Urban Development District," which comprises the commercial district. The standards ensure that new buildings are built to the sidewalk, conform to the district's existing character, and allow a full range of land uses.



Performance-based zoning can include standards for setbacks, parking, public space, and other district aspects.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS MATRIX

Development Category	ARC + L.U.C.C. Staff Reviews*	L.U.C.C. Reviews	D.R.C. + S.I.P.C. Reviews
Corridor Preservation (see pg. 5 & 6, Appendix)	●		
Corridor General (see pg. 7, Appendix)	●		
Street General (see pg. 8)	●		
Significant, Contributing & City Landmarks (see pg. 9)		●	
Buildings of Note (see historic, street, category pages)	●		
Parks & Open Space (see pg. 10)	●		
Public Right of Way (see pg. 11)		●	●

* Appeals - Appeals of Staff decisions shall be sent to L.U.C.C.

ARC - Architectural Review Committee - a standing advisory committee of the LUCC to review proposals for non-contributing properties. It shall consist of one LUCC Member & one member from each city-recognized neighborhood association within the boundaries of the HHHOZ and the Huning Highland FDo UCOZ. One staff person shall act as facilitator of the committee and shall have the sole authority to render administrative rulings and issue Certificates of Compliance for approved proposals. Selection of the Committee's representatives and terms of service shall be determined by the LUCC.

LUCC - Landmarks & Urban Conservation Commission, distinct from LUCC staff.

HHHOZ - Huning Highland Historic Overlay Zone

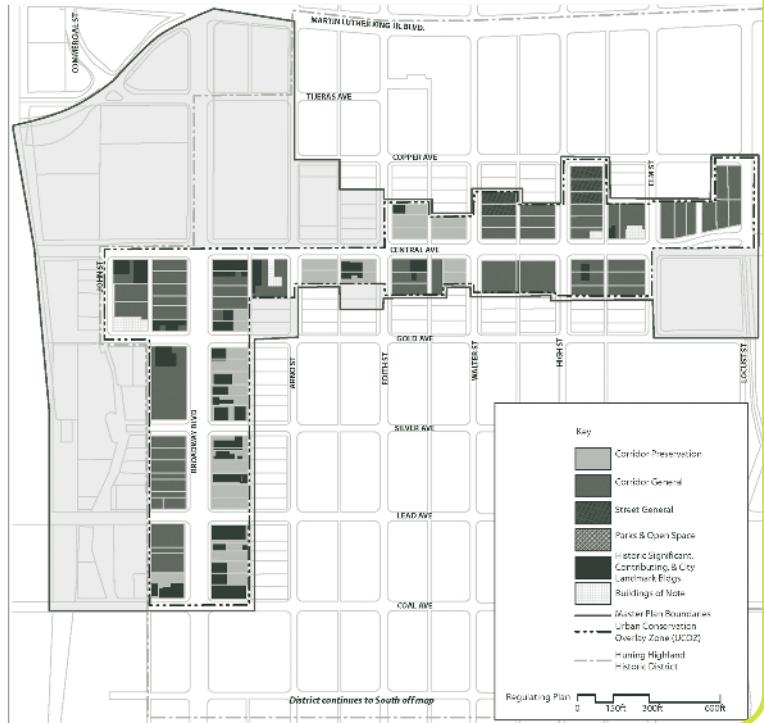
UCOZ - Urban Conservation Overlay Zone

SHPO - State Historic Preservation Office

DRC - Design Review Committee with City Municipal Development Department

NON-CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES: Any property that is not designated as a Significant or Contributing property within the Huning Highland Historic District or is not designated as a City Landmark or a Building of Note based on the most current survey of the Historic District.

NOTE: Landscape Regulation - should be distinct from the existing and proposed prototypical standards currently being developed by the City Municipal Development Department. The landscape design should reflect the more urban character of this area in its programming, detailing, and planting intensity.



A graphical representation of overlay zoning in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Incentive Zoning

Commonly used in mid-size to large communities, incentive zoning awards bonuses to developers in exchange for public amenities or design modifications. Bonuses usually take the form of adding density to the development, usually as increased floor-area ratios or relaxation of side-lot requirements. In return, the developer might agree to contribute funds for mass transit facilities or make park improvements. Portland, Oregon, for example, offers density bonuses if a developer provides affordable housing or daycare facilities in a new mixed-use development. Frequently, communities combine incentives with performance-based zoning—for example, if a

development meets certain performance standards, it may be awarded density bonuses. The drawback to incentive zoning is that it requires a market that can absorb the extra density of office, residential, or commercial uses.

Overlay Zoning

Overlay zones can be developed to deal with various local conditions and issues. Overlay zoning, as the name implies, is a layer of regulations that is added to the existing base zoning requirements and often enacted separately from the zoning ordinance itself. Most overlay zones are set up to ensure that the designs of new developments are compatible with the surrounding architecture or to

CASE STUDY

*Millville, New Jersey
Arts Overlay District*



Main Street Millville applied an arts overlay district to support its vision of becoming an arts destination. A local ordinance defined an arts district overlay zone, which designated a downtown area that encourages artist live-work space by removing the red tape and extra permitting expenses so that arts-related businesses can be located on the ground floor with residential units above.

Building on the community's heritage in early American glassmaking and drawing from a large national audience attracted to a nearby arts and cultural center, Millville developed several strategies to create a flourishing arts community. As a catalyst project, the city rehabbed three Main Street buildings to serve as a public arts center, which helped build the confidence of developers and investors. To attract new artists to the community, Pioneer Artists zero-percent loans of up to \$5,000 (with a five-year payback period) were offered to artists who agreed to sell or create original works of art, live in the district during the life of the loan, participate in events, and be open to the public.

protect the character of existing commercial buildings. In most cases, developers of new buildings must meet the design standards and requirements stipulated for the overlay zone district; typically, they must also get approval from a design appearance review board as well as the municipal planning commission. In mid-size to large communities, it is becoming common practice to develop a comprehensive set of design guidelines, which are then ratified as the overlay zoning regulations.

A common form of overlay zoning is the historic preservation overlay, which is intended to protect and preserve historic assets. Historic preservation overlay zones have two primary functions: to protect important historic buildings from demolition and to use design guidelines to manage design changes. Typically, historic preservation overlays are incorporated into the zoning ordinance itself and administered by a separate historic preservation commission; in some communities, however, the planning commission or a joint landmark-planning commission fulfills that function. In other circumstances, a stand-alone historic preservation ordinance could govern and manage overlay zones.

Other types of overlay zones can address signs, parking, and physical features such as lake and riverfront areas. In the Pacific Northwest, it is not uncommon to see overlay zones that require all commercial buildings to install awnings, mainly to shield pedestrians from the rain!

Planned Unit Development (PUD)

Planned unit development is a form of zoning that permits a developer to meet density and land-use goals without being bound by the existing zoning requirements. In some respects, a PUD combines aspects of both performance

and incentive-based zoning. In essence, planned unit development is “contract zoning” in which a developer is granted additional density for a project or other concessions in exchange for providing certain community benefits. Potential benefits may include open space amenities like plazas and lower costs for street construction and utility improvements for the municipality. PUDs are a special type of “floating overlay district,” which generally does not appear on the municipal zoning map until a developer requests a designation, which is then approved by the municipality. Many suburban communities and large cities are increasingly using the PUD process when working with developers to ensure that large projects will benefit the commercial district both economically and physically.

Form-based Zoning

Form-based zoning is different from all other forms of zoning in that it places greater emphasis on appropriate building form, placement, design, and the relation of a building to its physical surroundings rather than on land use. Another significant difference between form-based zoning and other zoning types is that graphics, photos, and schematics, rather than text, are used to illustrate how a building should be placed, designed, and built within a certain district. In a sense, form-based codes are detailed, in-depth design guidelines that carry the weight of a zoning ordinance.

Many of today’s form-based zoning codes are based on traditional neighborhood development (TND) principles that have long guided the design and construction of our traditional commercial districts. These principles include compact, pedestrian-oriented streets designed for slower traffic; zero setbacks; hidden parking; and attractive, human-scaled architecture. One prominent New Urbanist planner and architect, Andres Duany, and his firm, Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company, have developed a model Smart Code based not only on TND principles but also on a transect planning system. According to Duany, a transect zone takes a geographical cross-section of a region and divides it into a sequence of specific physical environments from rural to urban core. Each environment in turn has development and design qualities that are maintained and promoted through its own form-based standards. For example, in an urban core zone, buildings and development are expected to be dense, with diverse uses and open spaces consisting of plazas and squares. In a rural zone, open space and environmental areas are protected, and most forms of physical development are prohibited. Each zone would also have its own specific standards for building function and configuration as well as for parking.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)

Seven states allow communities to put “transfer of development right” provisions in their zoning and development regulations; in a downtown setting, TDRs are primarily designed to protect historic buildings from development pressures. TDRs allow the unused density or air rights between a building’s actual height



Upstairs, Downstairs.

This Kress building in Salisbury, North Carolina (*left*), was rehabilitated to offer the community mixed-use space with residential upper-floor lofts.

Stipulations that limit the percentage of non-retail businesses locating in first-floor space enhance the pedestrian experience.



Images: Left, © Linda Glisson; Right, © Josh Bloom.

and the allowable height and density (assuming there is a substantial difference between the two) to be bought and transferred to another area in the commercial district. Few Main Street communities use this tool, however, for reasons ranging from the lack of a market to purchase the air rights or no suitable receiving areas to the difficulty of administering the program.

Although this tool was initially conceived to preserve historic resources, it is now more extensively used to protect farmland, open spaces, and other environmentally sensitive areas from development.

Hybrid/Multiple Zoning Forms

It is quite common for most zoning codes today to combine different types of zoning—especially in mid-size to large communities where extensive commercial districts may require multiple forms of zoning to achieve a variety of revitalization, design, and land-use planning goals. For example, a commercial district with underutilized or vacant land surrounding a strong core of historic buildings might need PUD provisions, with a set of performance standards to guide the design of future develop-

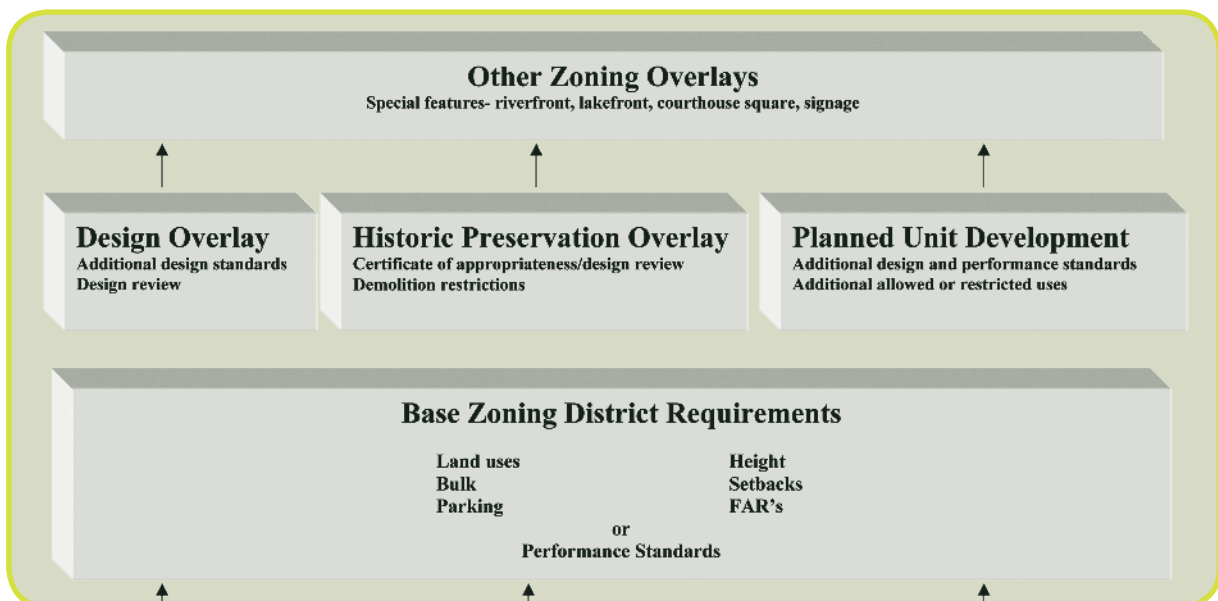
ment. The historic core might need a historic preservation overlay zone to protect it from development pressures as well as to manage design changes to historic commercial buildings within the zone. Underneath the overlay zones lies the base zoning requirements that dictate the uses allowed in the entire district, as well as general building height and bulk limits.

Main Street Zoning Issues

Main Street programs face many common zoning issues, including regulating first-floor storefront uses, determining parking standards, encouraging upper-floor usage, and regulating religious uses. While the following sections will discuss these issues, remember that these examples must be looked at in the context of state enabling legislation and whether your community can exercise home-rule authority.

First-floor Uses

It is safe to assume that a primary goal for most Main Street programs is to fill as much ground-floor space as



Hybrid forms of zoning can consist of base requirements and several overlay zones.

Taking a Stand

When a national video rental store announced plans to open next to a locally owned video store in Port Townsend, Washington, a group of concerned citizens rallied to fight the intrusion of a chain business in their community. As a result, the community passed a temporary ordinance to limit formula retail stores and restaurants to a single commercial zone along the main road leading into the community. It was later adopted as a permanent ordinance, which bans formula businesses from the historic downtown and stipulates that such businesses may not exceed 3,000 square feet nor occupy more than 50 linear feet of street frontage.

possible with appropriate businesses. In many communities, that goal is approaching reality as they successfully reduce their vacancy rates and see growing market demand for businesses to occupy remaining storefront space. In order to reserve that space for retail uses, some towns have modified their base zoning use requirements to exclude non-retail and non-service businesses from first floors and allow them only in upper stories or in zones outside the commercial core. Other communities have enacted a “sliding occupancy rule,” which stipulates the percentage—10 or 15 percent, for example—of total storefront ground space that can be occupied at any one time by non-retail businesses.

As simple as it may sound, restricting ground-floor usage to certain types of businesses can be difficult to implement and often quite controversial among property owners who may balk at such restrictions, especially if the retail market is weak. First-floor, retail-only zoning works best when

there is high demand among retailers for storefront spaces, and the number of buildings with suitable ground-floor locations is in relatively short supply. Zoning alone will not attract new businesses and it should never be a substitute for good business development practices. Also, restricting office or non-retail usage of first floors could bring up legal and constitutional issues if office uses are also limited elsewhere in the district or in the community at large.

As your Main Street organization moves from the catalyst period into the growth and management phases, you may look at modifying zoning regulations to encourage one particular use over another, such as putting retail uses on first floors only.

Upper-story Uses

As with first floors, communities can regulate upper-story usage. It is good land-use policy to allow a variety of uses on the upper floors of commercial buildings.

Because many historic Main Streets served primarily as commercial centers, housing was generally not a permissible use. As a result, many commercial districts still have zoning codes that prohibit upper-story housing. But, communities evolve and lifestyles change; today, residential units above storefronts are quite appealing. If this is the case in your community, your organization should encourage zoning legislation that allows a broad range of uses, including residential, since revitalization relies on diversifying the business district’s functions.

One land use that is rarely included in Main Street zoning regulations is light industry, which is now usually

CASE STUDY

Libertyville, Illinois

Mandating First-floor Retail



Libertyville, Illinois, has used special zoning provisions to regulate first-floor usage of downtown commercial buildings. The Village of Libertyville was one of the first Illinois Main Street communities to implement a zoning ordinance that restricted office and other non-retail uses to only 10 percent of the total storefront frontage in the downtown’s C-1 zoning district. At any given time, only 10 percent of the total storefront space can be occupied by such uses as medical or law offices. Uses such as hair salons, currency exchanges, and other personal service businesses are permitted in the C-1 zoning district because they are classified as service-retail establishments.

The “10 percent rule,” as it has come to be known, was first enacted by the municipality in 1996, after an intense lobbying effort by MainStreet Libertyville, Inc., which was searching for a way to effectively regulate first-floor uses. At the time, the downtown was experiencing substantial reinvestment: some of its most significant buildings were being rehabilitated and new retailers were moving into an already limited supply of first-floor spaces. Both Main Street and Village leaders feared that there would not be enough first-floor spaces to accommodate the influx of new retailers in an increasingly strong downtown retail market. What ultimately sparked the lobbying effort was the reuse of one key historic commercial property along downtown’s prime retail street for a new real estate agency that occupied the entire first floor.

relegated to office and industrial parks. As previously mentioned, light manufacturing often occupied the upper floors of many historic Main Street districts; but today, due to changes in particular industries and the effects of single-use zoning, these uses are not always considered appropriate. Some communities, however, have begun to reassess the role light industry can play in a traditional commercial district; not only are some forms of industry appropriate uses, but they can often complement other types of business in the district.

Parking

The parking standards in zoning ordinances vary from community to community and often depend on several factors, including the current supply of on- and off-street parking. Generally, in dense urban neighborhood districts and in some suburban downtowns, retailers and some upper-floor office uses may be exempted from the ordinance's parking requirements because of the existence of on- and off-street parking facilities. Exemptions may also be given if uses are located in proximity to mass transit.

Some Main Street communities exempt retail and other uses from parking standards if their square footage is less than a certain size, such as 1,500 or 2,000 square feet. However, new developments that house larger businesses are required to provide parking on the development site or demonstrate that they can secure parking elsewhere in the district. In some communities, such as Rochester, Michigan, for example, retailers are required to contribute to a parking fund in lieu of meeting parking standards.

Despite the usefulness of the 10 percent rule, Main Street leaders and city planners have re-examined it to determine how to best regulate the location of financial institutions in first floor spaces. In recent years, several Chicago area suburban downtowns have been faced with the proliferation of automated bank service operations—facilities without tellers and other bank personnel—in prime first-floor locations.

In the years since the 10 percent rule was adopted, downtown Libertyville has become a vibrant commercial district with few vacancies on either the first floors or upper stories of its buildings. Overall, downtown property owners have supported the rule although some have voiced a strong preference for the location of certain office uses on first floors because they provide a more stable and lucrative source of rental income than retail. To counteract that claim, Main Street Libertyville has tracked first-floor lease rates since 1996 and found that overall rents per square foot from retail businesses have doubled since the rule was enacted.

One such facility leased first-floor space in an important corner location in downtown Libertyville, prompting Village officials to enact a moratorium on new office use in the C-1 district until the 10 percent rule has been revised. Specifically, MainStreet Libertyville and the Village will look at the way banks and financial institutions

The municipality uses those proceeds to improve parking lots and finance future parking facilities and garages.

As previously stated, some downtown zoning codes may have excessively high parking requirements, mainly because they are based on codes for conventional, single-use zoning districts, such as shopping malls and strip commercial areas, which generally have more land available for parking. Because most Main Street districts already have adequate on- and off-street parking facilities, they would do better to lower parking requirements and instead look at the way the existing parking supply is actually being utilized. Parking standards for upper-story uses, whether for offices or housing, can be problematic for some communities since off-street parking facilities will have to be secured and shared among residents, office workers, and shoppers.

Ideally, parking requirements should be based on a thorough parking management study that examines the way the current supply is being used. (See Chapter 22 for more information about assessing your parking situation.) In simple terms, if there is a parking supply surplus that more than adequately meets the needs of all land uses in specific areas of the commercial district, parking standards can be lowered. If the parking supply does not meet current and future needs, then parking rates could be raised to require creation of new spaces to meet demand. Developers would then be required to meet parking requirements by adding spaces in the development itself, finding them within existing facilities, or contributing funds for new parking facilities. PUD and performance-based zoning concepts work well with this system because

are classified; currently, they are categorized as both a service-retail use and an office use. As “service-retail,” they are allowed to lease first-floor space under current zoning. However, banks could be classified as offices if no teller or other customer service functions are a part of their day-to-day operations. On the other hand, local planning staff has found it somewhat difficult to accurately measure when the 10 percent office occupancy level has been reached. Some Village officials are also concerned that the 10 percent rule may be arbitrary and thus unconstitutionally limit the amount of office in the entire C-1 district.

One proposal to replace the 10 percent requirement with a new rule that mandates that only the front 35 feet of all downtown commercial buildings must remain retail has since been adopted by the Village Council. Office operations could then locate on first floors provided they occupy the rear portion of the building, with storefronts reserved for retail stores. Planning officials and Main Street Libertyville leaders believe that this requirement may be more equitable, and thus more viable legally because there is no “floating” percentage that has to be measured. Furthermore, MainStreet Libertyville hopes that the rule can further diversify downtown's business mix by allowing a wider range of first-floor uses while retaining a critical retail presence in storefronts.



new developments would have to meet parking standards based on the total amount of parking as determined by an ongoing parking management program.

Religious Uses

Regulating the location of churches and other religious institutions in the commercial core is a concern for some Main Street communities. Because such institutions often occupy historic religious buildings that predate the community's zoning ordinance, they are usually grandfathered in as an allowed use. Other communities may zone them as conditional uses.

However, some Main Street districts, often in urban neighborhoods, have been struggling to determine how to handle churches and congregations that occupy first-floor storefronts, which could be generating property and sales tax revenue. This can become a critical issue, especially if there is already high market demand for ground-floor space by retail and other commercial uses. In these cases, cities may decide to change their zoning ordinances to limit religious institutions on first floors.

As straightforward as this may seem, however, restricting the location of religious institutions can raise constitutional issues relating to the First Amendment and the free exercise of religion. Another complication is the passage by Congress of the Religious Land Use and Institutional-

ized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA), which affirms that there must be compelling government interests advanced by any local regulation of religious institutions and that there must be no substantial burdens placed on the exercise of religious activities by individuals. This places a heavier burden on a municipality to justify why it is excluding religious institutions in one land-use district but allowing them in another. Indeed, planners, along with elected municipal officials, are concerned that the RLUIPA could overturn reasonable zoning regulations that are meant to treat all land uses equally and fairly.

Despite these recent developments, it still is somewhat safe to assume that local communities can regulate the location of religious institutions within a business district, just as it can with office or other commercial uses. Local planners and revitalization leaders, however, will have to prove that such restrictions further a substantial community interest.

Evaluating Your Zoning Ordinance

Developing effective, appropriate zoning ordinances for traditional commercial districts should be on every Main Street program's agenda, along with the all important activities of encouraging design improvements and undertaking effective business development initiatives. Design and economic restructuring committees, in particular, should first review the zoning regulations, then team up with city planners, legal staff, and elected officials to propose zoning modifications to assist with the research and development phases of writing new ordinances.

Not only do these efforts play a key role in encouraging revitalization, but they will become increasingly important as the commercial district experiences significant reinvestment and development. Without the right zoning codes in place, a Main Street district may never truly achieve the diversity of uses or types of development suitable for the existing physical fabric. You'll need to review your zoning ordinance and develop the best set of zoning tools to advance specific revitalization goals, knowing that as those goals change in the future, so must your zoning regulations.

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RESOURCES

For more information on planning and zoning issues, please see Chapter 16, Master Planning.



MANAGING TRAFFIC ON MAIN STREET

By John D. Edwards*

In the 1960s and '70s, the primary traffic issue for Main Street districts was how to reduce “congestion” and make traffic move faster, i.e., provide maximum mobility.

In the late '80s and '90s, there was a realization that maybe some traffic congestion in the commercial district was good. Maybe the commercial district doesn't have to be subservient to the automobile. The need to slow traffic to make the area more pedestrian friendly has caused many commercial districts to rethink operational techniques that cause high-volume and high-speed traffic. Converting a one-way main street into a two-way street is a common strategy for managing traffic.

Many factors combine to make Main Street economically successful. One important aspect is the traffic pattern. One-way streets increase automobile traffic and are efficient at moving high volumes of traffic, but they are not pedestrian friendly nor easy to navigate. Circulation becomes more complicated as motorists may have to drive a few blocks before they can turn around and get back to where they want to go. In a big city like Chicago, for instance, one-way streets are necessary to help move large amounts of traffic.

A major concern of organizations working to revitalize traditional commercial districts is to improve retail sales, and, more specifically, to boost the visibility and accessibility of their offerings. In this regard, making the circulation system more “customer friendly” is a prerequisite to increasing the retail segment of the commercial area and appealing to investors and business owners who are interested in your Main Street district.

Another perception that affects the success of a commercial district is “Does it feel exciting? Are there lots of people?” That indicates a certain degree of congestion. One-way cir-

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ulation is so efficient at moving traffic that the streets may feel empty! A commercial district needs to have a certain level of traffic congestion to appear busy.

How fast cars travel through your district is another issue. Any successful Main Street district will have considerable pedestrian traffic, and where pedestrians are present, operating speed limits should be 15 to 30 miles per hour. One-way streets, especially one-way road pairs 10 to 15 blocks long, tend to encourage higher operating speeds, usually in the range of 35 to 40 mph.

Why Convert to Two-way Streets?

When should a community consider converting a street or network of streets from one-way to two-way traffic? The most important consideration is whether it will help the revitalization effort. If the area affected by the conversion is a retail district that is experiencing a comeback, then a conversion may be warranted. If, however, the area adjacent to the one-way street has primarily office, warehousing, or industrial uses, with high peak-hour traffic, then a conversion may not be worth it.

Perhaps the most important reason for changing the traffic flow is to improve the economic well-being of the commercial district. A survey of 25 towns and cities that have converted their Main Streets show that many have experienced significant reductions in vacant floor space after the conversion. (See Table 1.)

All of the communities surveyed reported positive results after converting their one-way streets to two-way traffic, and many reported substantial private investments stimulated by conversions that were coupled with streetscape projects. West Palm Beach, for example, reported \$300 million in private investment in areas where city hall had invested \$10 million in public funding.

Changing the commercial district environment so that it better serves pedestrians is another major reason for converting one-way streets. In sev-

Speed and Field of Vision

Faster speeds result in smaller fields of vision—and less visibility and awareness of businesses on Main Street. The image above is what a driver sees when traveling at 30 mph; the image below shows what a driver sees when traveling at 15 mph.



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eral communities, operating speeds were reduced from 30 to 45 mph to 20 to 25 mph. Slowing traffic reduces noise, water and snow splash, and fumes—all problems for people walking on the sidewalk.

An even more important benefit is the increase in pedestrian safety. In the booklet, *Main Street: When a Highway Runs Through It*, published by the Washington State Department of Transportation, speed is related to driver perception and the severity of injuries at various speeds. For instance, at 40 mph, the driver's focus is on the roadway at a distance; at 30 mph, the driver begins to see things at the road's edges; and at 20 mph, the foreground comes into focus. At 15 mph, the motorist sees pedestrians and features on adjacent buildings. The booklet also points out the chances of fatality if a pedestrian is struck at various speeds: at 40 mph, the chance of death is 85 percent; at 30 mph, it is 45 percent, while at 20 mph, the chance of a fatal injury is 15 percent.

The level of traffic in your district is also a consideration. If traffic volumes exceed 15,000 vehicles per

Table 1: How One-way to Two-way Conversions Affect Main Streets

Community	Population	Vacancy Rate Before After	Remarks
Sheridan, Wyoming	14,000	25% 1%	Traffic increase 200%
West Palm Beach, Florida	85,000	80% 0%	Positive impact on reducing drug use
Lafayette, Indiana	50,000	20% 15%	Manager reports positive results
Washington, Missouri	12,000	30% 2%	Business is very supportive
Anniston, Alabama	26,400	6% 1%	Even those who opposed conversion now support it
North Little Rock, Arkansas	61,700	75% 60%	

Context-sensitive Design

Publications like *Main Street: When a Highway Runs Through It*, illustrate “context-sensitive design,” or CSD. Transportation agencies and engineers use CSD strategies to balance the needs of all groups affected by transportation projects, including customers, pedestrians, business owners, cyclists, residents, and others, while planning projects that fit in with the existing community type or environment. For more information on context-sensitive design, read, “Working with a Highway Department” on www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.

day (vpd) on each of the one-way streets and if there are numerous cross streets with no suitable parallel or bypass routes, the conversion to two-way may increase congestion to unacceptable levels and actually deter shoppers.

A final consideration is street width, and its impact on on-street parking and off-street parking access/egress. If streets are narrow, there may be a significant loss of parking. Streets less than 24 feet wide are not good candidates for two-way operations; left-turn movements will cause congestion (for more information on how left turn lanes affect your district, read “Working With a Highway Department” on www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet). For off-street parking lots and garages, the access design of the entrance/exit may require substantial reconstruction to accommodate a change to two-way operation. Another potential expense to consider is the cost of changing traffic signals and signs to accommodate the conversion. These changes can be expensive, especially if electrical wires are underground. In Greensboro, North Carolina, for example, the estimate to convert one street was \$30,000 per intersection.

Should You Convert to Two-way Streets?

What information do you need to decide on a street conversion and where do you get it? The types and level of analysis depend on a variety of factors, including:

- The jurisdiction under which the street(s) operate;
- Street widths;
- Amount of daily and peak-hour traffic;
- Adjacent building use;
- Pedestrian activity;
- Level of congestion;
- Possible economic impacts; and
- How the facilities relate to the local and regional transportation network.

Street Jurisdiction

Street jurisdiction refers to the legal authority under which the street operates. Is it federal, state, or local? If it is a federal or state route, you will need approval to make the conversion and the studies required may be fairly rigorous. If the street is under local jurisdiction, the conversion will be under local control, and the decision may depend only on traffic volumes and parking needs. See “Working with a Highway Department” on www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.

Street Width and Lane Use

Perhaps the most important consideration is street width. Two-way operation requires a minimum width of 24 feet. If there is parallel parking on both sides of

Table 2: Street Width: Minimum Required Widths for Two-way Traffic

Number of Lanes			Basic Lane Width		Required Minimum Width
Traffic	Parking	Turning	Traffic	Parking	
2	0	0	12'	n/a	24'
2	parallel 1	0	12'	8'	32'
2	parallel 2	0	11'	8'	38'
2	parallel 2	1	11'	8'	49'
2	angle 1	0	15'	19'	49'
2	angle 2	0	15'	19'	68'
2	angle 2	1	11-15'	18'	70'

Source: “Converting One-way Streets to Two-way: Managing Traffic on Main Street,” by John D. Edwards, *Main Street News*, June 2002, page 3.

Bringing Back the Two-way Street: Why communities are changing their ways

While the circumstances motivating street conversions and the logistical issues involved vary from place to place, most of the communities contemplating the conversion process cite easier access, traffic calming, and support for local businesses as reasons to make the transformation.

Anniston, Alabama, converted its downtown streets from two-way to one-way back in 1972 as a “temporary” measure during road construction. Those changes remained in place until the late 1990s when a new mayor, responding to requests from downtown businesses, promised to bring two-way traffic back.



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The downtown organization, Spirit of Anniston, worked closely with local newspapers and radio stations to educate the community about change. Radio “drive-time” reminders during the weeks that followed the conversion kept confusion down. While some banks with drive-through windows were initially concerned that the switch to two-way traffic would be dangerous, no traffic accidents were reported during the first two months of the conversion.

Anniston found that the conversion made access to stores more convenient and reduced traffic speeds. The community became “pro-pedestrian” rather than “pro-car.”

Lafayette, Indiana, instigated the change because of major transportation infrastructure projects. Relocation of rail lines and a new bridge across the Wabash River made the previous one-way pairs of streets unnecessary. The traffic system had



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three major one-way pairs—two in one direction, one in the other. Downtown business owners were concerned that the new bridge would cause loss of visibility and access.

The plan for converting the pairs raised concerns about loss of parking spaces and the cost of installing new traffic signal lights and signs. When the city did an actual traffic count, however, it found that the downtown didn’t need that many traffic lights or stacking lanes. The director of development saw that the conversion made it easier to get around—especially for tourists.

the street, the required width may be 36 to 38 feet; and with angle parking on both sides, the width expands to 64 to 68 feet. These widths do not provide any left-turn lanes, so if there is a heavy amount of left-turn traffic, additional width may be required. Table 2 gives minimum curb-to-curb widths for various parking and traffic lane configurations. As you can see, angle parking increases minimum required widths considerably due not only to the depth of the parking aisle but also the maneuvering space required.

Daily and Peak-hour Traffic

The amount of traffic, both daily and during peak hours, must also be considered. For streets carrying more than 10,000 vehicles per day, make sure that most of the traffic consists of local shoppers; otherwise severe complaints will ensue. Peak-hour volumes of more than 500 vehicles per lane can cause considerable delays due to the left turns generated by the conversion. (See “Working With a Highway Department” on www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet for information on collecting traffic data.) If you plan to convert streets with high-traffic volumes, look for alternative routes with surplus capacity that can be used by drivers who aren’t planning to stop at any of the businesses on the converted streets.

Adjacent Building Use

Building use along the street is another important factor. The basic reason for converting a street to two-way traffic is to make the circulation system easier to understand and use. For people who work or live downtown, this may not be an important issue. For shoppers, it’s a different story; two-way streets can help them reach their destinations more quickly and easily. Thus, streets lined predominantly with retail stores are usually the prime candidates for conversion.

Another use affected by two-way conversions is a parking structure. Parking garages, decks, or lots specifically designed for one-way operations may require redesign and reconstruction of their entrances and exits to accommodate the new traffic flow.

Pedestrian Activity

Improving the pedestrian environment on adjacent sidewalks is one of the major reasons for converting one-way streets to two-way operations. These conversions can reduce traffic speeds, noise, rain splash, and vehicular-pedestrian conflicts. To obtain significant benefits, however, there must be either existing or *anticipated* pedestrian traffic on the sidewalks. If the buildings along the street do not generate significant foot traffic, the conversion will generate fewer pedestrian benefits. Areas in which pedestrian traffic volume is less than 200 to 300 people an hour will probably experience minimal benefits. Pedestrian studies that include existing counts of activity on sidewalks can help determine whether a conversion will benefit the district.



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Levels of Congestion

Typically, traffic engineers and transportation planners strive for vehicular delays of 30 seconds or less at intersections. Most traditional commercial districts, however, must be willing to accept longer delays because pedestrians are present and drivers are turning or pulling into or out of parking spaces. The wait at intersections is less important because conditions in the middle of a block may exert more control over vehicular delay than traffic signals. For commercial districts, especially retail areas, average waits of up to 60 seconds at intersections are acceptable. Capacity and level of service analyses are essential studies for any proposed street conversion.

Levels of traffic congestion affect operating speeds as well. From the standpoint of pedestrian safety, vehicular speeds of more than 25 miles per hour for retail streets are undesirable. On-street parking will slow the speed of traffic as well, making it desirable for the retail areas of Main Street districts. There are many ways to slow traffic speeds, which is called “traffic calming.” Strategies include speed bumps, corner bump outs, and sharper corners that necessitate slower turning speeds, among others. For more information, read “Traffic Calming” on www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.

Conversions and the Regional Transportation Network

One-way to two-way conversions may depend on the way the proposed streets fit within the regional roadway network. When considering a conversion, look at the network and see how a change will affect traffic operations regionally. For instance, if a freeway interchange system is designed to operate with the one-way system in the commercial district, it may not be possible to make a change. On the other hand, if there are parallel routes to which “through” traffic can be diverted, a conversion may be feasible. In any event, studies should be conducted to determine how much of the traffic flow is “through” and how much is “local.” For supporting information, read “By-Passes” online at www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.

Truck traffic is another consideration. Is there a high volume of truck traffic on the streets to be converted? If so, find out if truck operations can be diverted to a parallel route to reduce congestion on the proposed two-way street.

Accommodating Customers in the Business District

By Keith R. Tianen, AICP

Several elements of a streetscape greatly influence the form and function of your district. If a wide, fast, auto-oriented main road dominates your streetscape, then the form and function of buildings will tend to reflect that in several ways:

- Buildings will be set back from the sidewalk to avoid the fast, dirty, noisy traffic.
- This “setback” space will accommodate either landscaping or parking lots.
- Buildings will contain uses oriented to motorists.
- Streets will be designed to accommodate motorists, so they will likely be wide enough to accommodate higher vehicular speeds. The faster the traffic, the wider the streets need to be—and fast streets are inappropriate for Main Street.
- New construction plans will usually propose one-story buildings instead of multi-story structures that can accommodate upper-floor residential units.
- Buildings will tend to be separated by large empty spaces, from the street and from each other, and will contain mostly destination uses (where customers patronize one business and then leave the district).
- Buildings with destination uses will have their own parking lots, called “exclusive-use parking,” rather than use public or shared parking facilities. Therefore, more land will be occupied by parking lots than by commercial buildings that would bring jobs and tax revenue to the local economy.

These elements reduce the likelihood of a vibrant, welcoming Main Street district. An effective circulation system makes people in your business district feel safe and comfortable, guides them to their destinations easily, encourages them to visit several destinations, and entices them to come back. To accomplish these goals, you must remove customer barriers as well as address customer conveniences.

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(continued from page 175)

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Customer Barriers

Various elements that have no place on Main Street show up in countless districts. Many out-dated zoning ordinances permit auto-oriented uses inappropriate for Main Street, like bank drive-throughs. Elements like drive-through lanes are “space eaters”—land uses that consume valuable space on prime land; allow inconvenient, unsafe distances between buildings; and create “blankness” between entrances—which pedestrians tend to avoid.

Unused and underutilized spaces in the heart of your district come with economic costs. Economic costs can be easily quantified for excessive parking lots and vacant lots, as described in Chapter 19, Parking on Main Street. The economic costs for excessive street width in a traditional business district are more complex to assess, but the negative impacts are greater and more difficult to remedy after the fact. Unnecessary space eaters that are in a traditional business district include:

- **Mid-block driveways and drive-through lanes.** If a drive-through lane in the business district is necessary, the site plan should be designed so the driveway is on a rear or side street.
- **Parking lots and vacant lots.** These create “holes” in the streetwall and discourage pedestrian activity.
- **Zoning requirements for building setbacks.** These regulations unnecessarily separate buildings from each other and from the street.

Your district’s street design and zoning ordinance should encourage motorists to get out of their vehicles and walk around! If people do not find it safe and convenient to visit several destinations, the benefits of customer sharing and economic restructuring efforts will be wasted.

Images from left to right: © Andrea L. Dono; Kennedy Smith; Linda S. Glisson; Frazier Associates, Andrea L. Dono.



Customer Conveniences

Streetscaping and transportation projects can profoundly affect the form and function of your district. They can enhance customer conveniences by slowing traffic and reducing the width and the number of lanes so pedestrians can cross safely. You can make customer conveniences a priority through good street design and appropriate traffic analysis. Some customer conveniences include:

- **Effective parking.** (See Chapter 19, Parking on Main Street).
- **Configuring streets to favor pedestrians.** Shortening street crossing distances can be accomplished by reducing the number of traffic lanes, creating narrow traffic lanes, constructing curb extensions or “bump-outs,” having small (i.e., tight) corner turning radii, developing on-street parking, and diverting commuter traffic to alternate routes.
- **Leveraging shade from trees and installing benches, public transit shelters, and other amenities.**
- **Placing buildings to encourage people to walk around and explore the district.** Zoning ordinances will determine building regulations, such as how buildings can be situated on lots; however, building placement rules are significantly affected by the prevailing vehicular speed and width of the street. Key regulations include building lot coverage (preferably up to 100 percent), building setback (preferably a maximum zero-foot front-yard setback from the sidewalk), building height (multiple floors, at least two or three, even more at corners and other prominent sites), and off-street parking requirements (preferably none for the business district core but a high ratio of public, or shared, parking).
- **Permitting mixed uses within buildings.** Allowing mixed retail, office, and residential uses, especially within the same building, contributes to a vibrant Main Street and lets people conveniently meet a variety of needs.

Cost-Effective Streetscape Improvements

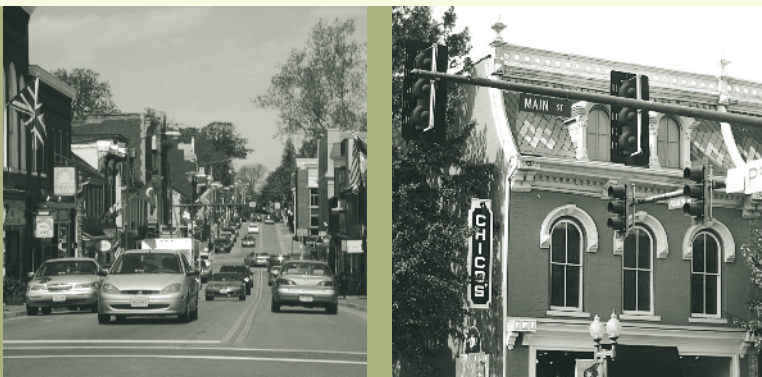
Many communities that want to tackle streetscape enhancements and transportation improvements delve immediately into sidewalk reconstruction, which is costly and disruptive and has less impact on the economic health of the district than reconfiguring the street. If your community needs to choose between sidewalk improvements and road reconfiguration, the latter will have a greater impact on your district and give your community more bang for its buck.

Imagine that you want to transform your downtown's five traffic lanes with two parallel parking lanes on each side into three traffic lanes with two diagonal parking lanes. This kind of street reconfiguration/lane reduction project brings many benefits to the business district, including:

- **Traffic calming.** Slowing vehicular speeds will make streets safer. It will also allow drivers to see Main Street businesses, which probably went unnoticed by 90 percent of motorists during peak-hour traffic.
- **Improved parking.** You can enhance customer conveniences by creating on-street "prime" parking. You can create more parking by turning parallel spaces into diagonal spaces. Also, because traffic is slower, motorists can more easily and safely pull into the diagonal spaces.
- **Upgraded land use.** By providing more on-street parking, the municipality doesn't have to tear down buildings to create tax-exempt municipal parking lots. Prime land parcels in the district can be used for their highest and best taxable use.
- **Stabilized or increased land value and tax revenue.** A tax increment financing (TIF) district can raise money to fund important Main Street incentive programs or services.

Street reconfiguration projects can be simple or elaborate. They can include a range of enhancements such as on-street parking, corner bump-outs, and curb extensions. They can relocate storm sewer lines; replace damaged curbs; and add new pavement, new trees, and new lighting. Whether minimal or elaborate, the design will be approved and implemented by the agency responsible for the street. Then that agency, possibly working with your organization, will explore a range of financing options through one or more of the following: tax increment financing, special assessment, municipal contribution, state contribution (particularly when the main road is a state road), or grant (potentially with locally matched funds through fund-raising efforts, if required).

Now, compare this project with a sidewalk-only improvement project. The expensive "sidewalk-only" project would not produce the benefits described above. Giving sidewalks a facelift can have valuable image and safety benefits and provide an opportunity to accommodate American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. When there is an option, however, the substantial community benefits make reconfiguring the street a powerfully favorable cost-effective project.



RESOURCES

Websites

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO): AASHTO is a nonprofit association representing all U.S. states and all modes of transportation. Its website is a good source of daily industry news updates. www.transportation.org

American Planning Association (APA): APA is a nonprofit public interest and research organization committed to urban, suburban, regional, and rural planning. It produces trainings and conferences, offers certification, sells publications, and offers various policy guides and other free information in addition to member-only content. www.planning.org

American Public Transit Association (APTA): APTA is dedicated to advancing public transportation. Its website offers a glossary, industry news, image library, bookstore, and a standards program. www.apta.com

Congress for New Urbanism (CNU): This organization promotes New Urbanism and walkable, neighborhood-based development as an alternative to sprawl. The website has an image gallery, case studies, articles, reports, and publications. www.cnu.org

Context Sensitive Solutions.org: This website was developed as a resource for state and local transportation agencies and practitioners, but Main Street practitioners will find it useful, too. It provides an overview of CSS topics that range from bike lanes and facilities to sidewalks. Each topic is supported with images, examples, additional resources, and case studies that show how flexibility was achieved through design and community input. www.contextsensitivesolutions.org

Federal Highway Administration: This website has highway regulations, a link to the online *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)*, SAFETEA-LU and TEA-21 information, and more. www.fhwa.dot.gov

Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE): An association for transportation professionals, ITE also develops standards. While some of its online information is only for members, its robust traffic-calming website has free information, such as the transportation yellow pages, that is not password protected. www.ite.org

New Urbanism: This informational website promotes walkable urbanism, transit-oriented development, public transit, and sustainability. It has a free e-newsletter, international case studies and examples, and content and statistics that support sustainable development and the fight against sprawl. www.newurbanism.org

National Parking Association: This membership organization produces conferences, e-newsletters, *Parking* magazine, and products and services directories. It also offers legislative updates. www.npark.org

Planetizen: A planning and development online network and resource hub. www.planetizen.com

RESOURCES, continued

Project for Public Spaces (PPS): PPS is a nonprofit association dedicated to placemaking. Transportation is one of its focus areas so its website presents concepts that support the use of transportation systems to contribute to a pedestrian-oriented sense of place. It also offers tips and case studies. www.pps.org

Smart Growth: The Sustainable Communities Network maintains the online Smart Growth Network, which offers a database with articles and various resources and case studies on such topics as green parking lots, local parking issues, managing storm water run off, and the benefits of on-street parking. www.smartgrowth.org

Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University: Since 1982, TTI has published its *Annual Mobility Report*, a nationally known study of mobility and traffic congestion on freeways and major streets in 85 cities. tti.tamu.edu/ and tti.tamu.edu/documents/mobility_report_2007.pdf

Transportation Research Board (TRB): The TRB promotes innovation and progress in transportation through research. www.trb.org

Transit Oriented Development (TOD): This website makes the case for TOD and lists benefits and components of TOD. www.transitorienteddevelopment.org

U.S. Dept. of Transportation (DOT): The DOT website provides links to state DOTs, industry reports, accessibility policy, grant information, and more. www.dot.gov

Walkable Communities: The website of a prominent transportation expert, Walkable Communities provides information to make communities more pedestrian friendly. It has a moderated listserve; pedestrian and bicycle photo library; and a helpful resource section that includes items such as charrette checklists, elements of good road design, and steps for building a walkable community. www.walkable.org

Publications

Flexible Design of New Jersey's Main Streets, Rutgers University and New Jersey Department of Transportation, 1998. This report offers an example of how context-sensitive design is achieved in New Jersey. http://policy.rutgers.edu/vtc/documents/LandUse.flexible_design.pdf

Traffic Calming, by Cynthia Hoyle (American Planning Association, 1995). Includes basic traffic-calming principles and techniques and examines their effects on traffic volume and speed in neighborhoods.

Streets and Sidewalks, People and Cars: The Citizens' Guide to Traffic Calming, by Dan Burden (Local Government Commission Center for Livable Communities, 2000). Non-technical guide to traffic-calming strategies and ways to implement a traffic-calming process.

The Parking Handbook for Small Communities, by John D. Edwards and the Institute of Traffic Engineers (The National Main Street Center, 1994). This handbook will help Main Street practitioners and other non-engineers who need to understand the parking systems of business districts and work to improve them. The book explores in detail gathering and analyzing data, increasing the effectiveness of existing parking and promoting it, the elements of developing new facilities, and more.

Parking Management Best Practices, by Todd Litman (APA Planners Press, 2006). This book is written for planners who want to develop more flexible parking standards for their communities, increase the efficiency of parking management systems, and reduce parking demand. It explores shared parking, parking maximums, pricing parking costs, and more.

Parking Management Made Easy: A Guide to Taming the Downtown Parking Beast, by the Transportation and Growth Management Program (2001). This free online publication can help communities identify their parking study area, assess their parking situation, count parking spaces, and take an accurate inventory. Discusses how to manage parking without building new facilities. www.lcd.state.or.us/LCD/docs/publications/parkingguide.pdf

Shared Parking, Mary S. Smith, et al. (Urban Land Institute, 2005). Case studies and management help on implementing shared parking.

The Dimensions of Parking, by the National Parking Association and Urban Land Institute (Urban Land Institute, 2000). Best practices for planning, designing, financing, building, and operating a parking facility. Also includes information on Americans with Disabilities Act compliance and handling parking at transit hubs.

The High Cost of Free Parking, by Donald C. Shoup (APA Planners Press, 2005). The author argues that ample off-street parking provided for every new (and existing) building contributes to an auto-dependent society and sprawl. He proposes different solutions for municipalities to regulate parking.

Articles

"Planning and Developing New Parking Facilities," by John D. Edwards, *Main Street News*, January 1995. Basics of parking facility site selection and evaluation; facility size and type; fundamentals of parking design; and parking facility layout.

"15 Reasons Why Downtowns Don't Need More Parking," by Donovan Rypkema, *Main Street News*, May 1999. Myths about parking in traditional shopping districts.

PARKING ON MAIN STREET

By Keith R. Tianen, AICP

Did you ever play the Park & Shop Game?

In Milton Bradley's 1960 edition, the goal was to "...drive your car from your home to the nearest Park & Shop parking lot, park your car, then move your pedestrian marker to all the stops on your shopping list, return to your car, and move your car back to the starting point." One-stop shopping and make it snappy! When a business district has sufficient density, clustered shops, shared parking, and safe streets to cross, one-stop shopping works!

It doesn't work, however, when building density erodes, parking lots replace buildings, and shops are located farther apart. Instead we have a new game called Destination-Shop where you park once and shop once, then return to your car because it's too far to walk to the next store on your list. Pretty boring, and let's face it, once you get back in your car, you're probably headed home.

Parking, nowadays for Main Street programs, is often known as the "P-word": plagued with misinformation and exaggerated importance. Parking policies are often based on the opinions—and behavior—of everyone except customers. Does your business district actually have a parking problem? Do the customers think there's a problem? How do you know? Often, when customers are asked to think about the business district as a whole, then rate and prioritize a dozen features that need improvement, parking is not even near the top. Typically, their top priorities are things like "variety of businesses" and "selection of merchandise," as in the Park & Shop board game. We can learn much from this game: the main purpose isn't to park, but rather to get all the items on your list before you get back to your car.

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Parking Problems: Perceived and Real

What kinds of parking problems are there? There's a *supply* problem, a parking *management* problem, or even an entirely misidentified problem. One thing is likely, if a business district is struggling, then there's a parking *demand* problem—but it's too *little* demand. It's always better for parking demand to exceed parking supply, because that means your district's business mix and merchandise selection are working, and customer needs are being satisfied.

When the problem is a *perceived* parking shortage, then you know it's time to ask local stakeholders: "Is the parking-tail wagging the district-dog?" The answer to this most important question can be revealed by a survey of business district improvement priorities, which would include parking among other important district features that may need improvement. Such a survey (discussed on page 182) will tell your Main Street organization where parking, as a priority, fits into the total picture.

A survey will also reveal different *priorities* among different groups: business owners, property owners, and customers. Many Main Street stakeholders are quick to assume that customers' top concern is parking; however, when asked, that isn't necessarily the case. In fact, in surveys about traditional business districts, merchants and property owners typically rate parking conditions as being worse than shoppers do.

As parking consultant John D. Edwards states in *The Parking Handbook for Small Communities* (page xii), when tackling your parking "problem," you need to adhere to a few basic concepts:

- You must know the existing supply of and demand for parking, and you must be able to accurately predict future parking demand.
- You must manipulate the future demand for parking to fit the structure, design, and performance of the district.
- You need to employ common sense and efficiency in devising the solutions to your parking problems. While evaluating and predicting demand and constructing new parking can seem technical, nine out of 10 appropriate solutions are sensible, practical ideas, backed with facts.

In addition, you should be armed with detailed knowledge of your district's land uses, including each building's gross floor area and use, as well as knowledge of customers' and stakeholders' attitudes about how parking system improvements rank among all aspects of the district that need improvement.

Sometimes a solution will involve changes to the zoning ordinance and street design. In larger business districts, parking solutions may involve addressing a regional issue such as public transportation.

Before World War II, downtowns and neighborhood business districts were served primarily by public transit, and curb parking adequately met demand. Today, because state and county highway departments have created policies

that place a high priority on widening streets to accommodate more automobiles, many Main Street communities have turned on-street parking into traffic lanes. Also, municipalities frequently provide additional parking through off-street parking facilities rather than on-street spaces. Recently, however, many communities have begun to bring back on-street parking to enhance customer convenience, pedestrian safety, and property maintenance (curb parking helps protect buildings from road splash and ice-melt residues).

Understanding Parking Supply

Parking supply is defined as the number of parking spaces available daily for business district users. In small towns ranging in population from about 3,000 to 18,000, available parking ranges from 50 to 100 spaces per 1,000 people in the community. In larger communities, the range is about 40 to 60 spaces per 1,000 people. Another way to look at the available parking supply is to compare the number of parking spaces to commercial floor space, which is how developers and builders calculate it. While regional shopping malls provide from 5.0 to 7.0 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor area (a ratio that typically represents the first or second busiest shopping day of the year), regional mall tenants usually have higher gross sales (and higher rents plus other overhead costs) than business district tenants.

A few successful older downtowns in suburban Detroit, including Birmingham, Wyandotte, Royal Oak, and Ann Arbor, provide parking ranging from 2.0 to 3.0 spaces per 1,000 square feet of commercial gross floor area (GFA). Jacobson's, a Detroit area department store, stipulated a parking cap of 2.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet in the site plans of its new stores. John D. Edwards finds that many of his downtown parking occupancy surveys show a peak demand averaging 2.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet. Struggling or declining older business districts invariably exhibit excessive parking ratios (i.e., more than 4 spaces per 1,000 GFA), evidenced by a



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A parking study can determine if your district has a parking problem, and, if so, which kind.



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Suburban strip mall parking lots have set the standard and led to the creation of too much parking in many traditional business districts.

substantial number of empty parking spaces during peak business hours. The prognosis: some districts have too much space devoted to parking lots and not enough to commercial buildings. Different commercial settings have different parking supply ratios: regional shopping malls provide 5.0 to 7.0 spaces per 1,000 GFA, commercial strips provide 4.0 to 5.0 spaces per 1,000 GFA, and older business districts supply 2.0 to 3.0 spaces per 1,000 GFA. Using a mall parking ratio for your community will give you more parking than is necessary, which will detract from the pedestrian experience. Unfortunately, this is what happens in many downtowns and neighborhood business districts. Suburban commercial center parking standards have become the norm because many cities adopted them after they were published by the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

How people use the district should provide the framework for increasing the use of its businesses, services, and parking facilities. People do not go to Main Street just to park; they go to shop, eat, work, live, or meet friends. Parking does not lead the business district improvement process; it supports and enhances improvements. As John D. Edwards has said, “parking is first and foremost infrastructure, not economic development.”

Secrets Unveiled by a Parking Study

By properly studying actual parking supply and demand, your community will be able to make reasonable projections and develop improvement strategies. A parking study can help you:

- **Resolve local issues about supply and demand.** A study will eliminate, or at least neutralize, the misinformation about parking. In its place, facts can be used to build new strategies. A thorough parking study will reveal the actual parking demand for each block of your district and will quantify it in relation to building floor space.

- **Determine parking demand and behavior.** Occupancy and turnover studies will reveal how parking is actually being used, and if there is in fact a parking supply shortage, a parking demand shortage, or a parking management problem, and show where problems exist.
- **Project future parking demand.** Making an educated estimate of future parking demand will determine if new facilities are necessary.
- **Create new multi-purpose tools for your Main Street program, such as an accurate base map of land uses, building inventory, parking, and street circulation.** Your research will extend beyond parking and provide information for market analysis and business recruitment.
- **Survey people’s attitudes about other issues, not just parking.** Discover what business and property owners, visitors, and customers in your market area think about your business district, especially their priorities for the district. These survey results will also serve the marketing and business recruitment objectives of the economic restructuring committee.
- **Identify weak demand areas.** A good parking study is a good redevelopment study: where future parking demand is low, new infill can be constructed on underutilized land and vacant lots. You can find out how much new floor space the parking supply can handle and what types of new businesses would best fill the new space.

Methodology of a Parking Study

First, let’s discuss how to properly study and improve your parking problem or issue. A general methodology for a formal parking study is summarized below. Some of the steps may be optional, depending on your goals and available data. An informal, or abbreviated, parking study would follow some of these steps and still reveal helpful insights. A parking study can be led by your organization or the municipality, or by both entities working together.

- **Mapping.** First, determine your study area, which should include all of the zoning districts for the Main Street area (some downtowns or neighborhoods have more than one zoning district), and make a rough estimate of the amount of public and private parking spaces. Next, using a scaled map of buildings, property lines, and parking spaces, show various aspects of parking supply and demand (e.g., occupancy or turnover) graphically by block.

A study map should depict land uses, buildings, streets, and alleys. You can get maps from the municipality. The parking inventory should be mapped and tabulated into various geographical and functional categories: “core” and “fringe” areas of the business district, blocks, parking facilities, individual parking

spaces, on-street and off-street parking spaces, and private and public spaces. Parking regulations and restrictions should be noted for each space, as well, such as time limits; free, fee, or metered spaces; and spaces reserved for handicap use, loading zones, etc.

- **Data collection.** Inventory all parking spaces (public and private) and building floor space (use, size, location), and count the number of employees and restaurant seats in each building. Also, collect relevant municipal planning documents that affect parking such as the community master plan; the business district's plan; the zoning ordinance; and municipal policies, regulations, and practices for parking enforcement. Finally, gather traffic counts, which are tracked by the police department, as well as the county or state highway department.
- **Survey of parking behavior.** A parking demand study is conducted by noting whether each space is empty or occupied, and if occupied, recording the license plate for each occupied parking space. Ideally, the entire study area should be canvassed on at least two or three weekdays (avoid Monday and Friday) hourly from about 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. A typical study is conducted while school is in session and not during the holiday season, summer, or during a special event when normal parking patterns are disrupted. If your organization is interested in parking usage during specific times or seasons, like weekends, summer, or evenings, then plan to study those times as well. The intent of the outline below is more conceptual than mechanical. For more information on the specific aspects of producing a parking study, refer to *The Parking Handbook for Small Communities* listed in the Resources section.

Most information should be tabulated on spreadsheets for each parking facility, each block (containing several facilities), each area (all the blocks that make up the core retail area), and the entire study area as a whole. Current parking demand is expressed through occupancy and turnover.

- **Occupancy rates** tell the percentage of spaces occupied throughout the day and the peak occupancy periods. For example, Block #3 had an average occupancy rate of 68 percent from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., with a peak occupancy of 80 percent between noon and 1:00 p.m.
- **Turnover rates** tell how long each vehicle remained in a parking space. For example, curb spaces on Block #2 had a turnover rate of 6.0 times per day and the average duration was 1.2 hours. Because every parking space should be accounted for hourly during the 11-hour survey period, the turnover survey response rate should be 100 percent.

Additional information that will help gauge parking demand includes the number and location of employees and restaurant seating as well as residential units.

A comprehensive survey is a substantial undertaking and can be fairly expensive. But if parking is

a controversial community issue, your municipality should set aside funds to conduct a comprehensive survey, in addition to collecting occupancy and turnover data. Understanding your visitors and customers is vital, but if a comprehensive survey is beyond your budget, then either look for another way to get their input or skip surveying business or property owners. You could add questions about parking in your market analysis research, or as one downtown organization did, “piggy-back” questions into a survey already being prepared by the local chamber of commerce.

A survey of stakeholders and parkers will offer the following:

- **Parkers' walking distance and destination from their cars.** You may find, perhaps, that shoppers in the core retail area walk an average of two blocks to their destination, while employees walk a shorter distance to their jobs. Such a finding shows that the nearest parking spots are being monopolized by employees, a situation that hurts the business district. This finding can be tested by comparing turnover rates among parking facilities: if core area turnover rates are low in on-street spaces and/or the nearest lot spaces, then the turnover survey corroborates the comprehensive survey, and vice versa.
- **Survey of attitudes about the business district.** Surveys can collect attitudinal responses concerning business district priorities from business and property owners and customers. People are asked to prioritize the importance of various aspects of the commercial district that need improvement, from merchandise to traffic flow. You can ask specific parking questions about public parking supply, shortening meter time limits, increasing parking meter rates, designating remote long-term parking for employees, as well as other topics such as what types of new businesses are needed. Keep the responses of business owners, property owners, and customers separate.
- **Analysis of parking behavior.** This is the heart of the parking study, as it analyzes parking occupancy rates, parking turnover rates, attitudes about the business district, and walking distances. Conclusions drawn from these survey analyses will drive the parking study recommendations. Include the findings on your maps and in reports.
- **Analysis of attitudes about the business district and parking.** This is, likely, the most fun part of the parking study because it compares attitudes and priorities of business owners, property owners, and customers. These findings will clarify many important issues that may be plaguing your revitalization efforts. What if business and property owners' attitudes conflict with those of customers? If the owners respect your study methodology, they will accept the customers' views, simply because they respect the axiom, “the customer is always right.”



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Vast parking lots in the downtown are a poor use of land when they could be providing housing or commercial space.

- **Anticipated future development.** Using the occupancy and turnover surveys, as well as the building floor space inventory, you can construct a five-year model for future development and parking demand that details use, location, and amount of floor space. Conversations with your city’s planning agency and people who understand local real estate dynamics will be helpful. Apply the parking demand model to future development projections to determine future parking supply by block, area, and total study area.
You can also depict future parking needs on the base map; identify areas where future parking supply is projected as deficient or excessive. In blocks where future parking supply is inadequate, it might be “borrowed” from adjacent blocks with a parking surplus or more parking could be added. The blocks where future parking supply exceeds demand indicate the areas that should be considered for new buildings, adaptive-use projects, and enhanced business assistance and recruitment.
- **Analysis of land use.** Land usage should be compared to current and future goals. Your map will depict land uses within the parking study area for retail, office/service, residential, recreation, parking, and vacant lots. Now is the time to match the district or community-wide master plan, which summarizes land-use goals for the parking area, with the occupancy and turnover data and land uses. Retail and vacant/underutilized land are two of the most important uses that should be analyzed: identify strong land uses that deserve support; and weak land uses that need special intervention, such as through changes to the zoning ordinance or infill construction.
- **Recommendations.** Develop parking recommendations for facility utilization, time limits, regulations, enforcement, fines, and zoning ordinances; land usage; changes to master plans, if necessary; and identification of potential development sites.
- **Management strategy for implementing recommendations.** Who does what? Identify various organizational stakeholders to implement the study’s recommendations, including the municipality, downtown development authority, police department, Main Street organization, chamber of commerce, merchants organization,

private companies that manage parking facilities, and others. If your city isn’t the lead on your community’s parking analysis project, then the most important member of your management team will be the local government, as the city council must approve changes to the management system, zoning ordinance, and budget (which could include parking enforcement officers hired through the police department, for example).

Role of the Main Street Organization

When the ink is dry on your parking study, the management strategy may include several supporting roles for your organization; preferably, leading roles will be performed by others, as noted above. There are some exceptions, but typically a Main Street organization has no control or authority to change the parking system, which is usually managed by the municipality or private companies. Your organization is most useful in advocating for the best parking system that supports the Main Street district, analyzing the parking system, advising the municipality, and improving public perception about parking. (To learn about promoting parking in your community, see Chapter 21, Promotion: Building Excitement.)

Local Parking Policies and Parking Design Options

Effective parking policies and designs will maximize the efficiency of your parking systems as well as improve customer convenience. Some of these concepts are discussed below.

Shared Parking versus Exclusive Parking

Shared, or public, parking is available to everyone at most times, while exclusive, or private, parking is not—which makes shared parking more convenient for customers. A parking study’s occupancy survey will show that public lots have higher, more efficient occupancy rates than private lots. It’s easy to see why. Public parking serves mixed uses (i.e., retail, office, service, entertainment, dwellings) and will have several peak hours spread over the course of the day: when office workers leave at 5 p.m., for example, those parking spaces are then filled by apartment dwellers returning from work, as well as people headed out to dinner. This is partly why curbside parking is so desirable: it’s shared parking, and being in the public right-of-way, it does not occupy taxable land. On the other hand, after quitting time, a private parking lot that exclusively serves an office building will remain empty until the start of the following workday.

Some pointers:

- Provide the maximum amount of shared parking possible—at least 50 percent of total parking.
- Prohibit mid-block driveways, because they reduce opportunities for curbside parking, increase the distance between storefronts, and cause safety hazards for pedestrians and vehicles.

The Mall Double Standard

Why is it that customers in traditional commercial districts insist on parking spaces that are near businesses (i.e., within 100 feet), but will happily park in a shopping mall's vast lot and walk a much greater distance to the entrance?

This is the so-called “double standard” that customers are widely reported to have. They seem willing to walk relatively greater distances across a mall parking lot than on Main Street, because they know that once inside, they will have a greater variety of stores and greater selection of merchandise. So, in a way, this double-standard behavior is justified: the greater the retail variety or deeper the business mix, the farther the customer is willing to walk from a parking space to the mall or store entrance.

This dynamic presents a challenge for you to improve the retail environment and maximize customer conveniences. How? Provide angle curb parking in front of stores; make sure that there is a high proportion of retail uses as opposed to non-retail uses fronting main street; institutionalize a zero setback of buildings to the sidewalk; and create easy, safe pathways for customers to walk among destinations.

Similarly, minimize customer obstacles, which can include excessively wide streets; excessively fast vehicular traffic; and excessive main street frontage that is non-retail, such as ground-floor offices, parking lots, driveways, etc.

- Shared parking does not require public ownership—private owners can coordinate efforts through public easements, removal of lots from tax rolls, and the re-design of several smaller lots into one larger one. Municipalities are often willing to remove lots from the tax rolls if the owner agrees to re-design them for more efficient public use.
- If there is an ample supply and proportion of public parking, there should be no need for the zoning ordinance to require commercial uses to supply private, off-street parking.

Zoning for On-street and Off-street Parking

On-street, curb parking in front of businesses provides opportunities for more people to park conveniently; this type of parking is “golden” and especially valued by retailers, providing that it turns over rapidly and customers use it. At least 25 percent of total parking should be curb parking.

- Consider *diagonal parking* for primary streets where speeds are slow, and on side streets, as well, especially if the street seems to have excessive travel lanes. (See Chapter 18, Managing Traffic, which discusses this issue and traffic studies.) A retail-oriented traditional business district cannot have too much diagonal curb parking. Simply, it's the best kind of parking to have. Period.
- When considering diagonal parking, look at *back-in diagonal parking*. Among its many advantages: loading is from the sidewalk/curb, not next to the traffic lane; sight lines are better when exiting the space; the

parking supply is greater than with parallel parking; bike lanes are better accommodated; maneuvering is easier than parallel parking; and less time is spent in the travel lane, with less delay than parallel parking. One disadvantage is that back-in diagonal parking takes up more space than parallel parking.

Check the local zoning ordinance for appropriate off-street parking requirements. If your ordinance requires minimum off-street parking for commercial uses in your business district, and your district seems to have ample shared parking, chances are the zoning requirement minimum is excessive. Ideally, if there is enough public parking and it's reasonably well distributed, then there is no need for the zoning ordinance to require that commercial uses supply private off-street parking at all. An exemption from the zoning ordinance's off-street parking requirement will greatly enhance Main Street's ability to attract new businesses to the district, as it eliminates a substantial development cost and a layer of bureaucracy. To find out if your district has enough shared parking to exempt a minimum off-street parking requirement, conduct the parking study described earlier, which will reveal how much parking is being generated per gross floor area. If you're not sure, and you don't have hard data from a parking study yet (but you plan to conduct one), consider, in the meantime, asking your elected officials to change the *minimum* requirement to a *maximum*.

Short-term Parking, Long-term Parking, and Parking Meters

Short-term parking is often a maximum of two hours and is located close to businesses' front doors. It's meant for customers and should be enforced. *Long-term* parking is more remote and intended for employees, residents, and customers on longer shopping trips. Parking lots located farther away from stores and other businesses are less convenient. Parking lots should be *accessed* from side streets or the rear of blocks, *not* from the front. They need to be clearly designated with signs and colored pavement striping. They also need adequate lighting; otherwise security-conscious employees will park in short-term zones, especially during winter months when the sun sets earlier. Enforcement of parking regulations is part of the parking management system, usually operated by the municipality or DDA, and promoted through off-premise directional signs and in marketing materials by the Main Street organization.

The purpose of *parking meters*, primarily, is to promote *customer turnover*, not to provide revenue. Meters are also used to distribute limited on-street parking time equitably; to provide spaces for short-term shoppers and business clients; and to maximize the economic viability of the district by creating convenient parking. Conditions are ripe for meters when parking turnover is necessary; the shopping district is a unique destination that attracts many people; and the district is not surrounded by other shopping districts with free parking.

Parking Facilities

The process of developing parking facilities, including signage, is beyond the scope of this chapter. There are many resources for learning more about these subjects (see the Resources section). Your organization’s role, typically, is to understand and influence municipal policy, not to develop, build, or manage new parking facilities. The emphasis of this chapter is to help you understand your “business district-dog” and its “parking-tail” and not get them confused. A parking study will determine if a new parking facility is needed to accommodate current or future demand or if improving parking management strategies is all that is necessary. The study’s findings can help a community avoid the costly mistake of planning expensive parking improvements or new garages that few people will use. Once your organization and municipality have a firm grasp on the realities of current and future parking dynamics, then sound and beneficial implementation should follow the reality-based parking dynamics like a cart follows a horse.

The Economic Cost of Excessive Parking and Underutilized Land

Although excessive parking, as exhibited by too many continuously empty parking spaces and underutilized parking lots during business hours, may go unnoticed by the majority of visitors to the Main Street district, this condition is a neon sign warning of a problem. Invariably, one of the most visible symptoms of a declining business district is *too much* parking. It indicates that the district’s land is not being used efficiently and, more importantly, is not valued as much as it could be, or as much as its more successful competition. Is there a way to quantify such an important economic cost to the district? Yes.

During community development meetings, you’ll hear the statement: “*we cannot possibly have too much parking.*” That could not be further from the truth. Underused land means missed opportunities for productive sources of business, customers, jobs, and tax revenue. To illustrate the economic cost of underutilized land, the following table calculates the annual cost, or “missed opportunity” of a building’s market value and tax revenue, about \$500 per parking space and \$1,400 per thousand square feet.



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ECONOMIC COST OF EXCESSIVE PARKING AND VACANT LOTS

Opportunity for New Building	Per Parking Space (10' x 20' + circulation)	Per 1,000 Square Feet
Area	350 SF	1000 SF
New Building Construction	\$125 / SF	\$125 / SF
Market Value	\$43,750	\$125,000
Taxable Value (50%)	\$21,875	\$62,500
Tax Millage	.022532	.022532
Tax Revenue	\$493	\$1,408

Economic Cost of 5 Percent Underutilized Land

Using the example above, if we apply this same principle of assessing economic opportunity costs to an underused, small portion of a hypothetical DDA district, the following analysis reveals that if only 5 percent of the district (its most underutilized land) suddenly sprouted productive buildings, the DDA’s annual capture of tax increment financing revenues, from city sources only, would increase by about \$560,000. And for 5 percent of the smaller core area, the result would be an increased annual revenue capture of about \$90,000 (see the chart below). A taxable, productive building would make other financial contributions as well, such as revenue to other property tax jurisdictions and new sales tax revenue.

ECONOMIC COST OF 5% UNDERUTILIZED LAND

Opportunity for New Building	DDA District	DDA Core Area
Total Block Area	7,950,216 SF	1,279,666 SF
5% of Block Area	397,511 SF	63,983 SF
New Building Construction	\$125 / SF	\$125 / SF
Market Value	\$49,688,875	\$7,997,875
Taxable Value (50%)	\$24,844,875	\$3,998,937
Tax Millage	.022532	.022532
Annual City Tax Revenue	\$559,795	\$90,104

The Future of Parking

Cities throughout the nation have been rethinking regional parking policies as they affect all types of shopping environments and parking facilities, including suburban strip centers and malls. This field is constantly changing, but some of the ideas being tested will ultimately give your community new options in the future. For example, in the absence of thorough parking studies, community planners have been making the minimum parking requirement the maximum requirement. Some have simply abolished parking minimums and leave the creation of

parking facilities up to developers. Maximum parking requirements are in place, or being considered, in Portland, Oregon, and Raleigh, North Carolina, among other cities.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, “Transportation Demand Management” goes further than parking maximums by establishing more efficient municipal land-use policies for parking in new developments. These policies allow, or sometimes force, developers to reduce the amount of parking otherwise allowed in existing developments. In Cambridge, this new policy makes developers reduce auto uses by specific percentages, which also provides more community support for developers’ proposals, especially from anti-growth forces.

CASE STUDY

Milford, Michigan: What a Comprehensive Parking Study Looks Like

The Village of Milford (population 7,000) is a high-growth, affluent Michigan suburb north of Detroit. Its attractive traditional downtown has a parking inventory of 1,400 parking spaces, of which 35 percent are public and 20 percent are curbside spaces. Its building inventory consists of 283,000 square feet of building floor space. The total parking study area has 4.9 parking spaces per 1,000 GFA, and the core retail area has 3.9 parking spaces per 1,000 GFA.

The Village conducted a parking study to assess and improve its parking system, ensure that the availability of parking will meet future demand, and determine if the community needed to build another parking structure to meet demand.

The comprehensive study looked at the following areas:

- **Land use.** Inefficient land uses were identified, including a bank drive-through; several underutilized private parking lots; and long-term parking near shops, in spaces that should be reserved for short-term parking.
- **Attitudes.** Customers’/parkers’ top concern was retail variety. In a survey they ranked parking concerns near the bottom of 12 downtown features; business and property owners’ top concerns were parking and traffic flow.
- **Occupancy rates.** Occupancy rates varied widely. The peak for the entire study area was 44 percent at 1 p.m. Core area peak occupancy was 76 percent at 1 p.m. All 17 blocks had a parking surplus at their various peak times. Some public parking facilities, although within a block or two of core retail shops, had low occupancy rates, primarily due to long-term employee parking in the first rows of closer public parking lots, which had high occupancy rates.
- **Turnover rates.** Core area curbside spaces turned over six times a day and averaged 1.3 hours. All spaces in the core area turned over 2.5 times a day and averaged 2.7 hours. Turnover rates were low in the front rows of the nearest and largest public lots, indicating long-term employee parking in high-turnover spaces that should be reserved for customers. The Village was not enforcing the district’s two-hour parking limits.
- **Walking distance from parked car to destination.** All parkers on average walked less than one block. In the core area. Employees walked shorter distances than customers.

- **Parking supply ratios.** These ratios ranged from 2.0 to 3.0 spaces per 1,000 GFA, significantly less than the parking supply of 4.9 spaces per 1,000 GFA. Office uses generated somewhat lower parking demand than retail uses.
- **Projected future parking needs.** Although the study area, as a whole, had surplus parking, it was not evenly distributed. Only two of 17 blocks were projected to have more demand than supply during each block’s peak hour; the remaining 15 blocks were projected to continue peak parking surpluses, ranging from four to 90 spaces. Total study area peak-hour projection showed a surplus of 300 spaces, or about 25 percent of total available spaces. Most of the potential sites recommended to meet projected parking demand are existing private and public parking lots that can be better utilized.

Results. Milford did not need a new parking structure because changes in the parking management system could easily accommodate future parking needs. The Village has improved its parking management system through new time limits, more enforcement, better signage, and the conversion of private lots to shared parking. It has planned redevelopment strategies to reverse inefficient land use by:

- expanding public parking in the bank drive-through space and in several underutilized private lots;
- constructing new buildings at select underutilized sites; and
- redeveloping an underused, large, older building to include upper-floor uses.

Zoning ordinance changes that require retail uses on the ground floors of core area buildings have contributed to a stronger retail environment and led to an aggressive retail recruitment program. Various management roles have been identified for the Village, its parking authority, its Downtown Development Authority, and the Milford Business Association.

The study also revealed that a large public lot had unusually low occupancy because raised railroad tracks separated it from the core area and created a significant user obstacle. Stakeholders decided to increase the usage of this lot by creating a community amphitheater in this space and providing safe access across the railroad tracks.

RESOURCES

Please refer to the full list at the end of Chapter 18, Managing Traffic on Main Street.

CLEAN AND SAFE MAIN STREET DISTRICTS

By Darlene Rios Drapkin

Maybe you've been dismayed by graffiti or an unkempt storefront. Perhaps, instead of seeing roll-down grates or poorly maintained buildings as eyesores, you've learned to accept such visual nuisances as part of a commercial district's gritty charm. However, for newcomers to your district, first impressions are everything. When they see negative cues such as litter and panhandling, newcomers probably will deem your district unsafe and shop elsewhere.

Graffiti and trash generally discourage people from visiting an area because those elements detract from their sense of security. Business owners also factor in perceptions of safety when choosing their locations. Vacant buildings, loiterers, and bad press all contribute to perceptions that a district or downtown is unsafe. They also give the impression that the community does not care about the neighborhood, which in turn may attract crime.

There is a connection between economic development, the public environment, and the perception of safety. Your Main Street program is poised to make sure stakeholders understand that connection. Main Streets of all sizes, sophistication levels, and regions must deal with clean and safe issues whether they are actual problems or just image misconceptions remaining from years of disinvestment. Whether real or perceived, if clean and safe issues are left unchecked, they will affect the economic stability of any community, rural or urban.

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Crime: A Perceived or Real Problem?

Many downtowns and neighborhood business districts have suffered years of disinvestment. During that time, area residents and workers have grown to believe that either “there is nothing to see or do there,” or worse, that “it is dangerous there.” This negative reputation can be a hurdle for your revitalization program, but one that will be addressed through the comprehensive nature of the Main Street approach. But how do you know if you are reversing negative perceptions for a district that doesn’t actually have high crime rates or if you have a real crime problem?

First, you must understand the actual crime problems in your district. You’ll want to look at reported crime and police statistics to determine your crime issues. Compare these crime statistics with those of nearby areas and see how your district measures up to other business districts and neighborhoods. Look for patterns or changes in reported crime. It could be that your district’s crime rate is lower or the same as competing commercial areas. In that case, your primary job is promoting the safety of your district, producing events that help reacquaint people with the community, and finding creative ways to make visitors feel comfortable when they are there. On the other hand, if you do have a significantly high crime rate, you’ll want to launch safety initiatives and partnerships aimed at reducing crimes—and get the word out right away about crime-reduction programs and lower crime statistics once you see results.

Many Main Street programs start by surveying business owners, residents, and visitors to determine their clean and safe concerns and learn about changes that would make them feel safer. By learning the public’s concerns, the Main Street program can seek solutions to all safety issues.

Next, conduct a visual assessment of the district to identify specific problem areas. Assemble a team of volunteers, preferably including police officers and other city representatives, and walk through the district once at night and once during the day. Look for areas with litter, poor lighting, ineffective signage, crevices between buildings, and other problems. Document your survey and on-site assessment findings with pictures, statistics, public comments, and other information so you can set a baseline and measure results after you start your clean and safe initiatives.

It is extremely important to persuade the community to report all kinds of crimes because these statistics are in-



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strumental in determining police assignments. Many times, victims don’t file police reports. Make sure people understand that no matter how petty a crime seems, reporting it will help build the case that your district has real needs and can justify increasing police presence or implementing another appropriate solution to improve security.

Safety and Cleanliness—The Fifth Point?

When the Fruitvale Main Street program was initiated in Oakland, California, in 1996, implementing the Main Street approach seemed like an appropriate fit for the neighborhood business district. Years of disinvestment had created a tired-looking district that made a negative impression on residents and visitors alike. The comprehensive, community-driven nature of the four-point approach offered a solid framework that residents and other community stakeholders could use to turn those impressions around.

What seemed like an appropriate fit, however, proved to be a challenge in the early stages of implementation. Merchants and residents initially resisted the program—or at least showed little interest—because they were preoccupied with issues related to safety and cleanliness: litter, disorganized trash collections, increased crime, and dirty sidewalks. It was evident that business and prop-

Fixing Broken Windows

In a 1982 *Atlantic Monthly* article entitled “Broken Windows,” James Q. Wilson and George Kelling argued that disorder in a community, if left uncorrected, undercuts residents’ efforts to maintain their homes and neighborhoods and control unruly behavior. “If a window in a building is broken and left unrepaired,” they wrote, “all the rest of the windows will soon be broken... One unrepaired window is a signal that no one cares, so breaking more windows costs nothing... Untended property becomes fair game for people out for fun or plunder.”

The authors point out that communities and police need to pay attention and address “small problems” such as

broken windows before they turn into larger problems. They found that if disorder goes unchecked, a vicious cycle begins and once-stable neighborhoods can quickly turn into hotbeds of criminal activity. As people notice increasing social disorder and physical decline of the environment, they begin to fear crime and stay inside more. Civic involvement decreases, threatening behavior gets ignored, and merchants quit picking up trash in front of their stores. The authors explain that when law-abiding eyes stop watching the streets, the social order breaks down and criminals move in. The authors point out that ignoring clean and safe issues has dire economic consequences because “shoppers will shun an area they perceive as being ‘out of control.’”

erty owners would be more willing to buy into all four points if the executive director could demonstrate that she recognized and could address their immediate concerns about clean and safe problems in the business district. In Fruitvale, it became necessary to create a separate, fifth committee focused solely on those issues. It is imperative to engage constituents by addressing their most basic and immediate concerns. Invariably, their most immediate concerns will involve inconsistent city services, which can be resolved more easily with louder, organized voices.

In order to prioritize clean and safe issues, some communities create a task force rather than establishing a fifth committee the way Fruitvale did. Establishing a new committee might very well drain or dilute valuable resources—people and time—from the other four working committees. So when should you consider a separate committee to tackle clean and safe issues?

If your community has significant crime issues, and your committees will have work to do beyond reversing public impressions of the district, a separate committee may be necessary. Otherwise, adding clean-up events and other projects to committee work plans may be all that is needed. Your organization should decide if it needs to deal with singular, isolated issues as they arise or establish a task force or fifth committee.

Whatever your decision, keep in mind that by quickly making visible, tangible improvements, especially by addressing the safety and cleanliness issues that are of greatest urgency in your community, you can get the public’s support for other program efforts. Regardless of how you organize your clean and safe volunteers, use these tips to get them started:

- **Clarify which responsibilities belong to the municipality.** If the municipality is not dealing with clean and safe issues, your organization should persistently contact city agencies until your issue becomes a priority and you see results. Also, never underestimate the power of resident complaints—encourage community members to join your organization in communicating concerns to the municipality.
- **Clarify which responsibilities belong to business and property owners.** Have your design committee sponsor a crime-prevention training session to



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educate district stakeholders. More importantly, make attitudinal change a key component of your educational efforts and convince merchants and property owners that they need to be part of the solution. Fruitvale Main Street launched a public outreach initiative to spread the word about the importance of a clean district by using a “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” city grant to create a mascot known as the “Trash Monster,” or “Cochinon” in Spanish, who appeared at community events.

- **Work with other existing programs addressing safety and cleanliness.** Have your committees piggyback on their work. Try to integrate, not duplicate, your respective efforts.
- **Empower business owners.** Encourage merchants to talk amongst themselves, so that word gets out about problems and who has contacted the police to help. Remind business owners that it is important to report all crime to create an ongoing record that builds a case for increased patrols. The authorities can’t address problems if they don’t know about them.

Design as a Safety Tool

Imagine two different business districts. District A features tree-lined streets, planters, storefronts with abundant outdoor lighting, and attractive display windows with clear views inside the shops. Some businesses even “spill” onto the street with sidewalk seating and attractive, colorful product displays.

Now picture District B. Overgrown shrubs and landscaping spill onto the sidewalk, making accessibility difficult; streetlights are dim or burned out; many storefronts are dark; and windows are cluttered with faded flyers. In which district would you feel safer at 3 p.m.? How about at 10 p.m.?

The obvious answer is District A. Note, however, neither of the descriptions of these districts included words we typically associate with safety such as alarms, fences, guards, etc. What makes District A feel safer are design elements, space planning, and space usage—things that are often more cost-effective than artificial barriers like grates and fences and much more aesthetically pleasing and less threatening to the public.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, or CPTED (pronounced “sep-ted”), affirms that it’s possible to reduce opportunities for crime and disorderly behavior by changing the physical environment. Good design increases perceptions of safety and creates an environment that encourages positive social interaction. CPTED emphasizes the physical environment, productive use of space, and behavior of people. Successful CPTED can be achieved through several inter-related strategies that are discussed below.

Natural Surveillance

In this instance, the term “surveillance” has more to do with being seen than being watched. You want customers to

Clean and Safe Jargon

“Target hardening” refers to methods that make targets in commercial corridors less open to attack, more resistant to theft, or more difficult to damage, thus providing a deterrent to crime. It is vitally important that the measures not only strengthen the physical security of the site but also send a clear signal that it is a well-defended area. Some examples include shatter- or graffiti-resistant film on windows, adequate external lighting, and other Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) concepts in this chapter. Using design to define spaces, determine how they are used, and creating ways to support those uses are the guiding principles behind the concept known as CPTED.



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The high-transparency of storefront windows in downtown Newtown, Pennsylvania, make the community less open to attack.

feel that they are safe because businesses are well lit, easily accessible, and clearly visible. You want unwelcomed users to feel uncomfortable for the very same reasons—criminals don’t like being seen or watched. These objectives can be achieved through design strategies that put people and activities out in the open and make the business clearly visible. Think of the mantra “see and be seen” when determining the design of a space in order to maximize the visibility of people, parking areas, and building entrances and exits.

Natural surveillance checklist

- ✓ Interior shelving and displays are not so tall that they inhibit visibility.
- ✓ Doors and windows look out onto streets and parking areas and are free of clutter.
- ✓ Building exteriors and interiors, walkways, and other common spaces are well lit.
- ✓ Shop windows are illuminated after dark.
- ✓ The commercial district has pedestrian-friendly sidewalks and streets.
- ✓ Loading areas do not create hiding places.
- ✓ There is clear visibility from the store to the street, sidewalk, parking areas, and passing vehicles.
- ✓ All entrances are monitored electronically or through visual surveillance.

Natural Access Management

The proper design and use of elements such as sidewalks, pavement, lighting, signage, and landscaping can be used to direct people to entrances and exits while fences, walls, and

landscaping can be used to keep people out of restricted areas. The strategic design of streets, sidewalks, building entrances, landscaping, and neighborhood gateways physically guides people through a space, helps deny access to crime targets, and creates a perception of risk for offenders.

Natural access management checklist

- ✓ Checkout areas/registers are located at the main doors of each business.
- ✓ Public and private areas are clearly marked.
- ✓ Effective signage is posted throughout the district.
- ✓ Roofs are not easily accessible.

Territorial Reinforcement

Inviting landscaping, signage, art, color, and sound define ownership of a space. Think of your favorite sidewalk café. The sights, sounds, and aromas speak volumes about who owns the space (literally and figuratively) but also send a clear message about the intended users as well. A well-maintained space that appears to be “owned” will tend to encourage acceptable behavior while discouraging criminal or disruptive users. Its territoriality suggests that people have the desire to care for and protect spaces for which they are responsible.

Territorial reinforcement checklist

- ✓ Art, signage, landscaping, fencing, and pavement treatments denote pride and ownership.
- ✓ Exterior features define the space over which you have jurisdiction or control.
- ✓ Awnings or signs are placed at the front and rear entrances of businesses.

Physical Maintenance

The maintenance of buildings, landscaping, and public spaces also conveys a message of ownership. Peeling paint, dilapidated signs, burned-out lights, litter, and graffiti say that people don’t care. Neglect significantly influences the public’s perceptions of safety.

Who serves on a clean and safe committee or task force?

- Merchants
- Residents
- Property owners
- Community agencies
- Public works (streets and highways)
- Waste contractors
- Police
- City staff

Physical maintenance checklist

- ✓ Vandalized, worn, or damaged features are repaired or replaced.
- ✓ Programs and procedures are in place for regular landscaping, lighting, open space, and building maintenance.
- ✓ Clean-up days organize merchants and residents to remove trash and litter.
- ✓ An inventory tracks vacant or abandoned buildings (so that your program can encourage property owners to lease or sell the space).

Façade improvement programs are a surefire method to instigate visible, tangible examples of positive change in commercial districts and are integral to CPTED strategies. Façade improvements can also be a catalyst for volunteer involvement in the Main Street program and stimulate other streetscape improvements. These programs produce a domino effect for change, and are normally administered by municipalities or Main Street programs as loans or, preferably, matching grants. They can provide tremendous incentives for property owners and merchants to improve their buildings and signs. A drawback for some participants is the bureaucratic process attached to participating in the program, including paperwork, the design review board, and requirements for multiple contractor bids or the hiring of architects. Many buildings don't need major structural changes; fresh paint and better signs can have a huge impact on their appearance.

In the absence of a façade improvement program or access to a coordinating Main Street program architect, your organization can still encourage property and business owners to improve their buildings. By using design software, you can visually demonstrate the difference a new paint job, attractive landscaping, or a new sign can have on a building as well as on the image of the business and the entire district. Computer-savvy volunteers or college architecture or design students can make simple alterations to digital photographs of buildings, which you can show business and property owners to inspire them to make simple changes. Business owners often insist they can't afford to improve their storefronts; but, really, they can't afford not to! Tattered storefronts attract crime instead of customers.

Clean-up events can be great ways to get more people involved in the community. The AdamsMorgan MainStreet Group in Washington, D.C., holds an annual Summer Spruce Up with community volunteer teams that clean target sections of the district.

Order Maintenance

Maintaining order deals with expectations about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and the consequences associated with them. Clearly communicating rules of conduct and providing some type of continuous supervision or surveillance, whether real or implied, encourages the activities you want and discourages those you don't.



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Putting CPTED to Work in Your District

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles seek to reduce crime and the perception of crime or danger by emphasizing good design in elements related to the physical environment of your district—storefronts, sidewalks, public spaces, etc. Here are some specific suggestions on how to put CPTED to work in your district:

- **Windows.** Keep ground-floor windows clean and free of clutter. Remove faded and outdated posters and flyers. Keep drapes and blinds open. In general, make sure the space from about a person's knees and higher is clear so people can see in and out of the business. Cluttered windows make it easy for criminals to stay out of sight. Sometimes businesses have bars covering their windows, which creates an unappealing prison-like appearance. Consider offering incentives such as free insurance for one year to merchants who remove the bars. Implement design guidelines that limit the percentage of covered window space to 15 percent.
- **Landscaping.** Use landscaping, such as shrubs, planters, and trees, instead of fences, to guide people to entrances and exits. Trees should be canopied so people can walk under them comfortably. Don't allow shrubs to become overgrown; they should be pruned to knee height. Neglected landscaping not only indicates a lack of concern and/or ownership; it also creates hiding spaces.
- **Fencing.** In situations where fencing is necessary, avoid solid fencing—remove every other board if necessary so passers-by can see what is going on behind the fence. Wrought iron or picket fences are more aesthetically pleasing than chain link fences.
- **Lighting.** Ornamental and pedestrian-scale lighting on buildings helps illuminate heads and shoulders and move people out of the shadows. Reflective light makes people feel safe. Burned-out bulbs should be replaced immediately. And don't forget to light parking lots as well!
- **Colors.** Old, peeling paint should be removed as quickly as possible. When repainting building exteriors, choose colors that are lighter and brighter with good reflectivity.



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This calls attention to and reduces minor infractions or problems. Remember the sidebar about broken windows?

Order maintenance checklist

- ✓ Graffiti-resistant materials and/or control measures are in place in areas subject to frequent tagging.
- ✓ People report all crimes, no matter how small.
- ✓ Business owners adopt uniform operating hours.
- ✓ Organized patrols help monitor activities.
- ✓ There is an appropriate response system that provides access to the authorities or other assistance in case of emergency.
- ✓ A system, such as online groups or e-mail or phone call alerts, lets people notify each other about suspicious activity or other problems.

Mount Pleasant Main Street keeps its Washington, D.C., neighborhood graffiti free through a rapid-response clean-up program. The organization has found that removing graffiti is in itself a deterrent because graffiti “artists” or “taggers” eventually learn that whatever they mark will be cleaned by the next day.

Carrots versus Sticks

Encourage positive behavior through incentives, like façade improvement programs, as well as educating your merchants so they understand how they can use CPTED strategies to their advantage. It behooves them to maintain and improve their storefronts if they want to succeed and fend off undesirable activities. There will always be someone who isn’t interested in “doing the right thing” no matter how strong your efforts. Focus on the lower hanging fruit first—the business and property owners who are eager to make changes; the naysayers may come around with time.

Use your city’s code enforcement as a last resort. Give your merchants and property owners every opportunity to enhance their businesses and/or buildings to improve their safety—and profitability. Eventually you will need to approach owners who aren’t being cooperative. At that time—by the second or third year of your efforts—investigate city regulations, such as blight ordinances, and see which tools would work to your advantage. Try working with “offenders” first to get them to meet code compliance instead of reporting them. It is hard to gain the trust of

local stakeholders once they view the Main Street program as a “rat.”

Downtown Tamaqua, Inc., (Pennsylvania) stirred up some friendly competition among business owners with its “clean carrot.” It instituted a program that encouraged business owners to clean their sidewalks and window displays and improve the overall “front door/street” appearance of their buildings. The committee presents the winning business owner with the “Golden Broom Award,” complete with a gold spray-painted broom and a certificate. The award has become quite competitive, and many business owners regularly sweep their sidewalks, clean their store windows, and consistently create great window displays.

Working with Enforcement Agencies

Many problems cannot be solved without active engagement by city authorities. Invite the police and other city authorities to attend your meetings and serve on a committee or task force. Encourage them to be partners in the district’s revitalization and educate them about their role in the economic development process. As part of your image-enhancement campaign, publicize this partnership and crime-fighting strategy and contact local reporters to encourage them to cover positive changes that result from this initiative.

Community policing partnerships are often a great way to get local stakeholders actively involved and committed to reducing crime. In the 1990s, the United South Broadway Corp., a CDC in Albuquerque, New Mexico, launched “Peace in the Streets” to take back the neighborhood from gangs and drug-related violence through marches and rallies. They empowered concerned citizens with crime-fighting resources and, with the help of local police, closed more than 100 drug dens, winning national recognition for their success.

Don’t assume that your local police department or city understands CPTED or knows that landscaping encompasses more than beautification. Part of Main Street’s job might include working with the police department to find new solutions to crime prevention in the district. It is important to have dedicated officers who work your commercial district’s beat and come to neighborhood meetings so they can develop a presence, understanding, and relationship with your community. Develop constructive relationships with police and public works agencies. Many times, it’s merely a case of discussing baseline services and making sure they are provided. Be sure to commend them for what they are doing before delving into the issues they need to solve!

Early in its existence, the Barracks Row Main Street program in Washington, D.C., convened monthly meetings with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to facilitate relationship development and stakeholder education. Once the district’s BID was up and running, it took over holding Quarterly Safety Meetings that included the MPD, Capitol Police, Amtrak, and local business leaders and focused on recent crime trends and problem-solving tactics. The organization’s newsletter included the neighborhood beat cop’s photo and work cell phone number so

people could call with immediate crime problems. The Main Street program also compiled a list of all business owners' contact information so they could warn each other about suspicious events or a problem patron right away. The police department found this list a useful way to get in touch with business owners easily.

Downtown Chambersburg in Pennsylvania uses part-time police officers to monitor the business district during specific times of the day to serve as a crime deterrent as well as project a good image. These officers work the downtown beat specifically and check to make sure even little things, such as ensuring that business doors are locked after hours, are in order.

Merchant Block Captains

Merchant watch programs are another effective tool for uniting your businesses so they work together to prevent crime. If a merchant sees someone suspicious entering the store, (s)he calls a neighboring business, and uses a previously agreed-upon code phrase—such as “your order will be ready at noon”—thereby alerting that owner to check in on him(her) or to alert the authorities. This system works especially well for business owners who often work alone.

Merchant Block Captains can be designated for every 10 to 15 neighboring businesses. Frequently, they just gather and keep contact information up to date and put together a phone tree so that if something happens, all business people can be contacted quickly and put on alert. All participants on the phone tree should have a copy of the list and agree to call a designated person. The person at the end of the list then calls the block captain to confirm that everyone on the list has been alerted. Some police departments have block captain programs and can distribute literature to participants or hold orientation workshops.

Dealing with Vagrancy

Homelessness is a complex social problem. There are no easy solutions. The causes of homelessness are varied and are frequently outside the control of government agencies. Police have a role in dealing with aggressive panhandlers, including the homeless, when their activities are unlawful or otherwise impact the safety of the community.

If transient issues affect your Main Street, work with the community to create a uniform policy to deal with the

problem. Educate the public not to give food or money to panhandlers but instead to make a donation to a social service agency that addresses homelessness. Business and property owners should agree not to permit anyone to camp or loiter on their grounds and to remove shopping carts, bedding, or personal belongings from their property. Other preventive actions include:

- Restrict access to overhangs, alcoves, or other protected areas.
- Lock or remove handles from water spigots to discourage unauthorized use.
- Lock garbage receptacles.
- Lock or turn off exterior power outlets.
- Lock gates after hours.
- Install exterior lighting and utilize motion-activated fixtures after hours.
- Trim shrubs and other foliage to eliminate hiding places.

Multifaceted Approach

Your clean and safe volunteers won't be working alone on these initiatives. Your promotion committee will help people see how much safer and cleaner the district has become. Your organization committee will be tout the program's commitment to improving the area. Economic restructuring volunteers will help fill abandoned buildings and strengthen businesses to make the district vibrant. Notice, too, that strategies for deterring crime do double-duty, such as illuminating business windows at night for safety reason as well as to attract shoppers' attention after the store closes.

In some situations, CPTED strategies alone won't be enough to deter crime. When used in combination with traditional measures such as policing, alarms, and security cameras, however, CPTED can reduce the opportunities for crime, enhance the way your district looks, improve public perceptions, and contribute to an overall improvement in the quality of life.

Downtown Ambassador Programs

Business district ambassador programs can effectively restore the confidence of patrons and visitors to the area and make them feel comfortable there. Just knowing someone is out on the street, keeping an eye on things and responding to issues on the spot can boost a district's image and make people feel safer. Like many business improvement districts, the Downtown

Spokane (Washington) Partnership created a Security Ambassadors program and placed trained security and hospitality representatives throughout the business district. Ambassadors wear uniforms so they can be spotted easily to give directions, resolve street disturbances, serve as employee/customer escorts, and handle medical emergencies.

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CASE STUDY

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Partners in Crime



© Kelly Metzler

The Neighbors in the Strip (NITS) has been working on community-based economic development for the Strip district in Pittsburgh since 1999. In 2000, after a series of violent incidents, NITS began a “Partners in Crime” initiative that created a comprehensive partnership involving key representatives from numerous city agencies and groups. NITS quickly convened partners, including business owners, residents, representatives from the fire and police departments, elected officials, the district attorney, the liquor control board, Nuisance Bar Taskforce, the Urban Redevelopment Agency, and others. They identified crime reduction and quality-of-life improvement goals and created a Safety and Security Plan that detailed the myriad issues that needed to be addressed with action items, timelines, task managers, and funding sources. A sample of the issues they vowed to resolve included improving street lighting, painting cross walks, improving communication between businesses and police, closing problematic after-hours clubs, holding town meetings to educate and empower community members, cleaning streets and sidewalks, and launching an auto theft awareness program.

They put together an Emergency Resource Team that included NITS representatives as well as others from their extensive partnership list to offer the public advice, help plan for emergencies, and provide training programs to prepare residents and business owners in the Strip to deal with safety issues and crime. They developed two resource guides for dealing with emergency situations (how to react to situa-

tions like assaults, fire, and unruly crowds) and managing crises (sharing information such as tips for working with the media and the 10 mistakes to avoid when handling a crisis) as well as compiling pertinent contact information when seeking help in dangerous situations.

When another series of crime incidents occurred in 2006, the partners launched into action by increasing daytime police bike patrols, creating a taskforce focused on entertainment-oriented businesses, conducting a traffic study, developing a traffic-calming plan to increase pedestrian safety, and creating a public relations campaign to present an accurate portrayal of the Strip.

This anti-crime partnership has brought together Pittsburgh stakeholders, key agency representatives, and officials to improve public outreach and communication so the partners can tackle clean and safe issues and respond quickly to incidents when they occur. In the first six years of the initiative, the district has seen a 33 percent reduction in Part One Crime (i.e., homicide, theft, robbery, etc.); a 30.5 percent reduction in Part Two Crime (i.e., vandalism, drunk driving, prostitution, etc.); and the closing of five nuisance bars. As the district has become more vibrant and safe, 58 new businesses have opened, creating more than 1,000 jobs, and a variety of exciting new rehabilitation and development projects have been completed.

RESOURCES

Websites

CPTED Watch: Features specific tips for using CPTED principles to keep specific areas of communities safe, such as parking garages, offices, and businesses. www.cpted-watch.com

Keep America Beautiful: Provides research, strategies, and other information to help keep your community clean. Visit this website to find model ordinances, facts and figures, the Litter Index assessment tool, community survey strategies, and more. www.kab.org

National Crime Prevention Council: McGruff the crime-fighting dog is not just for kids. This website offers tips and information for starting neighborhood watch programs, CPTED and other crime-prevention trainings, and publications. www.ncpc.org

Responsible Hospitality Institute: Helps communities with social and entertainment establishments stay safe and vibrant through cooperation with police, fire departments, and alcohol regulators. Access case studies, trends, voluntary agreements, ordinances, policies, and model practices online. www.rhiresource.org

Article

“Crime Prevention through Environmental Design,” by Sherry Plaster, *Main Street News*, October 1992. Discusses anti-crime efforts of the city of Sarasota.

Book

Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime In Our Communities, by George L. Kelling and Catherine M. Coles (Free Press, 1998). Explores concepts such as community policing and the aggressive protection of public spaces.

chapter 21

PROMOTION: BUILDING EXCITEMENT

By Joshua Bloom

Promotion influences attitudes toward the commercial district and can alter consumer habits.

Using a variety of tools, your Main Street program can reinforce positive impressions, or replace negative perceptions, while shifting consumer behavior so Main Street becomes a business and shopping destination of choice.

Perceptions and habits may be deeply ingrained among consumers who are unfamiliar with your commercial district or who have grown accustomed to overlooking it, so promotion requires constantly positioning the district in the best light and repeatedly creating opportunities and incentives to visit. Changing consumer attitudes and habits happens through work in three areas:

- *Image development activities* change negative impressions and reinforce positive perceptions to promote the district as a cohesive unit. This can be accomplished through media campaigns, image-building events, or products (e.g. custom shopping bags, coffee mugs, t-shirts, etc.).
- *Special events* bring potential customers and excitement to your district. Their function is to make a long-term impact on Main Street and its businesses, rather than generating same-day increased sales, because they expose new people to the district's range of goods and services.

© Dave Parsh



- *Retail and business activities* should attract customers and “ring registers,” thus making an immediate impact on businesses. Retail promotions include everything from events to coupons to advertising.

Because promotion requires an understanding of the market from both the consumer and the business owner’s vantage points, the promotion committee will find itself frequently working with the economic restructuring committee. Collaboration is particularly important in defining the commercial district’s niche in the regional marketplace: who and where are the district’s competitors; what are the district’s strengths—including businesses, buildings, and heritage—and liabilities, both real and perceived.

By gathering current market and consumer information, you will be able to develop new image, retail/business, and special event activities that alter people’s perceptions and behaviors. An annual, successful promotion calendar is a crucial part of any Main Street program’s goal to get more people to use the district’s resources and assets. Main Street programs are generally advised to balance their calendars and not to exceed their human and financial resources. Producing two or three special events, three to six business promotions, and one image-development project annually is a good rule of thumb.

Because promotional events and activities can be implemented more quickly than some other kinds of initiatives, such as capital projects, they can demonstrate progress to the public. Just as the promotion committee may need to create new, appropriately scaled events designed specifically for a target market, it may also need to eliminate promotions that no longer serve a strategic purpose or spin them off to other community groups.

Competitive Advantage

The first step in developing promotional activities is to get a better understanding of your district’s competitive advantages compared with nearby shopping alternatives. Malls and big-box stores enjoy the advantages of selection, price, national advertising, and consistent product and shopper experiences. A traditional business district’s competitive advantages vary from place to place: they may include convenience, unique and/or historic environments, unusual products or experiences, and/or personalized customer service.

The economic restructuring committee’s market research will help the promotion committee define the district’s position in the regional marketplace. That research typically includes an analysis of retail spending and sales leakages, customer surveys, and focus groups. Using this information, the promotion committee should write a “market position statement” that articulates the commercial district’s economic strengths in relation to its target demographic audiences. See page 197 for two sample position statements. This market definition will help the promotion committee and individual businesses employ the best advertising and marketing channels. Consistency requires use of

the same logo, colors, words, style, and feel throughout print materials, websites, media releases, and events.

The promotion committee’s activities—special events, retail promotions, and image-building activities—taken together, constitute its annual action plan. For each activity, the committee should establish measurable goals for reaching the target market. (Measuring outcomes will be discussed further in the “Evaluating” section on pages 207 and 208.)

In a branded world, Main Street has an identity crisis. Because consumer-product advertising emphasizes brands, it seems a logical extension for your commercial district to have a brand, too. But there’s a difference between a product and a place: a product has a brand; a place has an identity. Identity (or image) development may offer an opportunity to create a snappy tag line but, generally speaking, it’s a chance to shape a message for the commercial district. Rather than being thought of as “old” or “obsolete,” for example, Main Street is reframed as “historic,” “nostalgic,” “vintage,” or “authentic.”

Even the most distressed districts have positive attributes to highlight: historic events, historic buildings, historic businesses, local ownership, personal relationships, and convenience are just a few. Identity should be grounded in the district’s authentic attributes so it is both positive and truthful.

NAME THAT BRAND

Can you name the company associated with the slogans below?

Invent.

Always.

Live richly.

Get the feeling.

Think different.

It’s the real thing.

Yeah, we’ve got that.

You can do it. We can help.

What can brown do for you?

What happens here, stays here.

HP/Hewlett Packard; Wal-Mart and (extra credit) Coca Cola; Citibank; Toyota; Apple; Coca Cola; Staples; The Home Depot; UPS; Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

You’ve most likely done some of the groundwork needed to articulate your district’s identity. For example, when you were launching your organization or establishing your work plan, you may have discussed the commercial district’s strengths and weaknesses. If your economic restructuring committee has completed its business inventory, it may be able to define business strengths and clusters not immediately apparent to the casual observer.

Sample Position Statements

Downtown Blackstone specializes in providing home décor and personal adornment products and services with traditional atmosphere; time-honored value; and trusted, personal, and friendly customer service for discerning shoppers within the Blackstone, Crewe, and Kenbridge region and discriminating day trippers from western Nottoway county and Chesterfield.

Downtown Abingdon specializes in rejuvenating the mind, body and spirit; offering pensive arts, refined entertainment, rural exercise, and elegant relaxation within a revitalized historic setting. Downtown Abingdon caters to sophisticated (“outdoorsy”) women and their families throughout Southwest Virginia, Northeast Tennessee, and Northwest North Carolina.

Consumers themselves can be your best source of images and words. Again, the economic restructuring committee can be your research arm. Consumer surveys should include questions about users’ perceptions of the district: ask respondents to rank their perceptions and experiences with selection, prices, parking, merchant friendliness, safety, and the like. Positive answers to these survey questions can provide starting points for crafting an appealing image, while negative scores will point out characteristics that need to be improved and reframed.

Focus groups are the perfect tool for drawing out words and images. A structured, facilitated conversation with consumers will often yield evocative words and images that resonate with your audience. By asking participants to describe how the district compares with other places they know, you will gain insights into your Main Street’s identity. (For more information on focus groups and how to conduct them, see the March 2006 issue of *Main Street News*.)

You may also decide to hire a marketing professional to help package the words and visuals you’ve gathered into a cohesive message. Once you’ve decided on an identity, it should be incorporated into all of the promotion committee’s activities. And, while identities can change over time as consumer trends change (just look back at the “Name that Brand” sidebar), or as the commercial district itself changes, they should remain consistent for the period during which they are used.

Many communities have developed effective and creative identities. Geneva, Illinois, a suburb about 40 miles west of downtown Chicago, for example, articulated an identity that draws on its traditional “Midwestern downtown” look and its picturesque setting along a river. Working with a marketing firm, the local chamber ran a photo contest to capture the city’s new tagline, “A picture postcard.” The contest resulted in media exposure and a

downtown photography exhibit, as well as images that captured the new slogan. The tagline and the photos (graphically framed by a vintage postcard border), are used in all of Geneva’s retail and event advertising.

When the Pigtown Main Street Program in Baltimore began, it decided to reclaim a name the city had thrown out during an earlier effort at urban renewal. In the past, the neighborhood’s streets were used for herding swine from the train station to the nearby stockyards. The Main Street program decided to use the name “Pigtown,” instead of its new name, “Washington Village,” because it saw historic value and market differentiation in the former. Leveraging its quirky history raised the neighborhood’s profile and generated interest among new consumers and visitors.

The Downtown Walla Walla Foundation (Washington) promotes its image as a wine country destination by displaying empty wine barrels downtown. Local wineries donate the wine barrels, which are distributed to local artists who transform them into art to help support the burgeoning wine industry. The barrels are displayed around town in areas that attract both local and visitor traffic and then are sold through the Barrel Art Auction, with proceeds funding the Main Street endowment fund.

Image building can be incorporated into events, as well. Pigtown celebrates its heritage with a running of the pigs during its annual neighborhood fes-

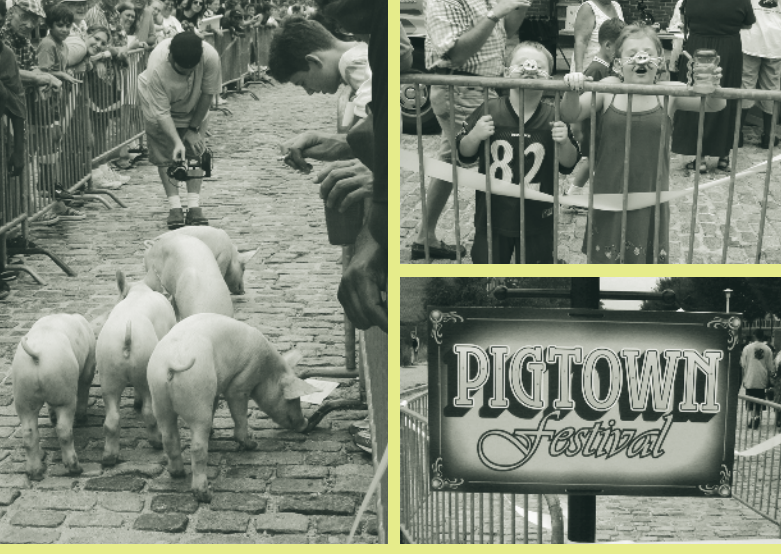


Who Are We and How Do We Find Our Identity?

- **Business inventory.** Look for strengths, niches, clusters, and unique advantages.
- **Consumer surveys.** Gather quantitative information about perceptions and experiences.
- **Focus groups.** Allow consumers to provide language and imagery.



Evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and don't be afraid to have fun!



tival. When the Center City District of Philadelphia was faced with an office-oriented downtown that was deserted after five o'clock, it launched its "Make a Night of It" initiative, which promoted the idea that the real nightlife was downtown, not in the suburbs.

As consumers are bombarded by messages about things they should do—recycle, eat right, exercise more—guilt-laden appeals like "Shop downtown—It's the right thing to do" may have the opposite effect. Consumers are more likely to respond when you create an image that captures their imagination, that makes visiting Main Street something they want to do.

Commercial district image campaigns (like Walla Walla's wine barrels or Geneva's postcards) grow out of something indigenous and authentic, whether it's a building, local culture, historic event, or even something as intangible as the weather, captured in the ethereal slogan of Grants Pass, Oregon: "It's the climate."

Image affects all aspects of a revitalization program and therefore should involve all players. In developing the characteristics and themes of the commercial district's identity, invite partner organizations, including city staff and elected officials, chamber of commerce, business owners and developers, tourism officials, and others, to be part of the process. Consider establishing an ad hoc committee to provide assistance or feedback during the image-development process. After using market data, your committee and, in some cases, a marketing professional to develop several concepts, return to your focus groups to test your draft images. Ultimately, the Main Street program and its partner organizations must all work with the same campaign, but objective input from consumers can help you and your partners reach consensus about a creative project.

Image and identity affect advertising campaigns and events, of course. But they also influence other revitalization projects as well: a commercial district with a bohemian image will have a different design sensibility than an authentically Colonial downtown. Imagine, for example, how out-of-character a psychedelic sign from the funky Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco would look in staid, downtown Concord, Massachusetts, where Paul Revere made his famous ride.

While your Main Street program may develop the unifying image, the identity and resulting campaign

should be embraced and adopted by every stakeholder. In promotion, the image is for the district, not the revitalization program. And the best way to foster consensus among diverse revitalization participants is to invite them to participate in the image-development process from the outset.

Using an inclusive process will help the program find an image that business owners believe in and will enhance by reflecting it in their own businesses. When the Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) led a community process to create an image for a "nameless" section of downtown, which ultimately became known as the "West Edge," an outside marketing firm conducted focus groups and surveyed area business owners to gauge their feedback and opinions about the neighborhood's brand. DSA learned that people valued the area's independent spirit and agreed that "West Edge" embodied that quality, reflected the cultural cutting-edge experiences people would have in the neighborhood, and communicated its physical location. Business owners embraced the image wholeheartedly—even opening businesses that used the West Edge name—West Edge Dental, for example. A neighborhood deli even created a special "West Edge" sandwich. On the day the brand was launched, DSA held a lunch-time concert at a popular community gathering spot, hung a banner with the new name above the stage, invited the mayor to read a proclamation, and handed out a new West Edge pocket guide/business directory as well as other items with the new logo.



Media

Chapter 7, Promoting the Main Street Program, discussed using the media and communications tools to promote the Main Street organization—its purpose and its work. You will use the same tools and the media in a similar way to promote the commercial district and your marketing and special event activities. The following types of communications fall to the promotion committee:

- Special event publicity and advertising—both before and after the event;
- Retail event publicity and advertising;
- Ribbon-cuttings for new business openings, façade rehabilitations, or public improvements; and
- Press releases about positive new developments (or responses to negative events).

CASE STUDY

Allston Village, Massachusetts Solving an Identity Crisis

Communicating with the media about promotions, image-building initiatives, and pre- and post-event details, and sending them interesting, newsworthy stories about the revitalization effort will acquaint people with your district and keep it in the forefront of their minds.

Sending press releases and fostering relationships with reporters, editors, and producers of local media will keep them informed about what is happening on Main Street. Work with your local radio station on broadcasting public service announcements (PSAs) about Main Street projects or upcoming events. Radio stations typically can't broadcast all the PSAs they receive, but developing a close working relationship with the station can help.

Depending on the size of your media market, be selective in sending press releases to local television stations. Television requires good visuals, preferably with action scenes; Main Street festivals, parades, and even the ceremonial removal of an old façade cover-up offer great video opportunities. The Main Street program in Canon City, Colorado, for example garnered a lot of press coverage, including television, for its Façade Squad's Strip Show event, which invited people to witness the removal of façade coverings from two historic downtown buildings.

Regardless of how you decide to promote your events and your district, make sure that publicity and marketing activities are part of your work plan and are connected to your image-development initiatives and events.

The Chicken or the Egg?

Some Main Street programs (especially their economic restructuring committees) find themselves caught in a cycle that seems to have no clear starting point: they want to recruit businesses, but find themselves hampered by limited foot traffic—that is, they don't have enough customers to support additional businesses. But the customers won't come (seemingly) because there isn't a broad enough (or enticing enough) set of offerings.

For most places, in most circumstances, the customers arrive first and the businesses follow. Sometimes the customers arrive because new housing has been built in or around the commercial district, or a new office building has brought additional workers. Special events and retail activities create reasons for customers to come to the district and, in that way, these promotions build foot traffic.

Events

Events communicate the concept that the commercial district is more than a collection of businesses: it is a center of civic life. The two concepts reinforce one another to strengthen the economy of the district and the community as a whole.

The best events are born at the intersection of authenticity and creativity. The "Mystery Festival" in Ventura, California, was inspired by Perry Mason author and Ventura native son, Erle Stanley Gardner. East Boston, where the local lobster industry is hidden behind refrigerated warehouses on the waterfront, hosted Lobsterfest,

Allston Village, a Boston-area neighborhood hemmed by three large universities, had an identity conundrum. It was a virtual melting pot of international people, restaurants, and grocery stores—Brazilian, Indian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and others. And it was home to that special cluster of businesses every college student patronizes: stores selling used CDs and vinyl records, unfinished furniture, mattresses, and other inexpensive home furnishings.

But what was Allston's identity?

The Main Street program did three clever things.

First, it renamed the district. Yes, renamed it: Rather than "Allston" (which many post-college Bostonians viewed as a boisterous place), the Main Street program christened it "Allston Village," and with the addition of one word, created a new image. It put the name on bumper stickers, on websites, in ads, and in all their press and public relations references. More than 10 years later, the name has taken hold.

Next, rather than trying to tease out a theme or a thread among the district's eclectic offerings, the Main Street program embraced Allston's greatest strength: its diversity of languages and products. The international diversity is subtly hinted by the word "village." An added tagline captured that diversity more literally: "It's all in Allston."

The Main Street program expanded the tagline in a multitude of ways. First came the banners, which say "Welcome" in each of the languages spoken in Allston Village. Next came a series of print ads elaborating on the tagline's claim:

- "Think globally; Eat locally—It's all in Allston." This tagline celebrates the district's international restaurants.
- "Faux or pho. It's all in Allston." Faux refers to faux-finish furniture and faux furs, while "pho" is a Vietnamese soup.
- "Fish or Phish. It's all in Allston." Fish refers to the many forms of fish that can be purchased in Allston: fresh fish for cooking, dried fish for Portuguese stews, smoked and salted Russian fish—or live fish (as pets). Phish refers to a band, popular in the 1980s and 90s.





The annual Evel Knievel Days festival in Butte, Montana, attracts an international audience.

with its requisite lobster-eating contest. MainStreet Uptown Butte, Inc., in Montana celebrates its hometown hero, Evel Knievel, the last weekend of July with a grand festival that attracts people from all around the world. Fireworks, music, food, stunts, hotrod shows, and more fill three exciting days.

Festivals and events are fun—at least for those attending them. For those producing the events, they can be exhausting. But what’s their purpose? They help change attitudes, public perception, and habits. Because of one event, some individuals who might not otherwise visit the commercial district, come once. They see things that might inspire them to return, and they leave the event having had fun. In that way, the event might successfully disrupt their pattern of only patronizing your competing businesses. Perhaps the next weekend they need to buy a gift, try out a new restaurant, or want something fun to do, and decide to check out your Main Street first.

Festivals such as street fairs and holiday parades, appeal to a wide range of people. However, they don’t need to appeal to everyone. It is appropriate and strategic to create a series of events aimed at different demographic segments of your target audiences. Events aimed at kids are different from events aimed at seniors. Events aimed at locals may not appeal to tourists. While a Dominican Day or a Malcolm X festival will appeal primarily to Dominicans or African Americans, respectively, all events should be open and welcoming to everyone.

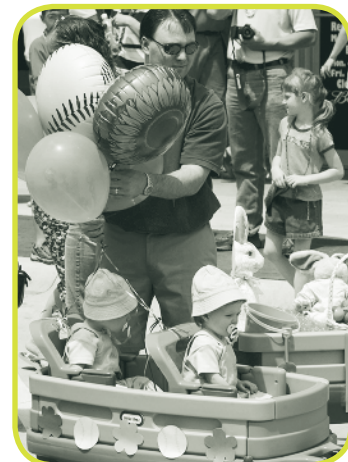
Festivals—regardless of their theme—should follow lessons taught by the entertainment and amusement-park industries. Theme parks, carnivals, and other festival-like environments have learned the importance of providing multiple activities and sensory experiences to keep visitors engaged.



© DR Smith

These include the following five characteristics:

- **Music.** All festival-type events should include music to not only provide entertainment but also to unify large outdoor spaces.
- **Food.** In some cases, food may be a central organizing element of the event (at a Little Italy festival, for example). Even if it’s not, you’ll want to have food available so people will stay at the event longer.
- **Overlapping activities.** Like a three-ring circus or a Disney theme park, overlapping activities add excitement, keep the energy high, and, of course, provide a good experience so people don’t get bored and leave.
- **Something for all ages.** You should have activities for people of all ages, of course, but typically, festivals attract families with children. Be sure to plan a number of activities geared toward kids of different age groups.
- **Something for free.** Everyone wins when you provide a small memento of the event. Giving people a little something to take home assures they will remember the great time they had.



Small Events

Not all events are blockbusters, nor do they need to be aimed at “everyone.” Some events are tiny: a jazz band “jamming” on a corner during rush hour, lunchtime concerts in a park, or a trick-or-treat promotion can be organized as small, simple events. Small activities are easier to produce and can more readily be aimed at distinct market segments: in the preceding examples, respectively, commuters, workers, and families.

If an event can be repeated frequently, it has a greater chance of not just disrupting a pattern of Main Street-avoidance, but creating a new pattern that makes your district a destination. Cape Girardeau, Missouri, started a walking club, “The RiverWalkers,” whose members logged miles walking in and around downtown and attended educational seminars on health and fitness.

Farmers markets are common—and perfect—examples of weekly events, and communities have created many variations on the market theme: some are for local growers only; some feature prepared foods; some include crafters or other retailers. In many towns and cities, the farmers market becomes a community-building place where neighbors run into neighbors. The farmers market hosted by Washington State’s Puyallup Main Street Association is itself a destination and builds foot traffic on market days,



Farmers markets offer the community a gathering place as well as entertainment.

All images © Linda S. Glisson

which benefits nearby businesses. Families and tourists alike descend upon Pioneer Pavilion, a picturesque park, to enjoy foods that are in season and the community-gathering spot. The market has seen a 30 percent growth, peaking at 125 vendors at the top of the season and generating more than \$1,000,000 in gross sales annually. Live music, food demonstrations, attractions or activities for kids, and cultural or educational components can turn weekly markets into exciting entertainment venues. Some communities create retail tie-ins to connect the market to the commercial district’s retailers (see pages 203–206).

While events may have multiple benefits, they should have a primary purpose that is distinct from image development or retail promotions. Events provide a reason to visit the district, and they offer a positive experience. They may not contribute to retail sales on the day of the event itself, but they strengthen the economy of the commercial district over time.

Despite your hard work and good intentions, some business owners may not favor or benefit from certain kinds of promotional activities. You can mitigate potential negative reactions by:

- Providing a calendar of all promotional activities 12 to 18 months in advance;

- Providing practical suggestions for ways in which any retail or service business can take part in a promotion or event;
- Making sure that the physical setup of the event (booths, barricades) does not interfere with business operations or block entrances;
- Surveying and listening to business owners after each event, and on an annual basis, to gauge which activities benefit the business community the most (see pages 207 and 208); and
- Minimizing the number of events that require street closures.

Developing a Promotion Calendar

Putting together an annual promotion calendar is the best way to plan and coordinate an effective promotional program. The Main Street program’s promotion committee, with input from the economic restructuring committee and from other community groups, such as the merchants association or chamber of commerce, is responsible for the calendar. It should be developed in advance to give the organization adequate time to thoroughly plan events and programs.

Insuring Events

If you put on events, you need specific insurance to protect your organization. Don’t assume that certain programs or projects of your Main Street organization are included in your city’s insurance policies. Shop around for the best quote and best coverage options. Ask your insurance agent about steps you can take to reduce risk (such as using trained alcohol servers and forgoing the moon bounce for safer entertainment options) and possibly lower your premiums. Also ask about the following extra policies:

- Special event liability coverage defends third-party property damage and bodily injury claims arising out of specifically scheduled events sponsored by or hosted by the organization. Find out about “rain insurance” and see what the weather conditions must be in order for you to collect on a claim and what is covered (deposits, pre-event expenditures, revenues that might have been generated, etc.).
- Most general liability policies are written in a way that covers a volunteer who hurts someone else but not volunteers who injure themselves. To ensure that you have complete coverage for your volunteers, ask for a volunteer accident policy so you are covered for excess medical expense, accidental death, and accidental dismemberment if volunteers hurt themselves. This policy generally will not cover pain and suffering or loss of wages.
- Does your event include wine tastings or alcohol sales? Add liquor liability coverage to your policy because it is generally excluded on general liability policies. This coverage defends claims attributed to the serving of alcoholic beverages, such as overserving and serving minors.



There are seven basic steps involved in preparing and implementing a promotion calendar:

- **Anticipate sales cycles and plan events to take advantage of established shopping habits.** Consumers tend to shop for goods and services at fairly predictable times. In most communities, retail activity typically follows the cycles of the garment industry, with sales peaking when a new season's clothing lines are introduced. In some cases, your district's sales cycles may be different, especially in communities with significant tourism. Check with your merchants to find out their strongest and weakest months.
After gathering sales figures for a year, plot them on a graph. Identify times when sales drop, when they increase, and when they plateau. The periods just before significant increases in sales activity offer good opportunities for full-price retail marketing; as sales start to dip (e.g., after Christmas), the time is right for discount retail promotions. For special events, target periods when there appear to be no major fluctuations in sales; such activities can help maintain consumer interest in the district. Image-building activities are good for slower times of the year or as a lead into busier times, especially when you need to change public perception of the district.
- **Review last year's calendar and analyze the effectiveness of each event.** Does the event still meet your marketing goals? Is it fresh and exciting, or has it become stale and mediocre? Eliminate the activity if it no longer seems appropriate. Follow the same process for every promotion on the calendar. Keep only those events that continue to meet the program's goals.
- **Plan activities that fit overall promotional goals.** Without assigning dates, develop basic ideas for activities that are meaningful and appropriate for your primary customer groups. After developing some basic concepts for several promotional activities, think about the form each should take—a retail promotion, a special event, an image-building activity, or a combination of these promotional types. If your committee feels the need to develop new events, looking at community heritage, assets, and culture—the same things you probably used when deciding on an image—can help you determine which new events will resonate with

your target audience. The promotion committee can also look at established events in the community and think of ways to make them bigger and/or better.

- **Lay out an 18-month program, based on the events that have been roughly formulated.** Schedule events as accurately as possible for 12 months; use the 18-month calendar to assign approximate dates for future activities and to facilitate planning. Take the time to plan and be creative. Effective promotional programs require extensive development and coordination over a reasonable time frame if they are to be implemented successfully.
 - **Consider the timing of other local and regional events and adjust the tentative calendar to avoid potential schedule conflicts.** Check with the chamber of commerce, local schools, civic clubs, arts leagues, and religious institutions to find out their agendas. The state tourism office may have information on regional activities. Think about such events as:
 - **Pay day.** People may be more apt to shop just after they receive their pay checks. Ask local industries, city and county government offices, and other major employers when their pay days are.
 - **Local or national sports events.** Avoid scheduling promotional activities that conflict with major local, regional, or national sports events.
 - **School events.** Check with the local board of education to see when standardized tests are given and get the dates for important events like homecoming or the prom.
 - **Festivals and major events in town or in nearby communities.** Arts and crafts shows, for example, could provide stiff competition for your promotional activities.
- Just as you should look at local and regional events to avoid conflict, those dates can also offer opportunities. For example, the local high school prom could be an ideal occasion for special joint promotions with your apparel shops, florists, restaurants, salons, and other businesses.
- **Make preliminary committee assignments.** For each promotional activity, appoint a chairperson to head the task force that will plan, oversee, and implement the event. Try to find chairpeople who are good organizers. While other members can provide technical skills and creative ideas, a leader with organizational ability is usually the key to a successful promotion task force.
 - **Finalize the calendar of events.** Prepare a master calendar of promotional activities for the coming year and circulate it to businesses, local media, schools, and civic groups. Also, send descriptions of one or

two major events to statewide media and tourism organizations that can help publicize the activities.

A single event doesn't change a pattern, but a series of events is a start. Over the course of a year or so, a regular calendar of events will give people numerous opportunities to come back to Main Street.

Special Events and Fund Raising

Sometimes events get confused or co-mingled with fund raising. Some programs put on events that generate a significant revenue surplus and provide a major portion of the revitalization organization's operating budget. For example, El Reno Main Street, a Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA) winning program in Oklahoma, hosts five special events that attract 38,000 visitors and provide 17 percent of its annual revenue. One event, the Fried Onion Burger Festival, lures 25,000 attendees downtown to salivate over a 750-pound burger as well as to shop—merchants have reported a 400 percent increase in sales during the event.

Some organizations produce one or two annual events to fund the bulk of their operating expenses. Another GAMSA winner, Lynch's Landing, in Lynchburg, Virginia, brought in \$800,000 in revenue in 2005 by producing exciting events that attracted thousands of people downtown throughout the year. Lynch's Landing lowers production costs by tapping the city's special events grants program and in-kind donations.

New events are unlikely to generate surplus revenue because they usually require a large investment and lack name recognition at the outset. Vendors and sponsors will be reluctant to make substantial commitments without a demonstrated track record. And if the event depends on ticket sales, those purchases may be slow to take off until the event has developed a loyal following.

If you evaluate an event's success on whether it made money, you may be judging it by the wrong criteria. (See "Evaluating Promotion Activities," page 207.) Large-scale events require an enormous amount of work and a substantial cash outlay for everything from portable toilets to bandstands. Events are also subject to large risk factors, most notably the weather. There are less risky and more resource-efficient ways to raise money for your revitalization program, if that is the primary goal.

Retail/Business Activities

Retail and business activities focus consumers' attention on the commercial aspects of the business district. Unlike special events, retail/business activities are designed to drive sales at Main Street businesses and make new, or strengthen, connections to customers. There are three general varieties of business promotional activities:

- Cluster promotions for businesses within the same category;
- Cross promotions, which make new customer connections among a variety of business types; and
- Market-segment promotions, which focus on attracting a particular consumer group.

In a cluster promotion, the Main Street program might publish a restaurant guide listing all of the district's dining establishments. Or it might organize a home show among furniture retailers and interior designers, highlighting new decorating trends through in-store displays and demonstrations. A bridal show could group together florists, restaurants that offer catering services, stationers, and, of course, bridal shops. Jamaica Plain, a Boston neighborhood, organizes "First Thursdays," where shopping is an intended byproduct of an arts-oriented event: sidewalk performers and in-store (as well as in-restaurant and in-real-estate office, etc.) art displays create a party-like experience on the sidewalks. First Thursdays create foot traffic and a happy, interactive, neighborly experience.

Cross promotions are well suited for districts that lack a distinct focus in their business inventory. Their goal is to increase retail impact by encouraging the customers of one or two businesses to shop in the commercial district as a whole. Cross promotions need not be "events" at all. For example, a customer at the bicycle shop receives a coupon for an extra scoop at the ice cream shop across the street. In turn, the ice cream shop gives its customers a coupon for a bicycle safety inspection, or a free map of scenic bike rides in the region. The hair salon offers baked

CASE STUDY

Goffstown, New Hampshire The Giant Pumpkin Festival



In New England, growing giant pumpkins is an organized and intense competition. Goffstown, New Hampshire, has managed to elevate the challenge from a mere exercise on a scale to something of a multi-channel fall sensation. There is the pumpkin cook-off, the pumpkin parade, the pumpkin prince and princess, the costume contest—for dogs(!), and, of course, the Pumpkin Regatta (pictured above).

Participants in the Regatta use power tools to carve out giant pumpkins and make watercraft out of them. The pumpkin boats are then mounted with small outboard motors and set to float in the Piscataquog River. The orbed craft—often festooned with flags and ribbons, and sometimes with super-soaker water guns—then engage in what is often a contact sport, as they race to the finish line.

treats from the local bakery; the service station offers to pay for lunch at a local restaurant while the customer's car is being serviced. The Main Street program can help facilitate these connections among individual businesses.

Cross promotions can also take a more formal, “event-style” approach: a health fair could feature demonstrations or seminars and connect the drug store, the yoga studio, the health food shop, and restaurants offering healthy menu choices. Cross promotions tend to focus on existing customers by broadening their impact across a greater number of businesses—a more efficient proposition than attracting an entirely new set of customers.

Market segment promotions target a specific group of customers, like a men's holiday-shopping night, early-bird dinner specials for seniors, or an after-work happy hour for district workers. In Wisconsin, the Platteville Main Street Promotion Committee found a way to better reach the 2,700 students at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, which is in walking distance of the downtown. After meeting with university representatives from the housing and student affairs office, the committee determined that connecting with the 95 Residence Hall Assistants (RAs) would help downtown business owners use word-of-mouth marketing. The Promotion Committee worked with the university to add a “Meet and Greet” event during orientation week; the university agreed to host a pizza party for the RAs and downtown business owners at a local pizzeria where the merchants could introduce themselves and their offerings and contribute to giveaway gift bags. The Meet and Greets familiarize students with the downtown and also provide an excellent volunteer recruitment opportunity.



Outdoor signage guides participants on the Joy of Cookies tour in the Lawrenceville neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Certain holidays are perfectly suited for business promotions. The flagship holiday for retail promotions is Christmas, and its calendar neighbors, Chanukah and Kwanzaa. To take advantage of the holiday season, during the last weekend of November, the Joy of Cookies Tour hits the independently owned businesses in Pittsburgh's Lawrenceville neighborhood. Businesses showcase holiday gifts and offer discounts and giveaways. People can shop, sample cookies, and collect recipe cards. The annual promotion promises shoppers that they will find unique, handmade, and eclectic gifts as well as an “un-mall” holiday experience.

Many communities organize winter open-house events that generally tie in retail and business promotions dur-

CASE STUDY

Somerville, Massachusetts
“What the Fluff?”



Fluff—the marshmallow sandwich spread—was invented in Somerville, Massachusetts, in 1917. What, you didn't know? Everyone in Somerville knows. At least now they do.

In 2006, Union Square Main Streets (USMS) celebrated the product that altered human history with the first “What the Fluff?” festival.

Somerville had the good fortune of being the place where Fluff was born. But how does a festival celebrate such a product? In a multitude of ways: there was the Fluff baking contest, the Fluff tug-of-war (over a vat of Fluff in the middle), the Flufferettes (think “Rockettes,” but dressed as Fluff), the Fluff science fair, Fluff art, and other activities. The planners also accommodated the needs of district businesses that were otherwise left out of the day-time, family-oriented event. They encouraged a Somerville bar owner to create a special Fluff-inspired beverage, which became the “Fluffachino”—an adult libation of espresso, Frangelico, and, of course, Fluff.

USMS photographed the bartender with his drink, posted it to the website, and managed to get it printed in the local paper. People started ordering the drink in the weeks leading up to the event—and the bar owner immediately became a staunch supporter and member of the Main Street program.

The national media picked up the story, and the event became an instant legend. One click on the USMS website (www.unionsquaremain.org) and you can find links to dozens of videos and media stories, including a feature on the Food Network. The site also has a gallery of zany images to get people excited about next year's event.

Image © Sadie Ide

ing an evening where stores remain open and offer warm drinks and treats. Augusta, Kansas, drops “snow” in the form of ping pong balls from the top of a fire truck ladder: the balls are imprinted with prizes or discounts at downtown retailers. From Valentine’s Day to Father’s Day, every holiday offers an opportunity to organize promotions.

Although not a holiday, the back-to-school season is a great time to showcase Main Street businesses. The Belair-Edison Main Street program in Baltimore uses this time to showcase its hair salon and personal care business niche. The annual Bel-Hair Back-to-School Festival puts on a hairstyle fashion show and gives away school supplies to local schools.

A marketing activity or event can bridge more than one type of promotion. Below are a few examples of promotions that effectively combine special events and retail activities.

Retail incentives can be used to link special events and festivals to businesses: a street festival where vendors are selling cheap food to eat on the go is not the time when a family is likely to sit down for a fine-dining experience. However, it is an opportunity to hand the parents a coupon, giving them an incentive to dine on Main Street another time. Farmers markets present an ideal setting for flower-arranging demonstrations by a local florist or cooking demonstrations by local restaurants, even though neither is likely to make sales at the market. Farmers could also be asked to insert coupons in customers’ produce bags. One Union Square Farmers Market featured vendors devoted to canine health for the special event “Paws at the Market.” District doggie-related businesses like FiDough, the neighborhood’s pet bakery and grooming salon, set up booths alongside area animal rescue leagues and dog training clubs, to meet the special interests of the market’s customers.

Belleville (Illinois) Main Street hosted a “who done it” set in downtown businesses. Those participating in the murder mystery first visited the crime scene, staged at the Main Street office, where they viewed the “victim” and the evidence left behind by the criminal. Participants were given a list of participating stores where they could interview witnesses and suspects to get information to solve the mystery. Qualifying entry forms had to have the correct solution and show that the participant interviewed a minimum number of the characters within the designated time period. The first person to solve the mystery got a cash reward. The event also included a random drawing for gifts. (Note that while this is an in-store promotion, participants might not make purchases while they are playing the game, but they will be exposed to the variety of goods and services available in the district.)

Sales and Discounts

Historically, Main Street programs equated retail promotions with discounts—sidewalk sales, “midnight madness” sales, percent-off coupons, and the like. Sale activities have a limited, strategic place in the promotion menu.

Everybody loves a bargain, except the retailers. As a facilitator of Main Street business development,

your organization should help businesses sell as much of their merchandise or services at full price as possible. Sales events are useful at specific times of year when merchants need to clear out stock to make way for a new season: after Christmas or during the dog days of summer, for example. Ask your business owners about their needs and ideas: in tourist communities, for example, summer may be the busiest time of year—and it’s the early fall when merchants need to move stale items before the season comes to a close.

Sidewalk sales, once the bread-and-butter retail promotion, are no longer viable in commercial districts where retail businesses (those that sell something that can be put in a bag) are sparse or scattered. Similarly, frequent discount events of any kind tend both to cheapen the image of the district and give the impression that businesses are trying to compete on price—a game they cannot afford to play when the opponent is a big-box store.

Cooperative Advertising

Business owners who might not take the initiative to advertise (in print or on the radio), or might not be able to afford it on their own, may be more likely to participate in a group advertising program. Group ads can effectively showcase particular clusters of businesses or compelling characteristics of a business niche.

Cooperative arrangements typically collect participation fees from businesses for a single

display ad that may include a collection of images or business cards or for an ad with one image or theme that simply lists participating businesses.

Retail advertising is one area where charitable nonprofits (those operating under a 501(c)3 designation) must be careful. The IRS may consider ads that list individual businesses (depending on the type of district where you are working) as being inconsistent with a “charitable” purpose. With this in mind, some communities rely on the chamber or merchants association (if one exists) to organize group ads. Alternatively, an individual merchant could take on the responsibility for organizing the ad campaign and collecting checks from participants. Some Main Street programs are organized as 501(c)6 (or other 501(c) entities) and are not subject to this limitation. And some 501(c)3 organizations are exempt, as well—particularly those districts where business owners are members of a disadvantaged class (e.g., minorities or women), as defined by the IRS. Check with an attorney experienced in





Advertisement featuring late shopping nights in the Lawrenceville neighborhood in Pittsburgh.

nonprofit regulations to find out whether these limitations apply to your particular circumstances. (The differences among these designations are described in Chapter 8, Effective Advocacy for Main Street Programs, pages 66 and 67.)

Store Hours

Since the beginning of time, it seems, Main Street districts have tried to corral their merchants into setting unified business hours. Like herding cats, the task ends up being harder than it first appears, and it tends to annoy the cats. Modifying the goal—e.g., promoting a group of businesses that are open late, asking business owners to consider extending their normal business hours, or establishing one late-evening shopping night per week—will make success easier to achieve. The issue straddles the work of the promotion committee and the economic restructuring committee. Convenient hours are important to promote, as Port Townsend, Washington, did by producing a series of ads highlighting extended shopping hours and noting the participating businesses.

Frederick, Maryland, uses the arts to draw traffic one evening each month. The Downtown Frederick Partnership found that its monthly First Saturday Gallery Walk events, which showcase the community’s strong arts and entertainment district, have inspired more than three-quarters of downtown businesses to stay open late. The executive director reported that the event has been wildly popular and that the sales receipts of many stores rival, and sometimes exceed, their best holiday sales totals. Their successes have helped the organization convince merchants to stay open until 9 p.m. on Friday nights from May to December as well.

“Shop Local” Programs

“Shop local” programs have always been popular among revitalization programs, and there’s reason to believe their

message will become more compelling as consumers increasingly look for ways to reduce energy-consuming shopping trips and support local economic development. Consumers are rarely motivated by guilt, however, at least, not for long. And in some communities, the downtown or neighborhood shopping district doesn’t have enough businesses to sell all the staples consumers need. Rather, the challenge is to make the commercial district’s “localness” one of its coolest qualities.

Philadelphia created a campaign featuring pictures of local owners in their businesses, with the tagline, “My city IS my business”; each picture was accompanied by a line or two describing the owner’s personal connection to her business, her customers, and her city. Cambridge, Massachusetts, which has seen a surge in chain-business openings, created a “Local First” program, which identified independently owned businesses unique to the community. Businesses displayed a sticker in their window, almost as an honor badge.

Taking an “incentive” approach to shopping locally, shopper loyalty cards have long been popular. Individual businesses (like coffee shops) use them frequently: buy 10 cups of coffee and your next one is free. Communities have often struggled, however, to create a loyalty card that works throughout the district. The 10-coffee concept won’t work for all businesses. Buy 10 wedding gowns, and your next one is free? Even discounts (e.g., 10 percent off) don’t work equally well for all businesses, especially those, such as grocery stores, that operate on very tight margins. However, “shop local” events can be successful incentives. The Main Street program in El Reno, Oklahoma, has an annual “Spend Christmas at Home—Shop Downtown” promotion that encourages customers to shop downtown during the season and collect tickets to win \$4,000 in Main Street Bucks.

Credit card technology has recently provided a “shop-local” solution for Main Street: several cities and companies have developed customized solutions where one magnetic-strip card can be tailored to each business’s preference. Some of these cards have also been combined with a credit card payment feature.

Helping Retailers Market Themselves

Taking a cue from larger stores that study and track their customers, independent businesses should employ some of the same techniques. For the business, having better information and more frequent customer contact builds on the premise that it’s easier to get a current customer to come



© Megan Henning



(Left) Downtown Athens (Georgia) Gift Certificates feature a downtown watercolor picture by a local artist. (Right) Hudson, Ohio, offers shoppers magnetic strip gift cards.

back more frequently than it is to attract new shoppers or clients. For customers, regular contact from businesses they patronize as long as it respects their privacy preferences can result in a better, more personalized experience through individualized communication and service.

Businesses might invite customers to attend special seasonal events or merchandise previews, or they may call a customer when a particular item of interest comes in. Many small businesses are using customer contact management software or web-based services. E-mail marketing allows merchants to tailor their messages to specific customer interests: they can highlight a one-of-a-kind product or a product category of interest to the customer, promote in-store demonstrations or workshops, and provide gift ideas at holidays.

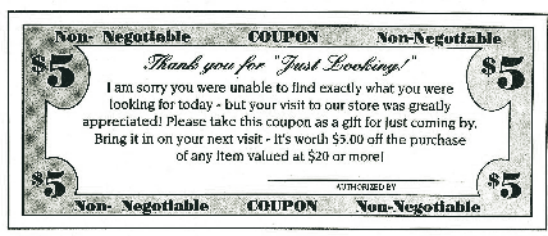
While websites serve as destinations in themselves for large web-based business enterprises like Amazon.com, they serve a slightly different purpose for Main Street businesses: websites and e-mail marketing provide an effective and cost-efficient way for businesses to expand a customer relationship that started with an in-store visit. Websites also help new customers find the business. Even if a customer lives elsewhere, the relationship can continue beyond infrequent visits—especially if the website offers e-Commerce features.

Evaluating Promotional Activities

You probably already track data related to business development, such as business openings and closings. Similarly, you should track the results of your promotion and marketing work.

Earlier in the chapter we discussed marketing plans and the need to determine measurable goals for each promotional activity as it relates to reaching your target markets. Developing specific goals will make you more effective when planning and more objective when evaluating. You can use your goals to help track your promotion and marketing programs. Here are the primary benefits of evaluating your promotions:

- Demonstrates the event’s reach to current and future advertisers and funders;
- Demonstrates your ability to reach targeted groups;
- Allows you to compare events and programs from year to year;



This coupon entices shoppers to return—and the redemptions help track success.

- Quantifies income generated either by promotions or contributing activities;
- Determines the cost-benefit ratio of the amount of money and/or volunteer hours necessary to implement the promotion versus the income, good will, recognition, etc., that it generates. (The goal of every promotion may not be to generate revenue—particularly image campaigns);
- Quantifies a promotion’s impact on district sales (especially business promotions);
- Measures the experience and satisfaction of participants or attendees; and
- Quantifies media exposure of the district.

Gathering information from attendees will help you determine if they had a good experience; gathering information from businesses will tell you whether the event or promotional activity benefited them.

Ways of Measuring

- **Attendance.** For special events, the number of attendees represents a principal benchmark. Tabulating participants can be as easy as counting ticket stubs or counting people as they come through the door or front gate. If the event takes place outdoors, in a large area, there are a number of techniques for estimating crowds. Typically, you count the number of people in several representative sample areas and extrapolate for the full area of the event. Note that the density of attendance typically changes as the event progresses. You will need to count at different times, and you will need to know how long people stayed at the event.
- **Surveys.** Traffic counts can tell you how many people came to your event, but surveys can tell you if you are reaching your target audience and even reveal how attendees learned about the event. Short attendee surveys and post-event focus groups help measure the relative quality of attendees’ experiences during an event in order to identify improvements from year to year. This kind of information is best gathered through a survey distributed randomly to attendees.

Conduct a survey at each event to determine where people came from, how long they stayed, and how much they spent (e.g., on food, entertainment, and retail purchases). You’ll be able to illustrate on a map the event’s geographic draw and quantify the economic impact for your district. Ask people to rate the quality of their experience according to several criteria. Depending on your planning needs, you may also wish to ask how many people were in their party and other questions to help in assessing your promotion. (Note that a survey at an event should never be used for gathering baseline data about typical Main Street shoppers.)



© Timothy Bishop

Main Street volunteers in Ellensburg, Washington, get ready to survey event participants.

The Union Square Main Street program tracks regular attendance at the weekly farmers market mentioned earlier in this chapter and conducts surveys to gather customer demographic information as well as how much shoppers spend at the market and at area businesses. Union Square learned that the farmers market for each season (June through October) has a roughly \$500,000 economic impact, with half going to the farm vendors and half going to area businesses.

Your program should also gather feedback from local business owners throughout the year so you can reiterate the purpose of each event as well as gather input. Two good ways to collect information are to distribute short, post-event surveys and to host an annual meeting with all business owners.

After each event, immediately send business owners a short survey that includes:

- A thank you for their participation/support;
- Directions on how and when to return the survey;
- A brief description of the event's purpose so they understand what its goals were and can use them to guide their responses; and
- Three to five questions written specifically to gauge their level of participation and satisfaction with the event.

For example, after retail sales/business-generating events, ask business owners about the type of business, whether in-store traffic was more or less compared with the previous year, whether sales increased, whether they thought the event was good for their business—and for the entire district. Merchant surveys can be disseminated as a one-page flyer or distributed and tabulated using simple web-based survey tools.

Once a year, all business owners should take a survey or attend a meeting to report on the year's full set of promotional activities, comparing all of them side-by-side; review the year's promotional calendar; discuss feedback; and revise next year's promotional strategy. If done correctly, soliciting business owners' feedback can generate a lot of good information and support:

- Ask merchants to rate the sales impact (e.g., positive, neutral, or negative) for all events, comparatively. This information will help you determine which events are most productive from the retailers' perspectives.
- Ask business owners which promotional activities they would like to see repeated in the future and which events they would like to see dropped (and why).
- Ask open-ended questions to solicit specific suggestions on ways to change existing promotional activities.
- As part of your analysis, ask merchants which hours they were open during each event—and use a chart to illustrate the percentage of businesses open during key events. (If the hours don't coincide, then the event won't have much impact on merchants one way or the other.)
- **Sales.** The best way to gauge the success of a retail promotion is to measure its effect on sales. While merchants aren't likely to tell you their actual sales, they will probably tell you the percentage difference from typical sales for the same day or period of time. If the retail activity includes a coupon or other tracking mechanism, merchants will probably be willing to tell you how many coupons were redeemed. It can be beneficial to select 10 to 20 businesses to help you consistently track data from year to year. Businesses can be given an identifier number to preserve their anonymity.
- **Media value.** If you've done your communications job right, the media will likely cover the promotional activity in ways that might include news or feature stories, photographs, live television coverage, and the like. (This is in addition to any paid advertising you may have placed.) Clip newspaper articles, print out online blog or media coverage, and record any other media mentions. You can quantify the value of this news coverage by calculating what it would cost to buy the same amount of space or air time for advertising.

For more details on creating surveys, read "Surveys" on www.MainStreet.org/RevitalizingMainStreet.

Funding Promotional Activities

For promotional activities such as cooperative advertising, the funding sources are typically straightforward: businesses that participate in the advertising campaign ante up a share of the advertising costs. Other promotional activities require more diverse funding structures.

- **Sponsorships.** Both local businesses and national corporations are potential supporters of promotional programs—especially special events. Corporate sponsors typically require a value for their sponsorship dollars that is roughly equivalent to advertising costs for reaching the same audience. They are interested in sponsorship

opportunities when the venue offers access to their target customer segments. Local service businesses might find value in sponsoring an event or another aspect of your program if they see the opportunity as a good match for them and if the sponsorship is visible. Goodwill and good public relations can be strong selling points for getting the support of business owners who understand the value of public perception. Consider naming rights, logo placement, website links, putting the business name on event materials, and asking a representative to speak at the event or set up a booth as part of a valuable sponsorship package. The Main Street program in Libertyville, Illinois, devised a menu of sponsorship opportunities that are packaged in a well-designed brochure and sold once a year for all activities. Sponsors like the package because they are only asked once, and the program knows in advance sources of funds for each event.

- **Ticket sales.** Gate/ticket receipts are appropriate for controlled-access events.
- **Vendors.** For special events, the Main Street program may be deputized by the municipality to sell permits to outside vendors, and those receipts (which come in before the event and are typically nonrefundable) can ease cash flow in addition to creating a profit center.
- **Food and beverage concessions.** You may decide to undertake “do-it-yourself” concessions, rather than licensing them to vendors. Before doing so, determine if this is the best use of your available volunteer resources. Alternatively, you may choose to bring in a charitable organization (e.g., the Rotary Club) to run concessions. In either case, check with your local health officials before getting involved in food vending.
- **Merchandising.** Selling customized merchandise (such as T-shirts or Christmas ornaments) has proved profitable for some Main Street programs.
- **Advertising.** Buying ad space for an event or retail promotion can be costly; on the other hand, it can also be a revenue source if you are able to set up bundled packages that provide advertising value to participating businesses while retaining a portion of the revenues for program operations.
- **In-kind donations.** Some cities participate financially in Main Street promotions seen to have a public benefit. Many local governments provide valuable in-kind services, such as extra police and public works staffing, and many local businesses donate items or even services to help your promotions succeed and to reduce costs.

Dealing with Prickly Issues

Promotion can present opportunities to address thorny issues in positive or light-hearted ways. Ex-



Promotions can help the public deal with inconveniences presented by streetscape projects.

amples of such issues include road or streetscape construction projects, parking violations or shortages, and trash and litter, to name a few. To provide an example of how creative solutions can help deal with prickly issues, this section will explore the use of promotions during streetscape construction.

More than likely, at some point during your district’s revitalization, major streetscape improvements will be necessary to provide updated infrastructure, traffic-calming elements, new sidewalks, and lights to improve circulation and make the district more attractive to customers, businesses, and investors. (See Chapter 15, Public Improvements, to learn more about streetscape improvements.)

Public improvement construction can last for several months, or even longer when the project is phased over a couple of years. The potential benefits of these improvements are great, but even temporary disruptions can be devastating to local businesses. It is critical that your organization work closely with the city, county, or state department managing the project and that each committee be involved in helping the district weather the construction. A subcommittee or task force can help coordinate all construction mitigation activities. An example of this is the Street Reconstruction Task Force created by the Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership to better manage and coordinate construction mitigation, business assistance, marketing activities, and protection of historic resources in the Wisconsin community’s business district.

Local business owners should be advised as soon as possible about plans to initiate public improvement construction so they can have a year or more to save money and plan a strategy to stay in business even if sales slow. Marginal or poorly run businesses will have a harder time surviving disruptive construction than business owners who are prepared. Your Main Street organization can be an integral business assistance resource by offering business improvement seminars that teach owners how to strengthen their operations before construction starts and how to prepare for slower business during those months. The more advance notice you can provide, the smoother it will go.

Half of the battle in mitigating the impact on businesses is communication; both patrons and merchants should know what to expect, and when to expect it, block by block. Your organization can be an excellent liaison to keep open the lines of communication between

the public and private sectors. Construction firms must give business owners advanced notice of when their sidewalks will be closed and their entrances blocked so they can make arrangements to provide alternate entrances.

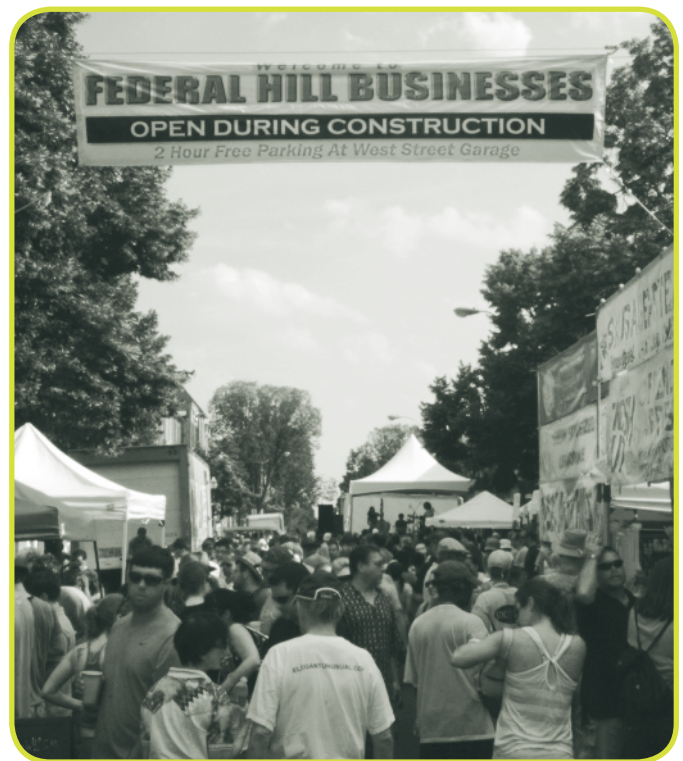
Some Main Street programs like Lee's Summit and Downtown Washington in Missouri created websites specifically to give the public frequent updates and even webcam glimpses of the project's progress. Barracks Row Main Street in Washington, D.C., hosted bi-monthly "Construction Coffee Update" meetings with local business owners and city officials to provide updates and answer questions. Barracks Row also submitted articles to local newspapers about the progress being made block by block and distributed quarterly updates on the construction to stakeholders.

Construction websites and blogs, the Main Street website, print and electronic newsletters, public meetings, and newspaper articles should not only provide updates, but should also inform the public that the Main Street organization is the hub for construction-related information. Use these communication channels to show how the project is being funded; display the final plans, sketches and timelines; explain where to get more information; discuss how many phases will be needed to complete the project; and provide other important information.

The other half of the battle is keeping the commercial district open for business during construction. Your design committee can produce temporary signs to direct pedestrians to open sidewalks and businesses and work with the construction project manager to make sure temporary traffic signs clearly direct drivers to available parking and open businesses. The committee can also create street signs that include items like your logo, a construction image campaign tagline, "after" renderings, a construction update website address, and a list of the businesses on each block during the construction.

The Main Street organization also needs to play a strong role in setting an optimistic tone for the improvements. Promoting the important benefits that the construction will bring to the businesses and the community's quality of life will help build public support. Construction image campaigns can also shape the public's perception about what the changes will mean to them and remind people that businesses are still open. Use special flyers, posters, and advertisements to send the message that the construction may be inconvenient but the end result will be worth it.

Counter any negative publicity, such as speculations that the district will be impassable or that businesses will be closed, with the facts and give the situation a positive spin. Reiterate that there is still plenty of parking, intact side-



© Jane Seebold

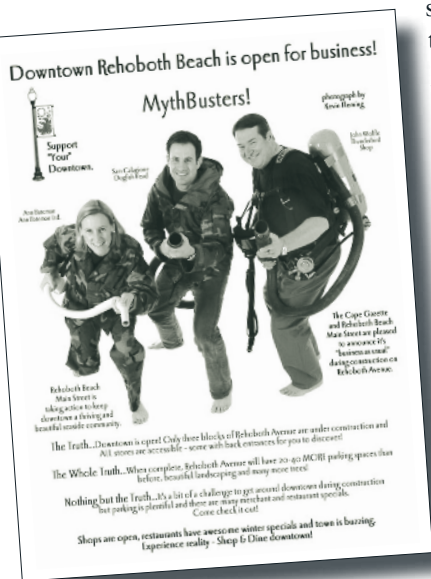
Events can show the public that Main Street is still open despite construction.

walks, and open businesses, and stress the fact that the community is being transformed for the better. Main Street Richmond-Wayne County, Inc., in Indiana, created several slogans like "Business Improvement Zone" and "We are turning upside down for you" to complement images of buoyant Main Street volunteers wearing hardhats and bouncing with enthusiasm over the project. Many Main Street organizations create "Buy a Brick" fund-raising promotions to encourage enthusiasm and involve stakeholders in the project.

Promotions play a huge role in both setting the tone and reminding customers that businesses are open. Promotions ranging from sales to contests attract people to Main Street despite the dust. If your district has a weekly event, such as a farmers market, try to keep it operating, even if you need to find another downtown location and coordinate parking for it. Getting people to continue patronizing the area is essential.

Special events that make people want to be a part of the chaos, rather than avoid it, should be planned throughout the streetscape project. Barracks Row scheduled promotions ranging from retail events such as a Halloween Trick-or-Treat in district shops to a neighborhood clean-up day attended by the mayor who helped plant cherry trees. Discounts provide an obvious incentive for customers to wrestle with the inconvenience, but relying on discount sales aren't necessarily good for the bottom line.

Another approach is to turn the inconvenience on its head, in a survival-against-the-odds way. Mainstreet Steamboat Springs (Colorado) hosted a construction kick-off party with music, food, and downtown activities to celebrate the start of its 10-block project. Before the event, it hosted a hard-hat decorating contest as a fund raiser for the Steamboat Art Museum. The entry fee was \$10. The





Mainstreet Steamboat Springs hosted a streetscape construction kick-off party, complete with decorated hard hats.

hats were donated by three of the participating construction companies and displayed at the museum for two weeks before the event so people could judge the best ones. Another art-related event invited people to paint 4-x-8-foot sheets of plywood that were attached to the pedestrian tunnels next to the construction site. Both the wood and the paint were donated by a construction company and a local paint company. As part of the image campaign, lamppost banners featuring the slogan “Downtown Renaissance... We’re Diggin’ It” were hung to remind people that Steamboat Springs is becoming an arts and entertainment district.

During the first phase of a four-phase streetscape project kicked off by Main Street Ripley in West Virginia, the promotion committee launched its “Diggin’ For Dollars” campaign. Main Street Ripley gave each retail establishment on Court Street a bucket of sand. Using \$400 from its budget, the committee made \$1, \$5, and \$10 coupons to bury in the buckets. After making a purchase, customers were invited to dig for a treasure. The whole retail community jumped on board to show their support for the Court Street merchants. Businesses throughout downtown added coupons to the buckets of neighboring businesses, adding a cross-marketing aspect to the retail promotion. The executive director noted that merchants reported an increase in their sales during construction because they kept filling up the buckets.

Regardless of which types of events or image campaign projects you plan, include funding for each project in your annual budget.

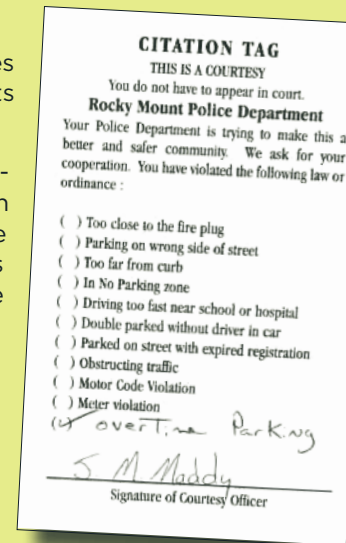
Conclusion

Although your promotion committee volunteers may enjoy working on projects, producing festivals and other special events, developing image-building initiatives, and business promotions are about more than having fun—they must be strategic elements of your comprehensive Main Street approach. Your promotional activities have the power to change the minds and habits of visitors and customers and make them think of your district as the place to do business or seek entertainment. Keep your Main Street position statement and target audience in mind and develop your promotion work plans to meet your organization’s goals.

Parking Doesn’t Have to be a Prickly Issue!

When people complain about parking, it may be because there’s a parking shortage. But it may equally be because they don’t like having to feed a parking meter or because they believe enforcement is too stringent. Main Street communities have handled these complaints in creative and lighthearted ways.

- Rocky Mount, Virginia, issues “courtesy” parking tickets (pictured right).
- Ellensburg Downtown Association in Washington places envelopes on the cars of downtown business employees who park in the all-day parking lot. The envelope contains a thank-you letter acknowledging that the “parker” is doing his or her part by leaving two-hour parking spaces for customers as well as a few coupons from downtown merchants.



- When Main Street Rogers in Arkansas learned that employees parking in prime customer spaces was one of the primary reasons for its parking problem, it started a positive reinforcement program that rewards employees for parking in designated areas. The parking committee established employee-designated spots in non-prime parking areas throughout the downtown. Using money raised by Main Street Rogers, a local neighborhood group, and downtown businesses, the program began to hold a monthly drawing. If the employee has parked in a designated spot on the day of the drawing, he or she is awarded \$50 or \$150 in December.
- Ardmore, Oklahoma, launched a Practically Perfect Parking Program that playfully promotes employees parking in non-prime spaces. It featured a monthly parking poem and article in its newsletter, as well as a drawing for registered downtown employees for gifts donated by local merchants.
- To encourage people to shop downtown, MainStreet Port Huron in Michigan worked with the city to glue parking tokens, which are good for two hours, into its newsletter. During the holiday shopping season, the group sells rolls of tokens for the discounted price of two for the price of one.

© Andrea L. Dono



RESOURCES

Website

Downtown Idea Exchange, Downtown Promotion Reporter: These monthly newsletters provide the details behind organizing, funding, and producing various events and promotions. www.downtowndevelopment.com/dix.php

Articles

“Becoming West Edge: Branding Gives a Nameless Neighborhood an Identity,” by Kyle Vixie, *Main Street News*, September 2005. This branding process looks at the power of getting community support.

“Building the Buzz: Pittsburgh’s Design Zone Grabs a Marketing Niche and Runs with it,” by Andrea L. Dono, *Main Street News*, January 2005. Local stakeholders led a grassroots effort to build the community’s brand through business recruitment and promotions.

“Focus Groups,” by Josh Bloom, *Main Street News*, March 2006. Survey customers in depth through focus groups.

“Surveys,” by Josh Bloom, *Main Street News*, April 2005. Learn how to develop effective surveys.

“From Planning to Promotion: Surviving Streetscape Construction,” by Bill McLeod, *Main Street News*, January 2007. Barracks Row shares its strategy and lessons learned from mitigating construction disruptions.

“How Special Events Benefit Local Businesses,” by Luke VanBellegem, *Main Street News*, June 2007. Learn about ways Main Street programs are making events more beneficial to retailers as well as ways they measure the economic impact of events.

“Strengthening the Commercial District: 10 Tips for Terrific Retail Promotions,” by Sheri Stuart, *Main Street News*, December 2002. Provides tips and Main Street promotion examples for improving your retail activities and adding new events to your work plan.

Books

Marketing an Image (National Trust Main Street Center, 2004). Learn how to identify and leverage your community’s assets; develop a graphical look for your district and organization; and develop exciting promotions.

Main Street Committee Handbook: Promotion (National Main Street Center, 1996). This handbook, developed specifically for your promotion committee members, explains roles and responsibilities and typical tasks and work plan projects.

How to Conduct Your Own Survey, by Priscilla Salant and Don A. Dillman (Wiley, 1994). Discusses how to choose the best survey tool to meet your needs as well as how to develop the survey and compile results.

Farm-fresh Ideas for Producers, Managers & Communities, by Vance Corum, Marcie Rosenzweig, Eric Gibson (New World Publishing, 2005). From record keeping and product selection to insurance and special events—this book teaches you how to run a farmers market.

How to Be Successful in Sponsorship Sales, by Sylvia Allen and C. Scott Amann (Allen Consulting, 1998). Explains how to tap local, regional, and national sponsors and discusses levels of sponsorships.

What Mother Never Told You About Retail: A Small Store Survival Guide, by T.J. Reid (2003). The author has survived the ups and downs of running a small fashion boutique and shares her strategy for success for small business owners to build excitement and attract a customer base.

Image, far right © Lucas Adams



HERITAGE TOURISM:

Capitalizing on Not Being AnyPlace, USA

By Amy Jordan Webb

Tourism is big business.

According to the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), in 2005, domestic travelers in the United States spent more than \$650 billion, generating approximately 8 million jobs, \$171.4 billion in payroll income, and \$104.9 billion in tax revenues for federal, state, and local governments. In addition to new jobs, new businesses, and higher property values, well-managed tourism improves the quality of life and builds community pride. This is particularly true for the heritage segment of the tourism market.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines heritage tourism as “traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past. Heritage tourism includes historic, cultural, and natural resources.” Heritage travelers can include daytrippers, event-goers who journey 50 miles or more from their homes, and overnight travelers. As the economic impact of tourism increases dramatically when visitors spend the night, successful destinations try to build an overnight tourism market.

Heritage tourism is an economic development tool that can be used by Main Street communities, heritage regions, scenic byways, heritage areas, states, and cities. It provides an opportunity to stimulate the local economy while helping to build community pride, preserve irreplaceable historic and cultural assets, and improve the quality of life for visitors and residents alike. While heritage tourism itself is nothing new, changes in American travel habits are opening up new opportunities for some communities to cash in on the benefits of this type of travel. The “Great American Time Squeeze,” created by an increasing number of dual-income families, increasing work hours, and decreasing vacation time, is changing vacation habits.



Trends in Heritage Tourism

Americans are taking shorter, more frequent trips and more weekend excursions to destinations closer to home. For smaller, historic communities located within driving distance of a major metropolitan area, this can mean new opportunities for heritage tourism.

Hectic lifestyles have boosted demand for packages and itineraries that lessen the time required for trip planning. Travelers are also increasingly turning to the Internet both to get travel information and to book travel (especially airfare and lodging). More than half (55 percent) of heritage travelers plan their trips a month or less before traveling, and the Internet offers immediate access to travel information. With shorter planning time, the use of the Internet for marketing is becoming more important. As busy lifestyles limit the amount of time travelers have to plan trips, visitors are leaving many decisions until after they arrive.

As the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) grow older and have more discretionary time and money to travel, they are seeking travel experiences such as heri-

tage tourism. According to a 1998 report on the Boomer travel market by the National Tour Association: “Because Boomers are more experienced travelers, they will expect more from their experiences; and terms such as cultural tourism, heritage tourism, sports tourism, active tourism, adventure travel, and ecotourism will be commonly used within the next decade.” Indeed, over the past 10 years, this prediction has become a reality. Boomers currently generate more travel than any other age group, and generally speaking, they fit the profile of heritage travelers.

Heritage travelers show a growing interest in experiencing diverse aspects of America’s history. As noted historian David McCullough wrote, “For a long time the spotlight has been on only a relatively few people—white, male descendants of Western Europeans. Now the lights on the stage are coming up, revealing for the first time all of the others who have been on the stage all the time.” Telling the story of everyday life for the different ethnic groups who make up America offers new opportunities for heritage tourism.

As national franchises and chains add to the homogeneity of communities across America, heritage

CASE STUDY

Natchitoches, Louisiana

Making Tourism a Community-wide Effort

Tourism is one of the top three industries in Natchitoches, Louisiana, and the entire town takes it very seriously. Natchitoches has received many accolades, including being named one of the National Trust’s Dozen Distinctive Destinations, winning a Great American Main Street Award, and being selected as a Preserve America community. Various magazines have named it one of the top places to retire. The city, the Main Street program, local businesses, Northwestern State University, the chamber of commerce, the convention and visitor’s bureau, and heritage and cultural groups work together to make every visitor to Natchitoches feel welcome and leave with an idea of what makes this place special.

“Tourism sustains us all year,” says Courtney Hornsby, the executive director of Natchitoches Main Street. One look at the community’s official website www.natchitoches.net shows that there is a lot going on here. There seems to be something happening every day of the week and at least one major festival each month celebrates local music, food, crafts, and other elements of local culture—all culminating during the holiday season. The annual Christmas festival has been a December tradition since 1927, but in the 1990s, Natchitoches decided to turn the Festival of Lights into a six-week event that starts around Thanksgiving and ends a week after New Year’s

Day. Weekly firework displays, downtown decorations, vendors along the river, carriage rides, a tour of homes, mini-festivals, and a variety of other events make Natchitoches an exciting and lively destination.

According to Hornsby, various organizations and agencies work together in partnership to make events a success. No one agency solely produces events—various groups take turns producing educational lectures and demonstrations, festivals, and more. If an organization is holding an event, the Main Street program might help with logistical support, such as handling street closures. Hornsby says that they want to engage people more than just one day a week. She says that regardless of whether visitors arrive on a Monday or a Friday, they will get a solid message of what Natchitoches is about, from cuisine to Creole culture to the history that comes with being the first European settlement in the Louisiana Purchase territory.

The city employs a full-time beautification director who is responsible for making sure that the downtown and its gateway are visually appealing all year round—during the fall, for example, pumpkins and mums are set out in the district. “City leadership sees this as an investment, not an expense,” says Hornsby. “We want people to come back and next time to stay longer.”



travelers are seeking to escape “Anyplace, USA,” by going to communities that offer unique attractions and experiences. Main Street communities throughout America offer this type of one-of-a-kind destination, and thus have great potential appeal for heritage travelers.

Are Heritage Travelers Different?

One of the most appealing characteristics of heritage travelers for Main Street communities is that they are more likely to shop than other travelers. Close to half (44 percent) of heritage travelers include shopping as part of their travel plans. Shopping is the most popular vacation activity for U.S. travelers, with 33 percent of all travelers including shopping as part of their travel plans.¹ A TIA study of travelers who shop indicates that they are looking for stores they do not have at home (73 percent), items they cannot get at home (67 percent), items that represent the destination they are visiting (53 percent), and a unique shopping atmosphere (52 percent).

1. Source: Travel Industry Association of America, 2002

Image: © Natchitoches Main Street

The downtown is designed to be walkable and ADA accessible; utilities have been put underground; and new investment in hotels, museums, and the convention center show that hospitality and culture are tightly linked.

Natchitoches received the Preserve America Presidential Award in May 2007, which has brought more attention to the historic district. The Main Street program and the Cane River National Heritage Area received a Preserve America grant of \$150,000 to support their Natchitoches-Cane River Region Heritage Tourism plans. They decided to use the funds to implement a downtown wayfinding and interpretive signage program that includes kiosks, trailblazer signs, historic markers, site-specific signs, a guidebook, and more. This program will meet a need to develop highly visible, quality signs to bridge the gap from the interstate, which is a four-mile drive from downtown, and from the plantations “down river.” The new system will prevent potential visitors from getting lost when traveling to Natchitoches as well as help them understand the significance of everything that they are seeing.

The Natchitoches National Historic Landmark District alone has seen more than \$47 million in private investment and \$1 million in public investment for historic preservation and infrastructure improvements from 1999 to 2007, with almost 80 new business openings during that period. A vibrant economy means higher sales tax revenues, which allow the city to provide more services.

Heritage tourism has brought jobs, tax revenues, and stewards of local culture to Natchitoches. It has also enhanced everyday life for local residents. Many events are free, and a lot of programming is designed to appeal to local residents, not just travelers. This makes access to the community’s heritage resources easier as well as promoting a better understanding of what people have in their own backyards.

Common preferences and characteristics show more good news for Main Street communities. Heritage travelers tend to stay longer and spend more money than other kinds of tourists, and there is a large and growing number of heritage travelers in America. Heritage travel increased 13 percent between 1996 and 2002, more than twice the growth of travel overall (5.6 percent). According to a 2003 national study by the Travel Industry Association of America, 81 percent of adult American travelers could be considered “heritage travelers,” meaning they visited at least one historic or cultural attraction during a trip taken in the past year.

Heritage travelers take frequent trips, with 25 percent taking three or more trips a year. With a growing interest in more frequent, shorter vacations to places closer to home, successful destinations must offer a variety of changing experiences to bring visitors back. Heritage travelers tend to stay an average of 5.2 nights compared with 3.4 nights away from home and spend an average of \$623 per trip as opposed to \$457 per trip for all other U.S. travelers. They are also more likely to stay in a hotel, motel, or bed and breakfast. Heritage travelers tend to be older and better educated than other travelers, and they like to take part in many different kinds of activities while they are traveling (with visiting state and national parks ranking high on the list).

Opportunities for Main Street

Heritage travelers bring outside money into your community, and these dollars will have a trickle-down effect that can benefit many different businesses and institutions. The additional spending by heritage travelers might mean that your Main Street community will be able to sustain certain businesses or services that residents want, but can’t support on local spending alone. These might include a fine-dining restaurant, a bookstore, or perhaps an old-fashioned soda fountain.

Diversifying your downtown or neighborhood commercial district’s economy by appealing to local as well as out-of-town customers protects your businesses against fluctuations in the local economy. If your commercial district depends heavily on a major business that suddenly closes, local customers may have less disposable income to spend at Main Street businesses—but out-of-town customers may not be affected. Conversely, if the price of gas suddenly spikes and fewer visitors drive to your community, you still have a strong base of local customers to keep local businesses thriving.

Tourism can bring both economic as well as quality-of-life benefits to communities. One challenge is ensuring that tourism does not destroy the very heritage that attracts visitors in the first place. Furthermore, tourism is a competitive, sophisticated, fast-changing industry that presents its own challenges. It is generally a clean industry—no smokestacks or dangerous chemicals—but it can put demands on the infrastructure of a community, including roads, airport, and water supplies, as well as public services like police and fire protection.

Events are a great way to turn your Main Street community into a heritage tourism destination. The Holiday Lighting Festival, held annually in Denton, Texas, on the Thursday after Thanksgiving, attracts more than 8,000 people from the community and surrounding area. A true partnership, the Denton Holiday Festival Association works with volunteers from Denton Main Street, Denton County Historical Commission, Denton Convention and Visitors Bureau, local businesses, the city, and Denton County museums to bring musical performances to the county courthouse's lawn and interior spaces and to plan special events that take place inside the Courthouse-on-the-Square Museum. Area business owners decorate their storefronts and compete for the Best Hot Apple Cider in the Wassail Fest. A shuttle provides transportation to the Bayless-Selby House Museum located off the square. The festival began in 1981 as the Victorian Celebration—an event that attracted a few hundred onlookers and focused on decorating the courthouse for the holidays. Today, the festival includes events throughout the weekend for an ever-growing audience.

Can Your Main Street be a Heritage Destination?

Not every community can have a successful heritage tourism program. Your district needs to have retained many of its historic buildings, as well as the cultural traditions that shaped the community. Once irreplaceable historic resources have been lost, there is no way to get them back. Viewing a parking lot with a sign that states “On this site once stood...” is less compelling than visiting a preserved historic building.

The heritage tourism assets in your Main Street community also include local businesses. Coronado, California, for example, passed a Formula Business Ordinance to regulate the number, location, and operation of formula businesses, including fast-food restaurants, to maintain the city's unique village character and the vitality of the

commercial district. The city considers a business with more than 15 locations a formula business. The zoning ordinance prohibits more than 10 fast-food establishments in the commercial district, and new formula eateries must obtain a special use permit, may not locate on a corner, and must meet design standards.

Often when communities adopt these ordinances, design requirements alone can be strong deterrents to national businesses that feel their brand relies on looking and operating like their other locations.

In addition to having historic and cultural assets, successful, sustainable heritage tourism programs also require both human and financial resources to develop and maintain programs. Because heritage tourism brings together many diverse partners, strong leadership is a critical ingredient.

Similarly, it can be a challenge for a small Main Street community to launch a comprehensive heritage tourism program on its own. Especially in rural areas, a regional approach is vital both to provide a critical mass of things to see and do within an area and to pool resources for tourism marketing efforts, which can be costly. Main Street communities can either join forces with an existing regional effort such as a heritage area or scenic byway; or if no regional entity exists, they can reach out to other heritage communities and attractions to create a new regional heritage tourism effort.

Location is also a consideration. A key question is whether the destination is worth the drive. In other words, how far off the beaten track is your Main Street community? The farther travelers have to go out of their way to visit your community, the more compelling your heritage attractions need to be.

Developing a Successful Heritage Tourism Strategy

The National Trust for Historic Preservation first became involved in heritage tourism development in 1989 through an intensive three-year heritage tourism initiative. This

CASE STUDY

Helena, Arkansas

Putting Your Community on the Map

A small festival that celebrates local heritage can really take off if produced well. Arkansas's King Biscuit Blues Festival, renamed the Arkansas Blues and Heritage Festival, began in 1986 as a one-day musical tribute to Sonny Boy Williamson who founded “King Biscuit Time,” a live Blues radio program.

The event began when a local group of Blues fans teamed up with the Main Street program in Helena, a town 70 miles southwest of Memphis, to produce a festival that celebrates the community's heritage and brought festival-goers downtown to discover its unique local goods and services. Today, this annual event spans an entire weekend in October and attracts more than 100,000 people from as far away as Japan. The festival brings more business to merchants in Helena than the Christmas holiday season and has helped promote the community as a major tourist destination in Arkansas.



Image: © Alex Drew McGee

Awards and Recognition

Seeking awards and designations for your Main Street community is a good way to demonstrate the quality and authenticity of the experience your town has to offer—and confirms that you are doing it well. Several Main Street communities, including Silver City, New Mexico; Guthrie, Oklahoma; Prescott, Arizona; and Goliad, Texas, have made *True West Magazine's* list of Top Ten True Western Towns of the Year. The magazine gives this recognition to towns that have made an important contribution to preserving their heritage and cites historic preservation and heritage festivals as part of the reason why they earned this award.



pilot initiative worked with 16 regions in four states and resulted in the creation of five guiding principles and four basic steps for developing or expanding existing heritage tourism programs. These principles and steps have stood the test of time and continue to serve as the hallmark for successful, sustainable heritage tourism programs.

Five Principles for Successful and Sustainable Heritage Tourism

1. **Collaborate.** Heritage tourism requires effective partnerships. Much more can be accomplished by working with others than by working alone.
2. **Find the fit between the community and tourism.** Heritage tourism should make a community a better place to live *and* a better place to visit. Respect the community's capacity so everyone benefits.
3. **Make sites and programs come alive.** Look for ways to make visitor experiences exciting, engaging, and interactive.
4. **Focus on quality and authenticity.** Today's heritage traveler is more sophisticated and will expect a high-quality and authentic experience.
5. **Preserve and protect irreplaceable resources.** Many of your community's cultural, historic, and natural resources cannot be replaced if they are lost. Take good care of them.

Four Steps For Heritage Tourism Development

The following four steps for heritage tourism development outlined can help you start a new program or take an existing program to the next level. As new attractions and visitor services are developed, and as destinations expand their marketing reach, these steps are repeated at each phase of development:

1. **Assess the potential.** Evaluate what your community has to offer in the following areas: attractions, visitor services, organizational capabilities, ability to protect resources, and marketing.

2. **Plan and organize.** Make good use of human and financial resources. Set priorities and measurable goals.
3. **Prepare, protect, and manage.** Look to the future. Be sure that the choices you make now will improve your community for the long term.
4. **Market for success.** Develop a multi-year, multi-tiered marketing plan that targets your market. Look for local, regional, state, or national partners.

Potential Heritage Tourism Partners

Collaboration is the first guiding principle for successful heritage tourism efforts for a good reason. Heritage tourism brings together a diverse array of interests, including preservation, tourism, the arts, museums, historical societies, and economic development. Get in touch with representatives from each of these areas and ask them to be part of this effort.

If your community is part of an existing heritage tourism region such as a heritage area or scenic byway, there may already be a larger partnership entity with which your Main Street program can work. If this is not the case and you decide to create a new regional heritage tourism entity, take a look at the tourism or economic development regions in which you are located. Consider these regional assets and attractions to see if there is a logical way to create a region based on geographic features or thematic connections. One of the challenges in creating a new regional effort is that political and funding mechanisms are often set up to function at the community, county, or state level. Travelers, on the other hand, are much more interested in thematic or geographic connections than they are in county or state lines.

Local business owners can be great at collaborating on tourism promotion ideas. For example, the manager of a recreation park on the lake near downtown in Gilmer, Texas, approached the nearby Main Street program to develop a brochure highlighting local attractions and businesses. Several partners came together to create full-color maps of the downtown with a business directory, a calendar of events, and recreational information.

If your Main Street community answers **YES** to these questions, heritage tourism may be right for you:

1. Are your local businesses looking for new ways to increase sales revenues?
2. Does your community offer unique historic or cultural attractions?
3. Do you have an interesting variety of restaurants to appeal to travelers?
4. Is your community an enjoyable place to spend a day or weekend?
5. Is your community part of a regional heritage area or scenic byway?
6. Can you meet the basic needs of visitors for an information center and/or public restrooms?
7. Are there organizations in your community or region that can help coordinate a heritage tourism effort?
8. Is your community within a few hours drive of a major urban center?



The maps, which cross-promote heritage tourism and eco-tourism, were distributed to visitor centers and to trade show venues.

Many states have individuals in state tourism, preservation, arts, or humanities organizations that can help you develop a heritage tourism program. For a current list of heritage tourism contacts in your state, look in the “Resources” section of www.culturalheritagetourism.org.

Since 2000, artists have been opening studios and showrooms in three small Missouri communities that stretch along 50 miles of the Mississippi River. Highway 79—a National Scenic Byway—physically connects Clarksville, Hannibal, and Louisiana, which also share a connection through The Provenance Project—an organization dedicated to using arts and artists to spur economic development, which, in turn, will spur heritage tourism. The group began placing ads in national trade journals to entice artisans to relocate to these picturesque communities. Tourists pour into the area for a semi-annual gallery tour called 50 Miles of Art where they can watch artists work, buy their pieces, and enjoy various recreational and historic attractions.

Clarksville, a town with a population of 500, developed a strong artisans niche and an antiques cluster. When the program started in 1989, the downtown vacancy rate was 89 percent; by 2006, it had dropped to 15 percent. “Authenticity in appearance and retail establishments that create and sell distinctive items that [aren’t] available in other communities are what have made Clarksville unique,” says Ralph Huesing, executive director of Historic Clarksville, Inc.

By focusing on recruiting businesses that offer items people can’t find anywhere else and preserving its

irreplaceable architecture, the Main Street community has leveraged its sense of place and authenticity to create a vibrant downtown.

Ways to Measure the Impact of Heritage Tourism

Successful heritage tourism programs bring both quantitative and qualitative benefits to Main Street communities. Measuring the impact of heritage tourism, like the economic impact of tourism in general, is challenging because tourism expenditures affect many different sectors of the local economy. While 100 percent of lodging expenditures might clearly be attributed to tourism, tourist spending also includes a portion of retail and restaurant sales, and expenditures in other sectors of the local economy.

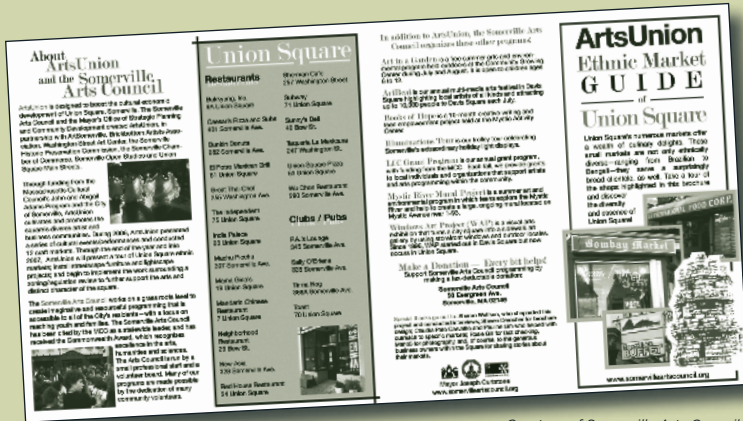
One effective way to differentiate between local and out-of-town spending is to encourage merchants to track zip codes. This information can also provide valuable marketing insights about where customers originate.

Surveys can also help you learn more about your tourism market. Asking visitors about expenditures is one way to measure the economic impact of tourism. Some communities have worked with local colleges or universities to conduct an economic impact survey, often for an annual event. Surveys can also measure customer satisfaction. By repeating exit surveys over time, Main Street communities can see if customer satisfaction is increasing or decreasing. When possible, work with research professionals to develop surveys and keep in mind that the way in which surveys are distributed and collected can affect the accuracy of the findings.

How to Involve Local Businesses

Local Main Street businesses can help support a heritage tourism effort in a number of ways, including:

- Encouraging local businesses to diversify their merchandise or services to appeal to both local and out-of-town customers;
- Creating packages that include lodging, dining, attractions, and shopping to appeal to the heritage travel market;



Courtesy of Somerville Arts Council

- Cultivating hospitality skills among local merchants to respond to the needs of travelers, from offering shipping services for larger items to cross-marketing businesses to keep travelers in the community longer;
- Recruiting new businesses that appeal to heritage tourism travelers as well as local customers; and
- Having local businesses collect zip codes from customers to track expenditures by out-of-town customers.

Businesses can be a great draw for your community. The arts council of Somerville, Massachusetts, for example, uses the arts as an economic development strategy. To encourage exploration of the Union Square Main Street district, the council produced an ethnic markets brochure and began offering free, guided tours of the markets. The brochure introduces new customers to cuisine and products that come from nations ranging from Brazil to India. The tours offer customers an opportunity to meet the market's shop owners, sample food, and learn more about various cultures and cuisine—a comprehensive experience!

Conclusion

Heritage tourism is not a panacea nor is it a “quick fix” to revitalize a community. Heritage tourism is not the right answer for every town nor should it be seen as the sole salvation for any community. Heritage tourism is not about creating a “Disneyland” experience. It is about taking the real places and real people in your town and finding ways to share them with visitors. It is about finding a preservation-sensitive way to diversify a local economy and retain a sense of place.

As more places recognize the potential of heritage tourism and work to enhance their heritage tourism assets, it will be increasingly important for communities to differentiate themselves from other emerging heritage destinations. While there is a growing market for heritage tourism destinations that have developed interactive and authentic experiences that appeal to today's more educated traveler, there is at the same time increasing competition for these sought-after travelers. By learning from others who have successfully developed heritage tourism attractions, you can avoid pitfalls and maximize your heritage tourism potential.

Make Sites Come Alive

Technology helps make sites come alive. The West Virginia Business Site Locator for Heritage Tourism, for example, matches tourism businesses seeking to locate in culturally rich heritage areas with appropriate properties in West Virginia Main Street communities. The website, www.wvtourismbusinesssites.org, is a collaboration of the West Virginia Development Office, Main Street West Virginia, and the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia.

Off the Road New Mexico is another example of the power of the Internet. Shannon Papin of the New Mexico MainStreet program and Tricia Ware of the New Mexico Economic Development Department took an eight-week road trip (funded by their employers and the McCune Charitable Foundation) to visit 20 New Mexico MainStreet communities and report on their shopping and dining adventures. A website (www.offtheroadnm.com) was created to chart their shopping experiences and food-oriented explorations at locally owned, one-of-a-kind businesses in historic downtowns throughout New Mexico. The accounts offer a brief background on the area, travel directions, and descriptions of several local eateries and shops.



Courtesy of offtheroadnm.com

RESOURCES

Websites

Destination Marketing Association International: This marketing professionals organization provides publications and online resources that can help you market your Main Street community as a destination. www.destinationmarketing.org

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Heritage Tourism Program: The Heritage Tourism Program has created an online clearinghouse of how-to information about the development, marketing, and management of cultural and heritage tourism programs. Its website includes more in-depth information on the five principles and four steps introduced in this chapter, along with success stories, resource directories, research, and more. www.CulturalHeritageTourism.org

The New Rules Project: The Institute for Local Self-Reliance's New Rules Project offers news, resources, and buy-local campaign information as well as sample ordinances and other tools your community can use to promote unique businesses that reflect local flavor. www.NewRules.org

Travel Industry Association: This travel trade association provides updated tourism statistics, trends, and tourism topics. www.tia.org

Article

"Using the Internet to Promote Heritage Tourism," by Patrick W. Andrus, *Main Street News*, October 2000. Describes the National Register travel itinerary website and explains features of a helpful online travel itinerary.

Books

These publications are available from the National Trust for Historic Preservation (www.PreservationBooks.org):

Touring Historic Places, by Priscilla Baker (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1995). A 16-page guide for group tour operators and managers of historic sites to develop, market, and host group heritage tours.

Preserving Our Past: Building Our Future (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1999). An eight-minute video describing the economic impact of heritage tourism and other benefits that heritage tourism can provide.

Share Your Heritage: Heritage Tourism Success Stories (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2001). An 80-page, four-color publication featuring heritage tourism success stories from across the nation. Stories were selected by a national committee including representatives from historic preservation, museums, the arts, and the humanities.

Stories Across America: Opportunities in Rural Tourism (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2001). A companion 44-page publication of rural tourism success stories.

Images from left: © Timothy Bishop; © Lees Dawson; © Leon Steele.



Main Streets are not just collections of old buildings, but the hearts of communities, distinct places, and the roots of our nation. Ignored, abandoned, and otherwise unprotected, they disappear. And with that, so do the souls of communities—and people. In an age of indistinguishable strip centers and homogenous culture, our Main Street districts are more important and compelling than ever.

A comprehensive, multifaceted strategy—the Main Street Four-Point Approach®—offers a blueprint for bringing community centers back to life. The Main Street Approach applies a historic preservation-based economic development strategy to powerful grassroots organization, which yields impressive results in communities of all sizes and in all places.

Revitalizing Main Street provides a foundation for understanding the many facets of commercial district revitalization. From business assistance to zoning, contributing writers selected by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which created the Main Street Four-Point Approach, explain fundamental concepts as well as offer inspiring success stories that show Main Street revitalization in action.



design



promotion



organization



economic restructuring

Main Street

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