

Reflections on Oregon's Main Streets

Sheri Stuart, Oregon Main Street Program Coordinator

As I prepare to step away from my role as State Coordinator, I've spent time reflecting on what I've witnessed across Oregon's Main Streets. After many years visiting communities large and small, one idea has guided my belief in this work: downtown is the heartbeat of a community. Jane Jacobs once said, "A city's downtown is its living room—it's where life happens." I've seen that firsthand.

I've watched experience-driven downtowns take shape—places where people come not just to shop, but to feel connected. I've seen the rise of small-scale

entrepreneurs who bring creativity and energy into historic storefronts. Since 2010, we've seen 1,046 new businesses open on Main Street and 11,422 net new jobs created. Every time a local business opens its doors, it adds new life to the community—and keeps more dollars circulating close to home.

Historic preservation has always been one of our strongest tools. I've walked through the deteriorated, empty shells of countless buildings across Oregon—hearing firsthand from property owners and local leaders their vision and catching a bit of their enthusiasm for the future. Our communities have shown remarkable care and creativity in reinvesting in the places that hold their history. Collectively, we've seen over 2575 buildings restored and brought back to productive use. This represented an investment of over \$348 million in our downtowns.

And of course, I've heard about your plans for countless community events on Mornings on Main calls and during on-site visits—those shared experiences that remind us why downtowns matter. Events don't just bring people together; they strengthen civic pride and create memories that keep people coming back.

This work isn't always easy—important things worth doing rarely are. Our downtowns continue to tackle big issues—housing needs, economic shifts, safety, technology, and ensuring that everyone feels welcome. But if there's one trait that defines Oregon's Main Street communities, it's resilience. Not just bouncing back, but *bouncing forward*.

Whether it's converting upper floors into housing, designing more walkable places, or rethinking public spaces to reflect community values, I've watched local leaders embrace innovation without losing sight of what makes their downtown unique. Downtowns matter because they reflect all of us. They are the places shaped by our ideas, our cultures, our histories, and our hopes. When a downtown thrives, the community around it becomes stronger, more connected, and more confident in its future.

And none of it—none of it—happens alone. Every success I've seen has come from partnerships, collaboration, and an abiding belief that when we work together, we can build something meaningful. Helen Keller captured it perfectly: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

As I step into retirement, I carry immense gratitude for all of you—the volunteers, business owners, city staff, board members, partners, and champions who have shown up time after time with passion and perseverance. Thank you for letting me walk alongside you. Every community has a story. **Downtown is the chapter we write together.** And I know Oregon's story is in good hands.





[View award videos here:](#)



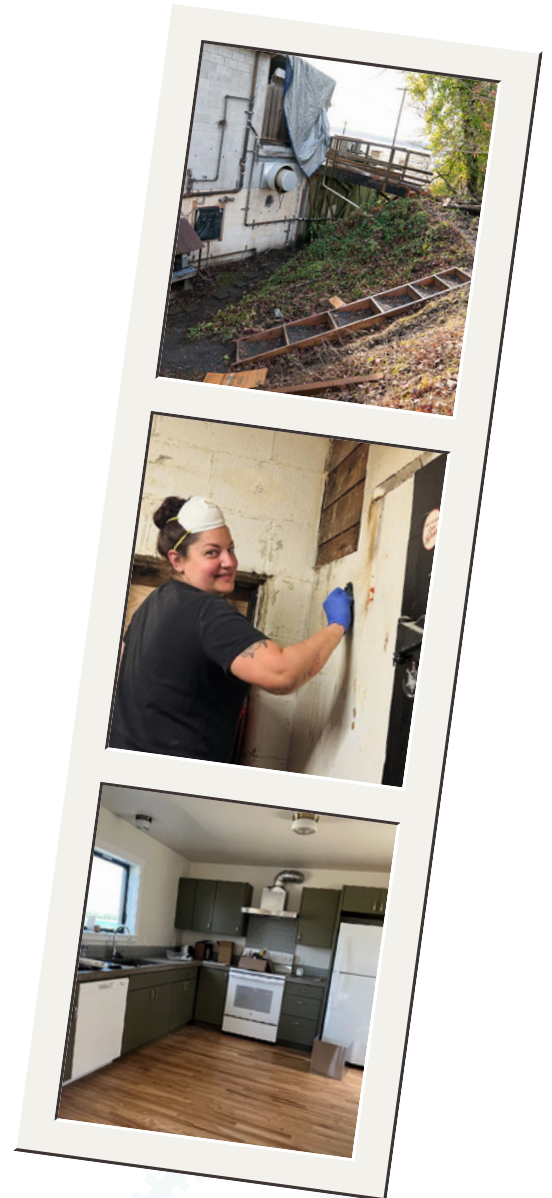
2025 Excellence on Main Awards

- Business of the Year | NO DINX, Albany
- Business of the Year | Wildflour, North Bend
- Best New Building | Houlton Hollow, St. Helens
- Bricks & Mortar | Holly Theater, Medford
- Main Street Resiliency | Monteith Square, Albany
- Open Door | Carina's Bakery, Beaverton
- Economic Vitality | Highwater Cafe & Market, Highwater Offices, Reedsport
- Leadership on Main | Kirsten Agard, Beaverton
- Outstanding Partnership | City of West Linn & Historic Willamette Main Street, West Linn
- Outstanding Promotional Event | North Bend Main Street Community Art Walk
- Statewide Leadership | Lise Grato, Albany

Main Street Revitalization Grant Spotlight: Crooked Creek Brewery, St. Helens

Sometimes the stars align, and the right people step forward to bring new life to a building that has seen better days. That is certainly the case for the Dockside Building in St. Helens, a beloved community landmark since 1947. A recipient of a 2023 OMSRG grant, the building was revitalized as the new home of Crooked Creek Brewing to honor its history and energize the southern gateway of the Riverfront District. Once a gathering place for families, friends, and mill workers, the structure had fallen into serious disrepair—including a collapsing back wall—threatening to erase decades of community memory.

The thoughtful restoration transformed the space into a vibrant hub with a welcoming restaurant, expanded taproom, and new lodging upstairs. Improvements to lighting, windows, and pedestrian spaces reconnect the building to the street, drawing locals and visitors alike. Crooked Creek now offers more than great beer—it fosters community through cribbage tournaments, bingo and trivia nights, live music, and a monthly Pints for Nonprofits fundraiser. By preserving its legacy and creating new opportunities, this project revives a cherished landmark, inspires community pride, attracts future investment, and stands as a beacon of growth and connection for generations to come.

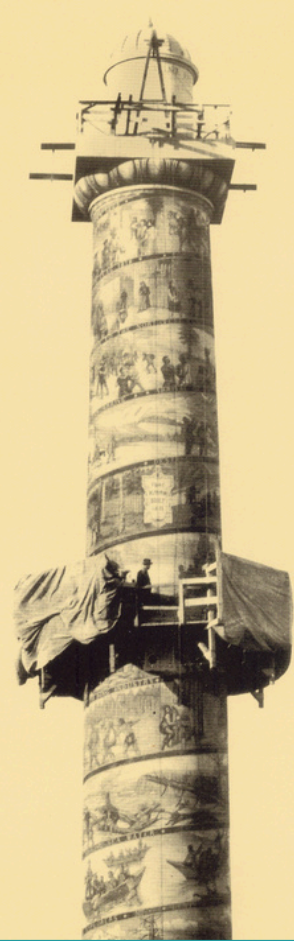


Second floor apartment entrance before (left) and after (right).

Community Highlight | GAMSA Semifinalist - Astoria

In October, Main Street America recognized the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA) as a 2026 Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA) semifinalist, one of only eight communities nationwide selected for their exemplary use of the Main Street Approach™ in revitalizing their downtown. Over the past 16 years, ADHDA has demonstrated exceptional leadership and vision in transforming Astoria's historic commercial district, building on its rich heritage as Oregon's oldest settlement. Through strategic planning, extensive community engagement, and strong partnerships with the City, local businesses, and preservation architects, ADHDA has guided the restoration and adaptive reuse of iconic buildings, including theaters, hotels, and waterfront docks, while also fostering workforce housing and new business development.

ADHDA's efforts have cultivated a vibrant downtown anchored by engaged entrepreneurs and innovative programming. Notable projects like Fort George Brewery + Public House illustrate how revitalization can combine economic growth with meaningful community contributions. ADHDA has also developed diverse funding streams, including unique fundraisers and the stewardship of the Astoria Sunday Market, ensuring sustainable support for the district's ongoing transformation. Their work not only preserves Astoria's historic character but has inspired a broader culture of preservation, education, and entrepreneurship in the region, making them a deserving semifinalist for this prestigious national award.



Oregon Main Street Goals/Services:

Here's what we are doing to meet our OMS goals!

Goal 1: Develop and support thriving organizations so they can implement local priorities.

- Conducted 6 Progress Visits
- Conducted Community Assessment Visit and Kick-off visits for Affiliated Main Street communities
- Approved two new rural regional hubs

Goal 2: Recognize and value connectedness to heritage community.

- Support heritage team in summit planning
- Presentations at LOC Small Cities Meetings
- Awarded \$10 million in ORMSG
- Oregon Heritage Staff Provide Reconnaissance Level Surveys in Tigard and Drain
- Oregon Heritage provided historic preservation webinar series that is recorded and available on demand

Goal 3: Increase awareness of Main Street's impact.

- Awarded 11 Excellence on Main
- Hosted OMS Conference in downtown Albany
- Co-presenter at Main Street America's Main Street Now Conference
- Provided 7 main street overview presentations to local government and partner organizations

Goal 4: Foster a healthy, impactful, and sustainable structure.

- Created Succession Plan template
- 50 Leadership Check-in Calls
- Provided board and executive director orientations

Goal 5: Build and sustain strategic partnerships.

- Invited partners to present at OMS Conference and Mornings on Main
- Participated in Business Oregon's ROI grant review
- Keynote with Stephanie Wilson and Rosa Solano at People's Coast Summit
- Continued EV partnership with RDI

Our 2025 Communities

Total Communities:

Accredited: 9 | Designated: 7 | Affiliated: 26

Rural Regional: 14 (2 hubs)

Connected Communities: 54

New Towns by Tier in 2025

Affiliated: Corvallis, Bend, Mosier, Yamhill

Designated: Baker City

Connected: Bly, Heppner, Madras, McKenzie River Valley, North Powder, Roseburg, St. Johns (Portland), Talent
Rural Regional: Shaniko

Nationally Accredited

- Albany
- McMinnville
- Astoria
- Oregon City
- Bandon
- West Linn
- Klamath Falls

ABOUT OREGON MAIN STREET

Oregon Main Street (OMS)

is part of Heritage Programs in Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. OMS is designed to assist with the revitalization of traditional downtowns and historic commercial districts, promote economic development, and encourage historic preservation. The program uses an approach that advocates a return to community self-reliance, local empowerment, and the rebuilding of central business districts based on their assets, unique architecture, personal service, local ownership and entrepreneurship, and sense of community.

OMS coordinates resources and provides technical assistance based on the Main Street Approach™ to communities that are working in historically relevant business district settings and that meet certain threshold criteria. Oregon Main Street provides assistance to all communities whether they are just beginning to explore options for their downtown or seeking national recognition as an accredited Main Street™ town.

Main Street America™

Main Street America™ is a program of the National Main Street Center. What sets Main Street America™ apart is the powerful network: the unique combination of grassroots dedication to comprehensively improving quality of life at the local level; integral support and expertise provided by Coordinating Programs at the city, county, and state level; and leadership and direction from the NMSC. Main Street America™ is also a special mark of distinction. It is a seal, recognizing that participating programs, organizations, and communities are part of a national movement with a proven track record for celebrating community character, preserving local history, and generating impressive economic returns.

The Main Street Approach™

The Main Street Approach™ is an asset-based economic development strategy. It is a comprehensive, incremental approach to sustain and enhance historic downtowns and traditional commercial neighborhoods based on the district's unique heritage and attributes. Main Street organizations are locally driven, funded, organized, and run.



Annual Statistical Highlights



Building Rehab Projects

2025: 306
Cumulative: 2575+

Volunteer Hours

2025: 46,815
Cumulative: 428,275+



Private Investment

2025: \$64,608,283
Cumulative: \$348,822,111+

Net New Businesses

2025: 122
Cumulative: 1,046+



Public Investment

2025: \$87,676,709
Cumulative: \$374,688,479+

Business Expansions

2025: 24
Cumulative: 276+



Net New Jobs

2025: 3,970
Cumulative: 11,492+

Business Acquisition

2025: 53
Cumulative: 327+



All statistics include '+' to indicate additional data from communities who have not yet completed reporting.



Photo Courtesy: Greater Bandon Association (Top), Wallowa Main Street Committee (Mid), Port Orford Main Street (Bottom)