

Oregon Greenhouse Gas Reduction Toolkit:  
**Case Study**

**OREGON SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE**



# CITY OF MCMINNVILLE

*A Model Oregon Downtown*

## Featured Category

### Support Downtowns



SUPPORT DOWNTOWNS  
AND MIXED-USE AREAS

## Location

### McMinnville, Oregon

Population (Inside City Limits): 32,435<sup>1</sup>

2020 Estimated Population: 47,240<sup>2</sup>

## Milestones

- » **1986:** Formation of McMinnville Downtown Association
- » **1986 to Today:** Streetscape Improvements
- » **1980's-1990's:** City/County Investment in Public Buildings
- » **1999:** Hotel Oregon (McMenamins)
- » **2010:** New Civic Hall

## Applicable GHG Reduction Strategies<sup>3</sup>

- » Parking Management
- » Plan and Code Amendments
- » Public Office Spaces in the Downtown Core
- » Pedestrian Environment
- » Transit Services and Facilities

## Active and Vibrant

Downtown McMinnville's success and growth is illustrated by some key indicators:

- » Between 2010 and 2012 (during the recession) McMinnville's downtown experienced strong growth and activity<sup>4</sup>:
  - 21 net new businesses, expansions and relocations
  - 37 net new jobs
  - \$249,800 in private investment
  - \$67,000 in public investment
  - 3072 volunteer hours
- » The downtown currently has a vacancy rate of approximately 4-5%. In 1985, the vacancy rate was 20%.
- » Transit boardings near downtown have more than doubled in the last five years.
- » Residential use on second floors is in high demand, and new high density housing is being built near the retail core on 3rd Street.

*This case study is an illustration of strategies from the Transportation and Land Use Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction Toolkit, and is intended to help local jurisdictions explore actions and programs that can reduce GHG emissions from transportation.*

## Challenges

**On-going funding for programs and capital improvements.** Public money is scarce, and capital improvements are expensive. Yet the need to improve the streetscape and storefront character of a downtown is essential to its success. McMinnville has met this challenge by making improvements in small increments (sometimes one light pole at a time) and leveraging the help of many partners and volunteers.

**Education and outreach.** Even with a very popular downtown and visible successes, there is a constant need for getting the word out about events, projects, and the need for volunteers. MDA reaches out to many organizations, provides on-going information to its 285 members, and regularly issues media information.

**Not resting on laurels.** The MDA and its volunteers are continually working to refresh its many events and programs - from the Brown Bag Summer Concert Series, to the UFO Festival, to the Historic Downtown Tours.

**Competition from big box retail elsewhere in the City.** Like all communities, McMinnville has its share of large format retailers along arterial streets. McMinnville has met this challenge by enhancing its unbeatable niche of walk-able streets, local shop identity, and historic character in the downtown.



*Small, creative improvements help stretch limited public funds*

## Background

Established as part of the original settlement and town plat of McMinnville in 1876, the downtown has always been the heart of the community. In the 1960's and 1970's, the downtown experienced a period of decline. Between 1968 and 1974, there were multiple plans and studies recommending downtown improvements, several of them promoting an expensive rebuild to create a pedestrian mall for 3rd Street, McMinnville's historic storefront street. In the early and mid-1980's, McMinnville began to emphasize business and community involvement, public-private partnerships, and low-cost street and building improvements to enhance the historic and walk-able character. This approach has fostered an enduring stewardship of the downtown. In 1986, two key actions were taken in response to high vacancies and competition from big box retail: an Economic Development District (EID) was formed; and, the McMinnville Downtown Association (MDA) was established. The mission of the MDA is to sustain and enhance downtown McMinnville as the cultural, retail and professional heart of the community. The City contracts with the MDA to administer the EID. Today, downtown McMinnville thrives with activity. Its banners state: "Oregon's Favorite Main Street," a testament to the local involvement, pride and affection for what the community has accomplished.



*Historic Photo of the Schilling Building in Downtown McMinnville*

## Strategies

Four key GHG reduction strategies make Downtown McMinnville distinctive and have contributed to its success as a viable and lively downtown.

- » **Parking management/Plan and Code.** The code allows 50% reduction in off-street parking within the downtown, and prohibits parking along 3rd Street. Design standards for the downtown promote pedestrian-oriented and historically compatible development. All streets have free on-street public parking and a "park-free" structure is available one block from 3rd Street.
- » **Public Offices Downtown.** City and County offices are located within the downtown. There are more than 200 government employees

## Key Successes



### A lasting public-private partnership.

Downtown is supported by a committed set of public and private partners: the City, Yamhill County, the McMinnville Downtown Association (with 285 members), McMinnville Economic Development Partnership, Yamhill County Transit Area, McMinnville Water and Light, and many others. This engenders broad support, joint marketing, and coordination of efforts.

**A culture of “working together”.** The diverse array of downtown partners and supporters has created a large source of volunteers. Between 2010 and 2012, over 3000 hours were donated to help staff events and implement projects. Capital projects are also a collaborative effort. For example, pedestrian scale lighting along 3rd Street started with the purchase of three poles by the MDA, then contributions by the City, followed by installation by the McMinnville Water and Light. Several businesses followed suit by contributing poles. Maintenance is done by the City.

**Retention of key employers.** Oregon Mutual Insurance is one of the City’s oldest businesses and has been in the downtown for over 100 years. Faced with strong growth and the need for additional space, the company chose to remain downtown rather than move to less expensive land at the edge of the City. In 2007, they completed a three-story, 60,000 square foot office building. Today, they have 211 employees working in the downtown.

**Adaptive re-use.** Famous for revitalizing charming historic properties, McMenamins found a perfect McMinnville home in the heart of downtown. In their words, “Hotel Oregon strikes an inviting pose – as it has since 1905. With practically a century of history under its belt, the Hotel has plenty of stories to tell.” Approximately \$3 million was invested in the restoration of Hotel Oregon. The hotel is proof that authentic, walkable downtowns provide a unique niche to attract investment.

within two blocks of 3rd Street, which provides a critical mass of support to downtown businesses, and a convenient mix of uses for visitors to park once and walk to multiple destinations. The City recently invested in an upgrade of a historic home for use as City Hall, constructed a new Council Chambers next door, and sited a new public library to anchor the west end of 3rd Street.

- » **Pedestrian Environment.** Using a combination of public and private funding (including volunteer contributions), the downtown has undergone extensive improvements that contribute to its historic and walkable character. These include: sidewalk improvements, pedestrian-scale light fixtures, mid-block pedestrian crossings, public art, flower pots and on-going maintenance, street kiosks, custom bike racks, and banners.
- » **Transit Services and Facilities.** The City’s two bus routes converge in the downtown. Ridership is steadily improving, transit-oriented housing is being built, and a new transit center is planned at the edge of downtown.

## Financing Mechanisms

- » **Economic Improvement District funds.** The district encompasses a 36 block area and generates approximately \$52,000 per year from property assessments. EID funds are collected by the City but administered by the MDA for beautification, economic improvements, marketing, and general expenses.
- » **McMinnville Downtown Association.** The budget of the MDA is approximately \$250,000 per year for operations and programs, funded by the EID, member dues and proceeds from events. The MDA is exploring forming a foundation to diversify and stabilize funding and provide a new tool for long term financial stewardship through endowments. The City is also in the final stages of establishing an urban renewal district that would encompass part of the downtown.
- » **Public-private funds and community contributions.** Working together and leveraging resources are a core part of the culture supporting downtown McMinnville. 3rd Street’s pedestrian scale lighting has come about through contributions from local businesses, McMinnville Power and Light, and the City. Kiosks have been constructed by volunteers. Custom bike racks have been installed by numerous businesses. These are just a few of the many contributions of funds, materials, and volunteer hours that help get things done in the downtown.



Third Street, circa 1930

# Conclusions

Downtown McMinnville has many assets: the “good bones” of historic buildings, storefront character, and walk-able streets; a strong regional economy related to Oregon’s wine country; and, substantial government and private sector employment within and adjacent to downtown. Its emergence as “Oregon’s Favorite Main Street” stems from community efforts to improve upon those assets, including:

- » Forming an Economic Improvement District and Downtown Association as the foundation for a broad array of public-private partnerships, collaboration, and culture of “working together.”
- » Preserving and enhancing the historic and pedestrian-friendly character of the streets and storefronts – and doing so through relatively small projects that leverage funds and utilize donations and volunteer efforts.
- » Following the national and Oregon Main Street approach of organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring<sup>5</sup>.
- » Investing in public buildings downtown, both existing and new.
- » Providing transit and affordable housing.



Hotel Oregon

McMinnville’s successes can be replicated, if locally tailored, in other communities. The key is to build on existing assets, create a broad base of support, and make patient, sustained improvements to revitalize the downtown. Such investments will yield returns in business activity, community pride and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

1 PSU Center for Population Research. <http://www.pdx.edu/prc/population-estimates-0>  
2 McMinnville Economic Opportunities Analysis (Review Draft, April, 2013), page 8, ED Hovee and Associations for City of McMinnville.  
3 Transportation and Land Use Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction Toolkit Database, ODOT, 2011.  
4 Source of statistics: Oregon Main Street Program, <http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/SHPO/Pages/mainstreet.aspx>  
5 See Oregon Main Street program, <http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/SHPO/pages/mainstreet.aspx>  
6 Transportation and Land Use Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction Toolkit Database, ODOT, 2011.  
Website: <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TP/pages/database.aspx>

## Living downtown – Downtown housing is becoming increasingly popular.

The newest project is Village Quarter: a mixed use affordable housing project for seniors located on historic 3rd street in McMinnville. Within easy walking distance of shops and restaurants and located on a bus route, the site was previously home to two storage sheds. Location played a key role in the desirability of the site and improved the project’s competitiveness for State and Federal funding. In developing the property, the Yamhill County Housing Authority (YCHA) worked with the Downtown Business Association, and Design Advisory Committee to address concerns about how the building would fit in with the historic look and feel of downtown. They also engaged both residential and business neighbors to address concerns about parking, successfully securing a variance to reduce the parking required.

## Quantifying GHG Reduction

The Transportation and Land Use Greenhouse Gas Reduction Toolkit<sup>6</sup> estimates reduction ranges for several of the strategies mentioned in this case study. Those strategies with quantified reduction ranges are:

- Increased connectivity (0.2 to 2.1%)
- Expansion of bicycle facilities (0.09 to 0.28%)
- Transportation Demand Management (up to 1.7%)

While strategies are often combined to maximize effectiveness, the reduction ranges are not necessarily additive.

The Toolkit is a component of the Oregon Sustainable Transportation Initiative (OSTI), which was formed to address the requirements of Senate Bill 1059 (2010).

For more information, please visit:

<http://cms.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TP/pages/ghgtoolkit.aspx>

