1

National Main Street Program

The Main Street Approach

The Eight Principles

Criteria for National Designation

Why is Downtown Important?

Downtown Partners

Stakeholder Benefits

Partner Handouts

OREGON MAIN STREET

intentionally left blank

The Main Street Approach

Main Street™ is a philosophy, a program, and a proven comprehensive approach to downtown commercial district revitalization. This approach has been implemented in over 1,600 cities and towns in 40 states across the nation with the help of the National Main Street Center and statewide downtown revitalization programs.

The success of the Main Street™ approach is based on its comprehensive nature. By carefully integrating four points into a practical downtown management strategy, a local Main Street™ program will produce fundamental changes in a community's economic base:

Organization involves building a Main Street™ framework that is well represented by business and property owners, bankers, citizens, public officials, chambers of commerce, and other local economic development organizations. Everyone must work together to renew downtown. A strong organization provides the stability to build and maintain a long-term effort.

Promotion creates excitement downtown. Street festivals, parades, retail events, and image development campaigns are some of the ways Main Street™ encourages customer traffic. Promotion involves marketing an enticing image to shoppers, investors, and visitors.

Design enhances the attractiveness of the business district. Historic building rehabilitation, street and alley clean-up, colorful banners, landscaping, and lighting all improve the physical image of the downtown as a quality place to shop, work, walk, invest in, and live. Design improvements result in a reinvestment of public and private dollars to downtown.

Economic Restructuring involves analyzing current market forces to develop long-term solutions. Recruiting new businesses, creatively converting unused space for new uses, and sharpening the competitiveness of Main Street's traditional merchants are examples of economic restructuring activities.

The Eight Principles

"Successful Downtown Revitalization"

1. Comprehensive. A single project cannot revitalize a downtown or commercial neighborhood. An ongoing series of initiatives is vital to build community support and create lasting progress.

2. Incremental. Small projects make a big difference. They demonstrate that "things are happening" on Main Street and hone the skills and confidence the program will need to tackle more complex projects.

3. Self-Help. The State can provide valuable direction and technical assistance, but only local leadership can breed long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.

4. Public/Private Partnership. Every local Main Street™ program needs the support and expertise of both the public and private sectors. For an effective partnership, each must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the other.

5. Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets. Unique offerings and local assets provide the solid foundation for a successful Main Street™ initiative.

6. Quality. From storefront design to promotional campaigns to special events, quality must be instilled in the organization.

7. Change. Changing community attitudes and habits is essential to bring about a commercial district renaissance. A carefully planned Main Street™ program will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.

8. Action Oriented. Frequent visible changes in the look and activities of the commercial district will reinforce the perception of positive change. Small, but dramatic, improvements early in the process will remind the community that the revitalization effort is underway.

Criteria for National Designation as a Main Street™ Program

1. Broad-based community support for the commercial district revitalization process with strong support from both the public and private sectors.

2. Vision and mission statements relevant to community conditions and to the local Main Street™ program's organizational stage.

3. Comprehensive Main Street™ work plan.

4. Historic preservation ethic.

5. Active board of directors and committees.

6. Adequate operating budget.

7. Paid professional program manager.

8. Program of ongoing training for staff and volunteers.

9. Reporting of key statistics.

10. Current member of the National Main Street Network.

It takes hard work and commitment by a community to become and maintain its designation as a Main Street community. Along with this designation comes the honor of permission to use the title "Main Street". Communities must be evaluated and meet the criteria above to use this title. Evaluation is done yearly, and will be granted only to Main Street™ designation level communities that fully participate in the Oregon Main Street Programs.

Call the Oregon Main Street Coordinator at 503.986.0134 for more specific information about Main Street™ criteria, use of the Main Street™ name, or the Oregon Main Street Program levels.

Why is Downtown Important?

Can malls and discount centers take the place of downtowns in the future? The answer is most definitely no. Though malls and discount centers play important roles in our communities, downtown is much more than a shopping center. It is critical for everyone involved in downtown revitalization to understand the value of downtown. Here are some good reasons why downtown is important (though they're not in any particular order):

1. Your central business district is a prominent employment center. Even the smallest downtown employs hundreds of people. Downtown is often the largest employer in a community.

2. As a business center, your downtown plays a major role. It may even represent the largest concentration of businesses in your community. It also serves as an incubator for new businesses—the successes of tomorrow.

3. Most of the businesses in your downtown are independently owned. They support a local family who supports the local schools, etc. Independent businesses keep profits in town.

4. Downtown is a reflection of how your community sees itself—a critical factor in business retention and recruitment efforts. When industry begins looking at your community as a possible location, they examine many aspects including the quality of life. Included in quality of life is interest in downtown — is it alive and viable, or does it represent local disinterest and failure?

5. Your downtown represents a significant portion of the community's tax base. If this district declines, property will decrease tax burden on other parts of your community.

6. The central business district is an indispensable shopping and service center. Though it may no longer hold the place as your community's most dominant shopping center, it still includes unique shopping and service opportunities. Attorneys, physicians, accountants, and insurance offices, as well as financial institutions, are often located downtown.

7. Your downtown is the historic core of your community. Many of the buildings are historically significant and help highlight your community's history.

8. Downtown represents a vast amount of public and private investment. Imagine the costs to recreate all the public infrastructure and buildings already existing in your central business district. Think of the waste of past dollars spent if downtown is neglected.

9. A central business district is often a major tourist draw. When people travel, they want to see unique places. There isn't a downtown like yours in the world!

10. Downtown is usually a government center. Most likely it is where your city hall, county courthouse, and post office are located. This "one stop" shopping for government services is a notable feature of downtowns across the country.

And, perhaps, most important, your downtown provides a sense of community and place. As Carol Lifkind, author of *Main Street: The Face of Urban America*, said "…as Main Street, it was uniquely American, a powerful symbol of shared experiences, of common memory, of the challenge, and the struggle of building a civilization… Main Street was always familiar, always recognizable as the heart and soul of the village, town or city."

(Edited from an article by Alicia Goehring, Wisconsin Main Street Program, Wisconsin Department of Development)

Downtown Revitalization Partners

The local downtown revitalization program must involve groups throughout the community to be successful. Different groups have different interests in the downtown. And, while each may have a particular focus, all groups ultimately share the common goal of revitalizing the commercial district. By involving a broad range of constituents in the process, the downtown program can help each group realize that this common goal exists and that cooperation is essential for successful revitalization. Furthermore, by identifying each organization's greatest strengths, the downtown program can help focus that group's energy in the areas where it will be most effective and have the most to contribute. Groups typically represented and involved in successful local downtown revitalization programs include:

Retail & Service Sector Business Owners

Retail and service sector activity is an important part of the downtown's economic base; consequently, business owners have a vested interest in the success of the downtown revitalization program. Retailers are often most interested in, and the most valuable contributors to downtown promotional activities, though their involvement in other downtown activities can also be beneficial.

Property Owners

Since they literally own the downtown, property owners have a direct interest in the downtown program's success and often become active participants in the revitalization process. Absentee owners, though, may show little or no interest in the program, nonetheless, they should be kept informed about revitalization activities and, as the program develops greater competency in directing downtown's economic growth, should continue to be invited to take part in its projects.

Chambers of Commerce

The chamber of commerce is an important player in most downtown revitalization programs because of its interest in the community's commercial development. The chamber can help the downtown program by providing liaison with local and regional economic development agencies, helping businesses expand, recruiting new businesses and sharing information resources. Remember, though, that the chamber must be concerned with community-wide development. Focusing too much on the downtown can contradict its direct mission.

Financial Institutions

Local financial institutions benefit from a revitalized downtown in many ways, from making new business loans to being able to attract new industry to the community. Banks and savings and loans can support the revitalization program by helping package loans, taking part in interest buy down and other financial incentive programs, providing leadership and seeking innovative ways to stimulate downtown economic development. Many financial institutions also find that participation in the local downtown revitalization program helps satisfy their directives under the Community Reinvestment Act.

Consumers

In many ways, consumers stand to benefit the most from revitalized downtown offering goods and services that meet their needs. Many local consumers who may not belong to an existing community organization will still be interested in participating in the revitalization effort and in helping make the downtown - and the community - a more lively place to be.

City and County Government

Without the support and involvement of local government, it is doubtful that a downtown revitalization program will achieve long-lasting success. Local government can help provide the financial and information resources, technical skills and leadership to the revitalization effort. Because local government plays a major role in directing the community's economic growth, it must be an active participant in restructuring the downtown's economic base and developing innovative solutions to downtown issues.

Media

Downtown revitalization means creating new jobs, generating new investments and bringing more money into the community - all newsworthy activities. Thus, the media are usually major supporters of a downtown revitalization effort. In addition to publicizing the local program's successes, media can provide information about local market characteristics to help the revitalization effort find better ways to meet consumer needs.

Regional Planning Commissions and Councils of Government

These groups can provide the local downtown program with market data and other technical information about the downtown's market area. They can also help the program identify resources and establish relationships with regional, state and national economic development agencies.

Schools and Universities

Schools can contribute to successful downtown revitalization in several ways. First, by involving young people in the revitalization process, the downtown program can reach a segment of the community that may not be familiar with downtown. Second, they can help students become positive contributors to the community's quality of life. Finally, by giving students opportunities to use their academic skills in a "real world" environment, they can help the downtown revitalization effort implement programs and activities.

Others

Urban Renewal Boards
Hospitals
Arts Councils and Commissions
Cultural and Heritage Councils
Bicycle and Pedestrian Advocacy Groups
Tree City Committee
Garden Clubs
Local Historical Societies
Community Web Hosts & Providers
Public Utilities

Downtown Revitalization Stakeholder Benefits

Local Residents/Consumers

- enhanced marketplace (better shopping and the benefits of shopping locally)
- sense of pride in downtown
- social/cultural activities
- opportunities to keep kids in town
- sense of hometown community
- historical awareness (preservation of architecture and human history)
- opportunity to participate/volunteer
- better communication (newsletter)
- political advocate
- home values increase

Property Owners

- increased occupancy rates
- rent stability
- increased property values
- increased stability
- reduced vandalism/crime deterrent
- assistance with tax credits, grants, loan programs, design, and co-op maintenance
- communication medium with other property owners
- better image
- new uses, especially on upper floors

City Government

- increased tax base
- more tourism
- increased property values
- increased number of jobs
- better goals and vision
- healthy economy
- better services available
- positive perception of downtown and community
- better relations between city hall and private sector
- takes political heat, develop consensus for political requests (avoid "victimization")
- industrial recruitment
- impetus for public improvements and CLG grant dollars
- increased volunteer base for city
- education resources for city leaders (officials) on planning and economic development

Retail Business Owners

- increased sales
- improved image
- increased value of business
- coordinated efforts between local business and franchises
- quality of business life
- educational opportunities (seminars and workshops)
- increased traffic
- district marketing strategies (promotion and advertising)
- better business mix
- new market groups downtown
- community pride
- have needs/issues addressed

Service Business Owners

- image building/improvement
- pride
- new/renewed/repeated exposure
- increased variety of services
- healthier economy generates new/more business
- increased competition means more aggressive business styles
- tapping leakage
- increased population, new customers
- improved image, creates new market

Financial Institutions

- community reinvestment act (federal government requirement)
- potential for loans, deposits, and other services (bank cards, financial services)
- improved image and good will
- survival of community critical to bank success and economic stability
- central location more cost effective

Preservationists

- Main Street Approach reinforces common goal of preservation
- increases coalition
- increased awareness and credibility
- education of public and group
- improved public image
- improved economic feasibility of preservation

County Government

- increased public relations for county
- viable downtown increases tax base
- ripple effect
- viable downtown is a draw for industry and county-wide area businesses

- common partnership with city hall
- county/community pride
- heritage preservation
- alternative to a redevelopment district
- quality of life issues especially for employees
- help with parking issues

Utility Companies

- additional business
- longer business hours
- more employees
- healthy businesses feel freer to increase utility usage
- healthy economy causes community to grow
- overcome bad guy image
- proof of new products
- quality in main street public improvements.