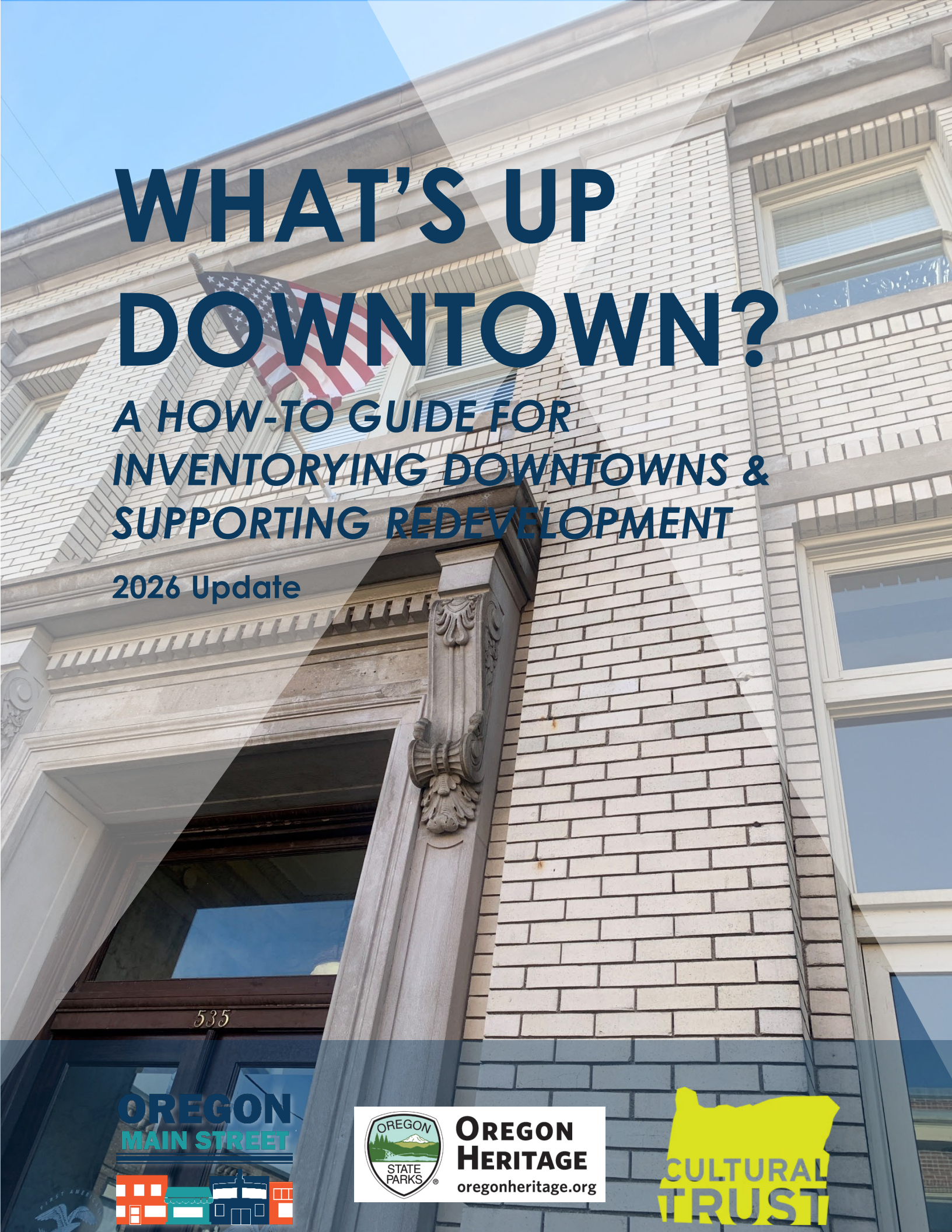


WHAT'S UP DOWNTOWN?

A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR INVENTORYING DOWNTOWNS & SUPPORTING REDEVELOPMENT

2026 Update

OREGON MAIN STREET

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The Institute for Policy Research & Engagement (IPRE) is a research center affiliated with the School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management at the University of Oregon. It is an interdisciplinary organization that assists Oregon communities by providing planning and technical assistance to help solve local issues and improve the quality of life for Oregon residents. The role of IPRE is to link the skills, expertise, and innovation of higher education with the transportation, economic development, and environmental needs of communities and regions in the State of Oregon, thereby providing service to Oregon and learning opportunities to the students involved.

2026 How-To Guide Update

This How-To Guide was updated in the Summer of 2026 to incorporate lessons learned from a North Bend inventory project and to reflect current best practices, funding opportunities, and redevelopment strategies. Building on the original Lebanon pilot, the guide now includes expanded examples, updated resources, and practical tools to help communities identify and document opportunities for upper story reuse.

Key Updates include:

- Recommended inclusion of basement in inventories (when they exist)
- Expanded guidance on selecting inventory platforms and engaging property owners.
- New templates and resources, including a downtown inventory checklist and downtown inventory spreadsheet template.

The 2026 update also reflects feedback from a June 2026 workshop with Main Street organizations in St. Helens, Oregon. This resulted in a more practical, user-friendly guide that can support communities of varying sizes and capacities. The guide is intended to serve as a living resource that communities can adapt to their local needs while encouraging continued inventory maintenance and long-term downtown revitalization efforts.

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered about the vacant or underused space in upper stories in your downtown?[1] Have you ever dreamed about helping your community to revitalize those spaces? In Oregon, just like the rest of the country, many upper stories sit unused in commercial and manufacturing districts, shopping centers, mixed-use neighborhoods, and stand-alone buildings. What can you do to re-activate these spaces?

This guide provides step-by-step instructions and ideas to help communities identify, understand, and keep a record of buildings with upper stories and their conditions. We hope that **local and regional governments**, **organizations in the Oregon Main Street network**, and **any other organization interested in utilizing vacant downtown spaces** will find these recommendations useful.

We developed this guide based on a pilot inventory in Lebanon, Oregon. We expanded and refined the guide from July– September 2026. This update incorporates feedback from a workshop with Main Street organizations and another pilot inventory conducted by North Bend, Oregon. We include examples from Lebanon and North Bend throughout to help illustrate what various steps could look like in your community. You may also want to look into efforts made previously in Astoria, Cottage Grove, La Grande, Pendleton, St. Helens, Tillamook, and other Oregon towns.

Why a How-To Guide?

Oregon communities face a massive housing shortage, as well as a lack of work, event, and cultural spaces. At the same time, many upper stories in our towns sit vacant. Upper story redevelopment offers a creative approach to addressing the housing crisis, increasing usable downtown space, creating income opportunities, correcting historical social disparities, and building a resilient, sustainable future.

In partnership with Oregon Heritage, the University of Oregon's Institute for Policy Research and Engagement published ***What's Up Downtown: A Playbook for Activating Oregon's Upper Stories***, providing regulatory and financial guidance to encourage upper story development. For communities to increase use of existing buildings, the report suggests communities start with a solid local team, create an inventory of upper story spaces, and use the inventory to support upper story projects. We created this guide to complement the Playbook and give local teams actionable steps and resources to support their upper story projects.

[1] While this guide emphasizes upper story spaces, many of the concepts, inventory fields, and engagement strategies can also be adapted for basements, vacant or underutilized buildings, redevelopment sites, commercial and industrial properties, and areas outside the traditional downtown core, depending on your community's goals.

WHY SHOULD YOU USE THIS GUIDE?

Knowing built assets is the first step to planning developments.

Re-activating an upper story space can be a long, resource-intensive project, but dozens of examples across the state demonstrate that it is not only possible but also offers tangible benefits to both the property owner and the community at large. Knowing what assets already exist and what state they are in will make it easier to identify opportunities and align resources. A community with an extensive, organized inventory of their built assets will find it easier to:

- ✓ Identify potential properties and interested property owners to encourage renovation
- ✓ Understand property needs, code & zoning requirements, etc.
- ✓ Locate existing resources
- ✓ Develop appropriate policies to fund development
- ✓ Align the needed technical assistance to support development efforts
- ✓ Foster collaborative public-private partnership to make commercial districts livable, vibrant, and inclusive



STEPS TO CREATING YOUR INVENTORY

The following sections give ideas and examples for how to build an inventory of built assets that can help your community better support upper-story redevelopment:

1. **Assembling Your Team** describes how to align the right resources behind your inventory effort.
2. **Creating Your Inventory** provides details on what to include in your inventory and suggestions for setting up and populating an inventory spreadsheet.
3. **Making It Happen** discusses ways to integrate the inventory into your day-to-day activities and the priorities of your community.

You can also use these two resources to guide your process:

- The Downtown Inventory Role Assignment & Checklist will guide you through some key steps to take.
- The Downtown Building Inventory template provides a starting point for creating a spreadsheet inventory.

1. Assembling Your Team

Before you can begin your inventory, you need to gather resources that will help you build it. This section gives you some suggestions about how to prepare for a successful inventory project.

Decide on the Inventory Scope

Where in your town are most unused spaces located? For many towns, it is often the downtown area or the local historic district. But it could be different for your town. The inventory aims at identifying the amount and conditions of unused assets, so this guide could apply to any area where there is untapped potential. It is critical to map out a scope for the inventory that is manageable for your town's staff, volunteers, and financial resources. We recommend focusing on a small area first to streamline your process before expanding the scope of your inventory.

Choose a Lead

Identify a lead for your inventory project. This person should be familiar with development in your community and have some established relationships with property owners, business owners, tenants, and community organizations to help expedite the project. Project leadership may come from:

- City government
- Your Main Street organization
- A downtown association
- A local nonprofit organization

Establish a Taskforce



Completing the inventory requires background research and getting people on the street to photograph, tour, and engage in conversations with property owners, businesses, and residents. These activities may require substantial time on the part of staff and volunteers.

We suggest the following approaches to form and fund a taskforce to conduct the inventory:

- Utilize volunteers and interns through existing programs and organizations. Examples include the Main Street Design Committee and AmeriCorps Volunteers.[2]
- Utilize grants to pay for labor costs, such as Oregon Heritage grants and Certified Local Government grants.[3]
- Hire interns from your local high school or colleges

Build Connections

Compiling your inventory is quite doable, but it requires strong community relationships and a bit of research expertise (in addition to time!). It is helpful to find support from a breadth of interests and expertise. From our experience in Lebanon and North Bend where we piloted the inventory creation, connections with the following people were especially helpful in identifying and locating existing information, as well as connecting with property owners/ building occupants.

The following agencies and partners can provide information, historical context, technical expertise, and community knowledge to assist with the inventory process.

Local and Regional Government and Staff

- **Planning Department:** Zoning, Land use regulations, historic districts, development projects, GIS and Mapping, and downtown planning initiatives.
- **Building Department:** Building permits, occupancy information, code requirements, and records of renovations or history of use permits.
- **Economic Development Staff:** Downtown revitalization efforts, redevelopment opportunities, incentive programs, and connections with the local business community.
- **County Assessor's Office:** Property ownership, tax lot information, building characteristics, and assessed values.
- **Historic Preservation Staff:** Historic preservation, preservation requirements, and questions about historically significant buildings.

[2] Learn more about AmeriCorps Volunteers https://www.americorps.gov/
[3] Refer to Oregon Heritage's grants page here: https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/oh/pages/grants.aspx

Community Organizations

- Main Street Design Committee, downtown associations, and chambers of commerce can provide local knowledge, connect you with property owners, and identify redevelopment priorities.

Property Owners and Businesses

- Property owners, business owners, developers, contractors, architects, and commercial real estate professionals can provide firsthand information about building conditions, renovation history, upper story uses, and redevelopment potential.

Libraries and Historical Organizations

- Local libraries, archives, museums, and historians can help locate historical records, photographs, maps, and past information about past building uses, histories, and ownership.

2. Creating Your Inventory

Once you've assembled your team, it's time to get to work on building the inventory! You can use this checklist to help guide your process.

The inventory is where you organize and log the information related to each property in your scope. Because the inventory will be a "living document," you will want to keep it simple, friendly, and accessible so it can be easily shared and passed on as turnover occurs.

Create the Tool

We chose Google Sheets to develop a sample inventory for Lebanon. Generally, any web-based or other digital platform that your team finds easy to use should work.

Our sample inventory spreadsheet includes seven primary categories. These categories provide information about the property address, property owners' contact, ground floor, upper stories, basement, property conditions, and property's zone and designations. Each category has a more detailed explanation for suggested information to document in the "Inventory Category Description & Notes" tab at the bottom of the spreadsheet.

In addition to a simple spreadsheet, consider two other platforms that other Main Street organizations have found to be excellent at recording inventory data include:

BOOMS Tracker

The Building Opportunities on Main Street (BOOMS) Tracker is a building inventory and field data collection platform designed to document downtown districts and commercial properties. Communities can use it to collect and organize information on building characteristics, occupancy, upper story uses, vacancies, building conditions, photographs, and redevelopment opportunities. It is well-suited for conducting field inventories and maintaining up-to-date records of downtown buildings.

Note that BOOMS Tracker is only available to designated Main Street communities.[4]

Maestro Community Manager

Maestro Community Manager is a cloud-based platform designed for Main Street organizations and downtown management programs. In addition to tracking commercial properties, it allows users to manage property and business owner contacts, vacancies, reinvestment activities, organizational reporting, and work plans.[5]

You can customize the tool by identifying which categories and fields will be most useful for your community, try to populate the fields with as much information as possible in your initial effort, then continue to update your inventory each time you engage with property owners.

Possible Categories to Include in Your Inventory

Street Address	Owner Name and Contact	Ground Floor information	Upper Story and Basement Information	Conditions and Concerns	Zoning and Special Designations
• Address • Year Built • Tax ID	• Owner name • Email address • Phone number • Mailing Address • Interest in renovations	• Current Business(es) • Size (sq ft) • Occupancy (# of people) • Occupancy Status • Current Use • Previous Uses	• Upper stories or Basement (Y/N) • Size (sq ft) • Occupancy (# of people) • Occupancy Status • Current Use • Current Business(es) • Previous Uses	• Accessibility/ safety concerns • Known renovation needs • Building materials characteristics • Parking conditions • Outdoor space	• Zoning • Zoning overlays • Special designations



[4] Learn more about BOOMS Tracker. https://booms-tracker-nthp.hub.arcgis.com/
[5] Learn more about Maestro Community Manager. https://www.maestrocm.com/

Locate Existing Information

Much of the information for your inventory **already exists and is publicly available**. You do not need to start your inventory from scratch! Take the time to gather as much existing information as possible before field verification.

In the table below, we provide an example of where we found information for the Lebanon inventory. **Please note that different communities hold and organize such data in different ways.**

Example Information Sources – Sources Used for Lebanon Inventory

Category/ Field	Information Source(s)
Street Address:	
Address	Lebanon Downtown Association record
Tax ID	Linn County GIS Office
Owner Name and Contact Information:	
Owner Name	Linn County Tax Assessment and Taxation
Email	Lebanon Downtown Association record Direct property owner contact
Phone Number	Lebanon Downtown Association record Direct property owner contact
Mailing Address	Linn County Tax Assessment and Taxation Direct property owner contact
Interest in building renovation	Direct property owner contact
Ground Floor:	
Business Name	Lebanon Downtown Association record Site Visits/In-Person Observation Direct business/property owner contact
Year Built	Linn County Tax Assessment and Taxation
Size (sq. ft.)	Linn County Tax Assessment and Taxation
Vacancy	Site Visits/In-Person Observation Direct business/property owner contact
Current Use	Site Visits/In-Person Observation Direct business/property owner contact
Previous Use	Site Visits/In-Person Observation Direct business/property owner contact
Occupancy	Site Visits/In-Person Observation Direct business/property owner contact

Example Information Sources – Sources Used for Lebanon Inventory *(Cont.)*

Category/ Field	Information Source(s)
Upper Stories:	
Upper Stories (Y/N)	Linn County Tax Assessment and Taxation Site Visits/In-Person Observation Direct business/property owner contact
Size (sq. ft.)	Linn County Tax Assessment and Taxation Direct business/property owner contact
Vacancy	Direct business/property owner contact
Current Use	Direct business/property owner contact
Previous Use	Linn County Tax Assessment and Taxation Site Visits/In-Person Observation Direct business/property owner contact
Occupancy	Linn County Tax Assessment and Taxation Direct business/property owner contact
Conditions & Concerns:	
Accessibility/Safety Concerns	Direct business/property owner contact Site Visits/In-Person Observation Linn County Building Permit Department
Parking Conditions	Direct business/property owner contact Site Visits/In-Person Observation
Other	Direct business/property owner contact Site Visits/In-Person Observation
Zoning & Special Designations:	
Zoning	City of Lebanon Planning Department City of Lebanon GIS Department
Zoning Overlays	City of Lebanon Planning Department
Special Designations (1+)	City of Lebanon Planning Department Oregon Heritage Historic Preservation Office Linn County Tax Assessment and Taxation



Consider Integrating with Other Inventory Efforts

A downtown inventory can support a wide range of planning, revitalization, and community development efforts. Rather than collecting data for a single project or initiative, consider whether your community can combine this effort with other inventory or data collection activities.

For example, your community may choose to collect information on historic preservation, building conditions, accessibility, business recruitment, public infrastructure, façade improvements, hazard mitigation, economic development, or other local priorities alongside the core inventory data.



Collect Additional Information

Where information is not available through a public office or downtown association, filling in the inventory requires visits to properties and conversations with property owners. Consider the following approach:

- **Prepare necessary materials and tools:**
  - ✓ Create sample language for public outreach through newsletters, social media announcements, and/or direct mailing/email
  - ✓ Create a sample script for engaging with property owners, including those for cold calling and first in-person engagement. The script should include information about the opportunity for upper floor use and how upper story renovations can benefit the owners. Be prepared for a diverse range of responses, including excitement to participate and hesitant or disinterested property owners.
  - ✓ Create a tool for collecting information onsite. Consider creating something similar to this Google form we designed for Lebanon that allows information collection on smart devices during a visit. You can also simply use a clipboard with paper.
- **Plan for comprehensive visits to properties:**
  - ✓ Collect property owners' contact information.
  - ✓ Conduct outreach via direct mailing/email/phone calls where available. During the outreach phase, utilize your team members' personal or professional connections to engage with property owners. Where you expect or encounter resistance from property owners, seek help from your organization board or your city councilors to connect with property owners.
  - ✓ Schedule visits with property owners once you have built up some trust.
- **Visit/tour properties**
- **Aggregate information gathered during the visit back into the inventory**



Maintain the Inventory



As property changes hands, businesses open and close, and properties are developed, you will need to update your inventory to track progress and ensure appropriate communication with property owners.

Maintaining your inventory should be relatively simple if you have a well-organized spreadsheet and clear, shared understanding of how to keep it updated. We suggest the following approach inventory maintenance:

- Record any changes to the properties as staff become aware through their observations, grant applications, and any other conversations with property owners. Changes might include:
    - Change of property ownership
    - Changes in the property's public appearance
    - Change of the business or residents occupying the property
    - Rehabilitation or rebuilding of the property
    - Zoning change (less frequent but can affect building uses and redevelopment)
- Take any opportunity to engage with property owners as a chance inquire about or visit their properties
- Keep yearly snapshots or summaries of current conditions to allow for progress tracking
- Set a timeline for comprehensively reviewing the inventory every year to identify and correct outdated information
- Build inventory maintenance into the job description/expectations of a staff member, volunteer, or group of volunteers

Main Street organizations are particularly good candidates for owning the task of inventory maintenance since they have extensive connections and frequent contact with the downtown community. Main Street organizations could align inventory maintenance with their quarterly reporting obligations to Oregon Main Street. This would ensure a regular update schedule is built directly into the organization's pre-existing activities.

3. Making it Happen

While every community will have its own unique circumstances, we offer some common tips in this section about how to ensure the inventory and upper story redevelopment remain a priority and a manageable activity for the community.

What kinds of planning processes might this fit into?

To ensure that upper story redevelopment receives support and resources from the community, it is useful to integrate these priorities into planning and visioning efforts. When a plan or vision that guides a City or other organization includes policies and priorities related to upper stories, it is more likely that effort and attention will be directed towards upper stories. As typical planning processes occur in your community, consider adding emphasis on upper story redevelopment in any of the following plans that are relevant:

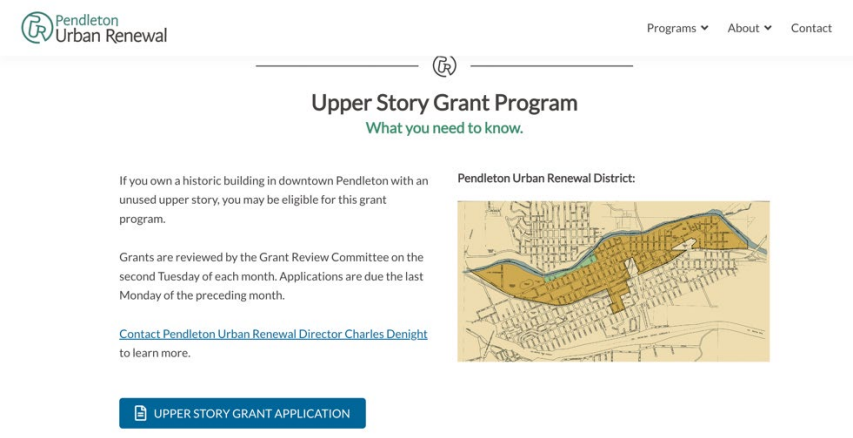
- ✓ The City Comprehensive Plan
- ✓ Downtown Plans
- ✓ Urban Renewal Plans
- ✓ Economic Development Plans/Strategies
- ✓ Main Street Strategic Plans
- ✓ Housing Needs Assessments
- ✓ Housing Production Strategies

Examples of Integrating Upper Story Priorities into Plans

Downtown Plan Example – Klamath Falls



Urban Renewal Plan Example – Pendleton

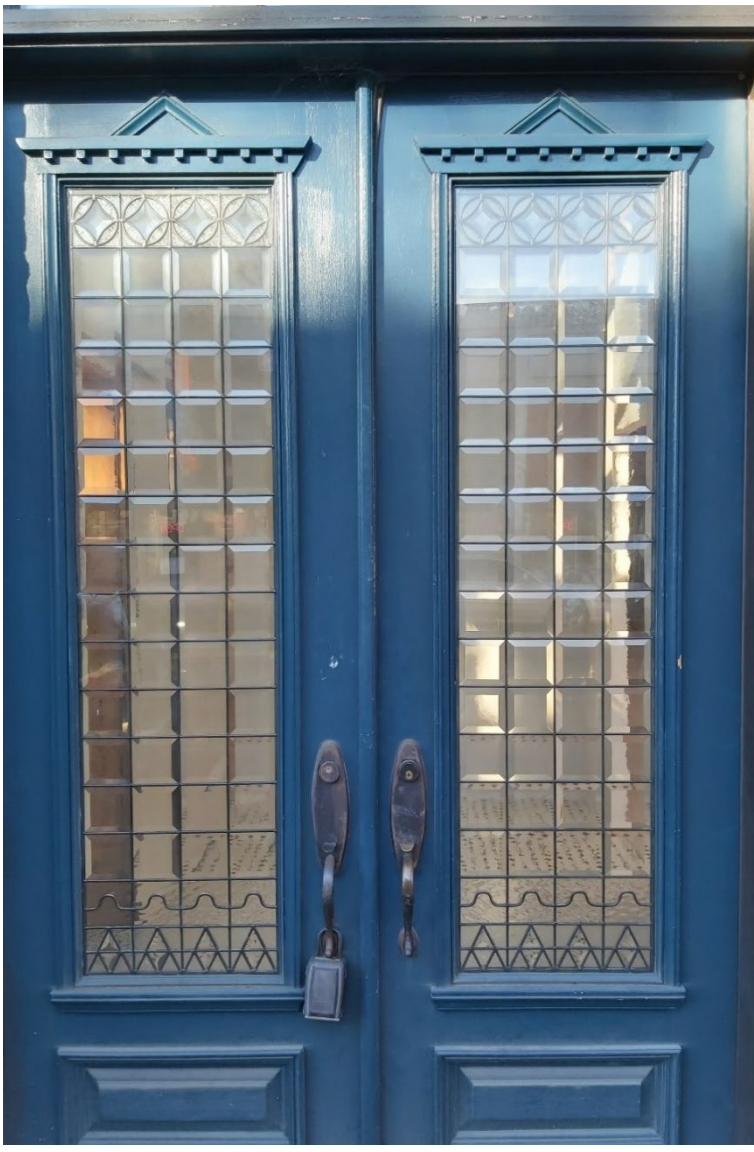


Examples of Integrating Upper Story Priorities into Plans *(Cont.)*

Economic Development Plan Example – La Grande

> **Policy 27.** Residential development; i.e., residential units, shall be supported and encouraged on the second and higher floors in the Central Business Zone. Residential uses shall also be permitted on the main and higher floors as identified in the "Residential Overlay Zone Map", in an area of the GC General Commercial Zone, provided that the store front is used for retail or other commercial purposes.

How long will it take?



Building the first version of your inventory may take some time, especially if you don't have much pre-existing information. How much time will depend on:

- The staff and volunteer capacity available
- How much information about the property and property owners you already have
- How strong your pre-existing relationships with property owners are

If you are starting from scratch (as a new Main Street program might), it's possible that assembling all the initial information might take six months to one year of incremental work. In our pilot project with Lebanon, it took the team approximately 20 hours to dig through public records to gather publicly available information about properties. We did not talk to property owners, a task which the Main Street organization, through volunteers, will tackle in the future. This task will likely be more time consuming, but well-aligned with the existing mission of Main Street: it is a relationship-building process that will benefit the organization beyond the value of a written inventory.

Finally, it is also important to remember that the inventory should be an ongoing activity: efforts to update it should happen at least once per year to ensure information remains current. After the initial lift of building the inventory, maintenance, especially if it is thoughtfully integrated into the day-to-day activities of the managing organization, should be a fairly low-effort task.

LEVERAGING THE INVENTORY TO ENCOURAGE UPPER STORY USE



Now that you've built your inventory, it's time to put it to use. Here are some suggestions for how to leverage the inventory to encourage better use of upper story spaces:

- ✓ **Screen for potential building renovation projects when funding opportunities become available.** Use the inventory as you learn about funding opportunities to identify good candidates for applications. The more Main Street organizations, City staff, or other local advocates know about potential projects, the better they can work with property owners to assemble applications.
- ✓ **Align local funding opportunities.** If your community has any discretion or ability to offer funding to projects, use the inventory to determine what kinds of funding would be most useful to the circumstances in your community. Then use the inventory to publicize these opportunities to relevant property owners.
- ✓ **Tailor communication strategies to property owners.** Your community may consider extending the inventory to include communication logs with property owners. Overtime, this communication history allows you to identify effective outreach strategies or appropriate communication styles for each property owner. It also helps avoid disrupted communication when your organization undergoes staffing changes.
- ✓ **Plan for district-level development.** Some communities are looking into neighborhood development to save time and money on processes like securing funding, navigating regulations, and coordinating contractors. Your inventory could aid such a process with extensive information regarding building conditions and property owner interest. Look for process efficiencies and opportunities to facilitate connections between property owners, for example:
    - If there are three National Register listed properties, organize a meeting for the property owners with the State Historic Preservation Office to learn more about the Federal Historic Tax Credit.
    - If there are several properties with building code issues, team up to meet with the local and state building officials to determine cross-project solutions or instigate creative approaches to compliance.

- ✓ **Keep track of current downtown development and/or upper story projects.** The inventory can also be a place to maintain a list of current and completed projects, the number of buildings and/or upper stories fully in operation, and any other information about properties that your organization finds useful. For example, the Lebanon community wants to keep a record of what types of businesses are in their downtown area to better understand the business mix and whether it aligns with the needs and desires of residents and visitors.
- ✓ **Celebrate successes!** Because many find the prospect of upper story renovation to be quite daunting, it's critical to share and celebrate projects as they occur. This helps others realize their vision is possible and that there are support systems that can help make their dreams a reality. It can also inspire greater support from public and nonprofit organizations in the future. Consider sharing creative approaches and completed projects with:
    - City council
    - Economic and community development agencies
    - Main Street board and committees
    - Local housing organizations
    - Downtown property owners
    - Neighboring Communities in your area



More Tools to Support Upper Story Redevelopment

As part of our ***Playbook for Activating Oregon's Upper Stories***, we developed some tools to aid property owners and their support networks. We created a simple pro forma spreadsheet to share with property owners and include an explanation of how to calculate a capitalization rate. We also developed an initial list of fundings sources that can be used to support upper story redevelopment. See the appendices of the ***Playbook*** as well as Oregon Heritage's website to access these resources.

The future is bright for Oregon's underused upper stories. Momentum is growing as more and more property owners and developers seek to rehabilitate upper stories to meet community needs.

As advocates for your community, you have the opportunity to encourage and support this movement towards increasing local vitality. We urge you to take the first step by inventorying your built assets. Then use this information to partner with property owners and developers to bring vibrancy back to upper stories.