

Discover & ReImagine

Chapter 2: Main Street Methodology

Much like a person grows from childhood to adulthood, maturing in thinking, sophistication and ability, redevelopment efforts in a community also often mature over time. Generally, communities begin with youthful enthusiasm, and then develop the tools and skills to make a huge community impact. Success often breeds more success, but two common denominators among the high performance community include sustained efforts toward revitalization issues and the development and adherence to clear redevelopment strategies.

The purpose of this Plan is to provide an implementation strategy that the Sylvania Downtown community can use to guide its Downtown revitalization efforts. The Main Street Approach works for thousands of communities nation-wide because it balances revitalization efforts. It works because the Four Points correspond to the four forces of real estate value: political, physical, economic, and social. The Main Street philosophy divides the workload among a minimum of four standing committees (Organization, Design, Economic Restructuring and Promotions) and balances revitalization efforts by concurrently improving all aspects of what makes real estate attractive and valuable. Recommendations in this Plan are arranged according to these Four Points in anticipation of the community organizing groups of volunteers to implement the steps, projects, and recommendations outlined in this Plan.

Main Street Strategy: Four Points

The Main Street Methodology and Strategy revolves primarily around the fundamental elements that make real estate valuable to consumers: location, location, location. But what is it about individual locations that make certain pieces of property worth more than others? Just as home-buyers consider many things when purchasing a house (school district, physical condition of the house, neighborhood, interest rates at the time of purchase, etc.), Downtown stakeholders consider all these things when developing strategies and programs to revitalize their neighborhood (Downtown). Literally, the Main Street Approach re-establishes Downtown as a valuable environment at the center of the community. Downtown is like no other neighborhood in a community however. It is owned simultaneously by individual property owners and by the community as a whole. Individuals may hold titles and deeds proving ownership of parcels, but the emotional “ownership” of the Downtown is something that every member of the community holds and has held from the time the community was established. Therefore, Downtown is a neighborhood like no other, and revitalization efforts must include different strategies than they would for an aging commercial strip or historic residential neighborhood.

The National Trust’s Four Points divide the revitalization workload so that no one person or group is overwhelmed with the responsibilities of a comprehensive revitalization

effort. Each of the Four Points focuses on pieces of what makes real estate valuable, and each of these Four Points must be addressed in order for revitalization efforts to succeed in the long-term. Along with these Four Points, the National Main Street Center developed the Eight Principles to guide revitalization efforts; eight principles that groups can (and should) adopt as guiding principles that govern all stakeholder activities. Below is a discussion of each of the Four Points and brief definitions of the Eight Principles.

Organization (Human & financial resources)

Purpose: “Organization involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a Main Street revitalization program. A governing board and standing committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the volunteer-driven program. Volunteers are coordinated and supported by a paid program director as well. This structure not only divides the workload and clearly delineates responsibilities, but also builds consensus and cooperation among the various stakeholders.” (National Main Street Center definition)

Organization Committee members promote the downtown organization’s message of revitalization, and they typically are the front-line ambassadors that keep the critical public-private partnerships in good health with



"When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bustling with prejudices and motivated by pride and vanity."

- Dale Carnegie

regular conversation and coordination. Members of this committee are charged with organizing and maintaining a regular volunteer corps to implement the vision established by the community for downtown revitalization efforts. They are also charged with raising funds and building a budget to accomplish the organization's tasks, as well as coordinating with local political leadership to regularly share information about the Downtown so that both public and private sectors can work together to advance priorities for the Downtown.

Design (Physical environment)

Purpose: "Design means getting Main Street into top physical shape. Capitalizing on its best assets - such as historic buildings and pedestrian-oriented streets - is just part of the story. An inviting atmosphere, created through attractive window displays, parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, street lights, and landscaping, conveys a positive visual message about the commercial district and what it has to offer. Design activities also include instilling good maintenance practices in the commercial district, enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging appropriate new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, and long-term planning." (National Main Street Center definition)

The physical attributes of a property clearly have an impact on the value of that property. How it looks, how well it

is maintained and/or preserved, what kinds of changes have been made over the years; all of these things directly influence the property's value. The Design Committee is commonly tasked with addressing the physical appearance of the structures in the downtown as part of the overall strategy to maintain the physical environment and increase property values. Members of the Design Committee work with the local design review board to preserve the historic architecture, they offer incentives to property owners to help offset rehabilitation costs, they work with planners and landscape architects to design pedestrian-friendly streetscapes that welcome shoppers and visitors and generally make the downtown a more attractive, pleasant place to spend time.

Economic Restructuring (Economic environment)

Purpose: "Economic Restructuring strengthens a community's existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base. The Main Street program helps sharpen the competitiveness of existing business owners and recruits compatible new businesses and new economic uses to build a commercial district that responds to today's consumers' needs. Converting unused or under-used commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability of the district." (National Main Street Center definition)

Economic factors affecting properties include things like interest rates, since the cost of borrowing money directly influences the overall value of the property. The Economic

Restructuring (ER) Committee is typically involved in creating an economic atmosphere that helps current and prospective property owners purchase, improve and maintain their properties. Members of the ER Committee continually monitor market and demographic information so businesses can better position themselves to increase sales, keeping abreast of financing tools and incentives to help building owners maximize their investment, essentially restructuring the economic environment to stabilize and increase property values. In addition to retaining existing businesses, the ER committee is responsible for recruiting new businesses to meet the needs identified by the community in the market analysis.

Promotion (Social environment)

Purpose: "Promotion sells a positive image of the commercial district and encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play and invest in the Main Street district. By marketing a district's unique characteristics to residents, investors, business owners, and visitors, an effective promotional strategy forges a positive image through advertising, retail promotional activity, special events, and marketing campaigns carried out by local volunteers. These activities improve consumer and investor confidence in the district and encourage commercial activity and investment in the area." (National Main Street Center definition)

The social function of real estate is the playground of the Promotions Committee. Though commonly called the "party people", this committee serves a vital, yet often

misunderstood function in the revitalization movement. Downtowns were once the social and cultural epicenter for communities. Shopping was not just a chore, it was a social event. Though that era has passed and our way of life is different now, that social aspect of the downtown cannot be forsaken. Festivals, special events, and retail events all serve to bring people back into the downtown to have fun. They associate this positive experience with the physical environment. Children build memories of going to the ice cream shop with their grandparents, just as their grandparents did fifty or more years ago, and while intangible, that indelible link is crucial to the downtown revitalization movement. Promotions in the downtown bring back the sense of community that many people are craving in today's society.

Main Street Philosophy

Eight Principles

The National Trust's Main Street Center's experience in helping communities bring their commercial corridors back to life has shown time and time again that the Main Street Four Point Approach succeeds. That success is guided by the following eight principles, which set the Main Street methodology apart from other redevelopment strategies. For a Main Street program to be successful, it must wholeheartedly embrace the following time-tested Eight Principles.

"Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration."

- Thomas Alva Edison

- 1. Comprehensive:** No single focus — lavish public improvements, name-brand business recruitment, or endless promotional events — can by themselves revitalize Main Street. For successful, sustainable, long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach, including activity in each of Main Street's Four Points, is essential.
- 2. Incremental:** Baby steps come before walking. Successful revitalization programs begin with basic, simple activities that demonstrate that "new things are happening" in the commercial district. As public confidence in the Main Street district grows and participants' understanding of the revitalization process becomes more sophisticated, Main Street is able to tackle increasingly complex problems and more ambitious projects. This incremental change leads to much longer-lasting and dramatic positive change in the Main Street area.
- 3. Self-help:** No one else will save your Main Street. Local leaders must have the will and desire to mobilize local resources and talent. That means convincing residents and business owners of the rewards they'll reap by investing time and money in Main Street — the heart of their community. Only local leadership and involvement can produce long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.
- 4. Partnerships:** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the district and must work together to achieve common goals of Main Street's revitalization. Each sector has a role to play and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations in order to forge an effective partnership.
- 5. Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets:** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities, like distinctive buildings and a human rather than a vehicular scale, that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.
- 6. 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. Shoestring budgets and "cut and paste" efforts reinforce a negative image of the commercial district. Instead, concentrate on quality projects over quantity.
- 7. Change:** Skeptics turn into believers and attitudes on Main Street will turn around. At first, almost no one believes Main Street can really turn around. Changes in attitude and practice are slow but definite — public support for change will build as the Main Street program grows and consistently meets its goals. Change also means engaging in better business practices, altering ways of thinking, and improving the physical appearance of the commercial district. A carefully planned Main Street program will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.
- 8. Implementation:** To succeed, Main Street must show visible results that can only come from completing projects. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way and succeeding. Small, quality projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger ones as the revitalization effort matures, and that constant, successful revitalization activity creates confidence in the Main Street program and engenders ever-greater levels of participation. (The Main Street Philosophy taken from the NMSC website)