

MAINSTREETNOW

The Journal of The National Main Street Center | FALL 2014

SPECIAL EDITION:
Celebrating
35 Years of
the National
Main Street
Center!



THE FUTURE

OF MAIN STREET



6

Four Point Refresh Project

BY PATRICE FREY & MARY THOMPSON

16

Main Street: Right from the Start

BY DONOVAN RYPKEMA

30

Investing in Main Street's Future

BY KENNEDY SMITH

48

Leadership: Then & Now

BY MARY MEANS

62

Placemaking Main Street into a Destination Downtown

BY FRED KENT, GARY TOTH



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National Trust *for* Historic Preservation


The National Main Street Center inspires and enables the building of economically vibrant and enduring communities and commercial districts through investment in their historic and distinctive places.




TABLE OF CONTENTS

FALL 2014


The Four Point Refresh Project | 6

 NMSC President Patrice Frey and Board Member Mary Thompson discuss the Four Point Refresh project, which is designed to show how the Main Street Approach has evolved over time and how it is being implemented by communities today. They share the highlights of a recent Main Street Network survey, which show the benchmarks towns have reached and the major challenges they face.


Main Street: Right from the Start | 16

 In his keynote speech at the Detroit National Main Streets Conference last spring, Donovan Rypkema, the nation's leading expert on preservation-based economic development, showed how Main Street, over its 35-year history, has always been ahead of the curve, embracing the principles of smart growth, good urbanism, Placemaking, and sustainability before these labels were invented. Find out the eight things he believes Main Street must keep and eight things it needs to do differently.


Investing in Main Street's Future | 30

 Former National Main Street Director Kennedy Smith takes a look at why some Main Streets thrive while others struggle to survive. She describes the demographics and technology that are driving the changes that will affect Main Street in the future and offers five ways Main Street managers can position their districts to achieve long-term economic success.

Leadership: Then and Now... | 48

 Learn from one of the founders of Main Street, Mary Means, as she provides critical insights into the trends shaping Main Streets today and the skills Main Street managers need to become civic and economic development leaders in their communities.

Placemaking Main Street into a Destination Downtown | 62

 Fred Kent and Gary Toth of Project for Public Spaces offer an intriguing look at the connections between Placemaking and the Main Street movement. They show how Placemaking tools like the Power of Ten and Walking and Street Audits can work with Main Street to create “destination downtowns” that invite people to gather as a community.



By Patrice Frey
President and CEO
National Main Street Center, Inc.

Welcome to the 35th Anniversary edition of *Main Street Now!* This issue focuses on the future of Main Street, a fitting topic as we celebrate three-and-a-half decades of the Main Street movement.

We are honored that several thought leaders in the community revitalization field agreed to contribute to this special edition, including one of the founders of the Main Street program, Mary Means, affectionately known as the “mother” of Main Street; Kennedy Smith, a long-time Main Street road warrior, a former Director of the National Trust Main Street Center, and now one of the nation’s foremost community revitalization experts; Donovan Rypkema, head of Place Economics and the nation’s leading expert on preservation-based economic development; and Fred Kent, President of Project for Public Spaces (PPS) and the country’s most thoughtful and eloquent advocate for the transformative power of Placemaking in our neighborhoods, along with Gary Toth, a senior director of PPS and one of the leading U.S. experts on utilizing flexible design and design standards to create great streets and communities.

National Main Street Center Board Member and Four Point Refresh Task Force Chair Mary Thompson and I kick off this issue with an article on the future of the National Main Street Center’s Four Point Approach, which has been deployed in more than 2,000 communities since Main Street’s inception. Readers may recall that last spring, the National Main Street Center announced the kick-off of the *Four Point Refresh* process, designed to help us understand how Main Street’s signature revitalization framework has evolved over time and how it is currently being implemented in Main Streets across the country. This process is also helping us better understand the revitalization challenges communities face today and assess the degree to which the Four Points are addressing these needs.

A key project of the new National Main Street Center, the Refresh process is designed to renew the Four Point Approach and ensure that Main Street leaders can use this framework to effectively address 21st-century revitalization challenges. Mary Thompson and I share highlights of a recent survey of the Main Street Network, which

not only reinforce the power and efficacy of the Four Point Approach, but also begin to illuminate where there are opportunities to improve managers' implementation of the long-standing framework.

Next up, Donovan Rypkema offers a global perspective on 35 years of Main Street. Last May in Detroit, his keynote speech, "Main Street: Right from the Start," kicked off the conference with a rousing start as he detailed how Main Street has been the single most effective downtown revitalization program in the country and how, far ahead of its time, Main Street advanced smart growth; good urbanism; Placemaking; creative places; and sustainable, mixed-use, resilient cities before these labels were even invented. In this issue, we have included excerpts of his Detroit speech, which offers eight key things that Main Street must keep doing—and challenges us with eight things we must do differently in the coming years to maintain the success of the movement and the approach.

Main Street veterans Kennedy Smith and Mary Means offer important insights on the realities of Main Streets today, and both challenge managers to sharpen and broaden their skills so they can play a key role in the economic development of their communities.

Kennedy looks at why some Main Streets thrive and others struggle to survive. She details the demographics and technology that are driving the changes that will affect Main Street in the years ahead, shows us what the Main Street of the future will look like, and offers five ways Main Street

managers can position their districts to achieve long-term economic success. A must-read for any Main Street manager, she describes actions they must take to turn the tide of investment in favor of downtown.

Mary Means' article is also essential reading for every Main Street manager. It offers crucial insights on trends that are shaping downtowns today, from ongoing technological change to significant demographic shifts. She challenges Main Street managers to acquire the skills needed to ensure that they are key leaders with a seat at the tables of power in their communities.

Finally, Fred Kent and Gary Toth of Project for Public Spaces discuss the connections between Placemaking and the Main Street movement and describe how Placemaking tools like the Power of Ten and Walking and Street Audits can combine with Main Street to create "destination downtowns." They emphasize the need to foster Main Streets as inviting public spaces that encourage people not only to shop but also to gather as a community.

Taken together, this issue is full of insights that will help us chart a strong course for the next 35 years. We hope you enjoy this issue and, as always, welcome your feedback.



Patrice Frey
President & CEO
National Main Street Center, Inc.

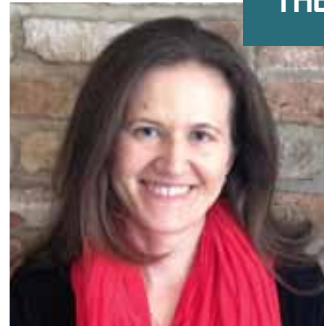


THE FOUR POINT REFRESH PROJECT







BY
Patrice Frey
&
Mary
Thompson



When it was developed in the late 1970s, Main Street and its grassroots, incremental, volunteer-based approach provided a pathway for small towns across the country to regain their footing as the economic, social, and cultural heart of their communities. At a time when monumental new construction was seen as the only way to prosperity (think shopping centers, convention centers, pedestrian malls, etc.), Main Street offered a powerful, alternative vision for economic health—one that embraced existing assets, offered greater sustainability over the long-term, and proved cost-effective.



Since then, Main Street has taught thousands of people how to view their downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts differently—as collections of assets to be leveraged, as places that define who we are, and as destinations where the entire community still comes together to live, work, and play. One of Main Street’s greatest strengths is its focus on small, highly visible, and doable activities that help create a climate of confidence and much-needed momentum to inspire local leaders and stakeholders to tackle bigger challenges. We now have 35 years of experience in more than 2,000 communities to tell us that Main Street’s Four Point Approach can and does work.

Through the use of the National Main Street Center’s organizing framework to preserve and revitalize their traditional downtowns and commercial districts, communities have collectively rehabbed more than 246,000 buildings, produced \$59.6 billion in investment, and created over 110,000 new businesses, along with more than 500,000 new jobs. The powerful legacy of the Main Street program has brought reinvestment, hope, and vitality to communities on a scale rarely seen.


While these measures of success prove just how effective Main Street has been over the years, we must also recognize the multitude of ways the playing field has changed. E-commerce has not only been created; it has exploded into our

daily lives. The shopping mall has been enclosed, re-opened, died, and then resurrected as the suburban town center. Profound shifts in manufacturing have altered the landscape of both small towns and big cities, often with dire consequences to local economies. Technology has changed the way we work, making telecommuting or work-share spaces a reality and providing a wave of entrepreneurs with a brand new set of business tools. And two generations in particular—millennials and boomers—have rediscovered downtown. Voting with their feet, both groups are choosing to live, work, and play in mixed-use, dense urban areas, re-kindling the vitality of downtown cores.

Concerns about climate change and sustainability have unalterably changed our daily lives in big ways (recycling and new energy sources) and small (bringing our own bags to market)—and are likely to further change our lives in the foreseeable future. And another profound demographic shift—the growing diversity of our population—is changing the composition of our nation and bringing forth the challenging social and economic issues that are often rooted in inequities.

AGAINST THIS BACKDROP, WE MUST ASK: HOW WELL IS THE MAIN STREET FOUR POINT APPROACH® PERFORMING TODAY?

Answering this question requires that we step back and evaluate the fundamentals



of the Main Street Approach to community revitalization. We need to ask questions about how the approach is working for managers and communities all across the country and evaluate the degree to which the approach matches up with new revitalization realities—both challenges and opportunities.

This evaluation, formally known as the Four-Point Refresh, is a cornerstone of the Center's work this year and beyond, ensuring that our network has the framework and tools required to meet 21st-century revitalization challenges, while continuing to build on 35 years of truly remarkable success. This process will allow us to strengthen the Four Point Approach—keeping key elements intact, while renewing, reviving, and refreshing the foundation.

The Task Force

During the National Main Street Center's May 2014 Board meeting, Board Chair Barbara Sidway announced the formation of a task force to oversee the Four Point Refresh project. NMSC Board Member and Main Street veteran Mary Thompson, who many may recall as the chair of the Next Main Street Task Force back in 2008, was chosen to lead the Task Force.

Late in the summer of 2014, the National Main Street Center engaged The Community Land Use and Economics

Group (CLUE) to conduct an extensive survey of Main Street directors, coordinators, allied members, and others outside our network to ask about your experience with the Four Point Approach and the Eight Principles. The results are illuminating, and help us see where there are key opportunities to improve the Main Street Approach.

Survey findings and focus group reports suggest that the Four Point Approach has tremendous value and continues to be a relevant framework for revitalization. One Network member summed it up: "The Four Point Approach is as relevant as it has ever been."

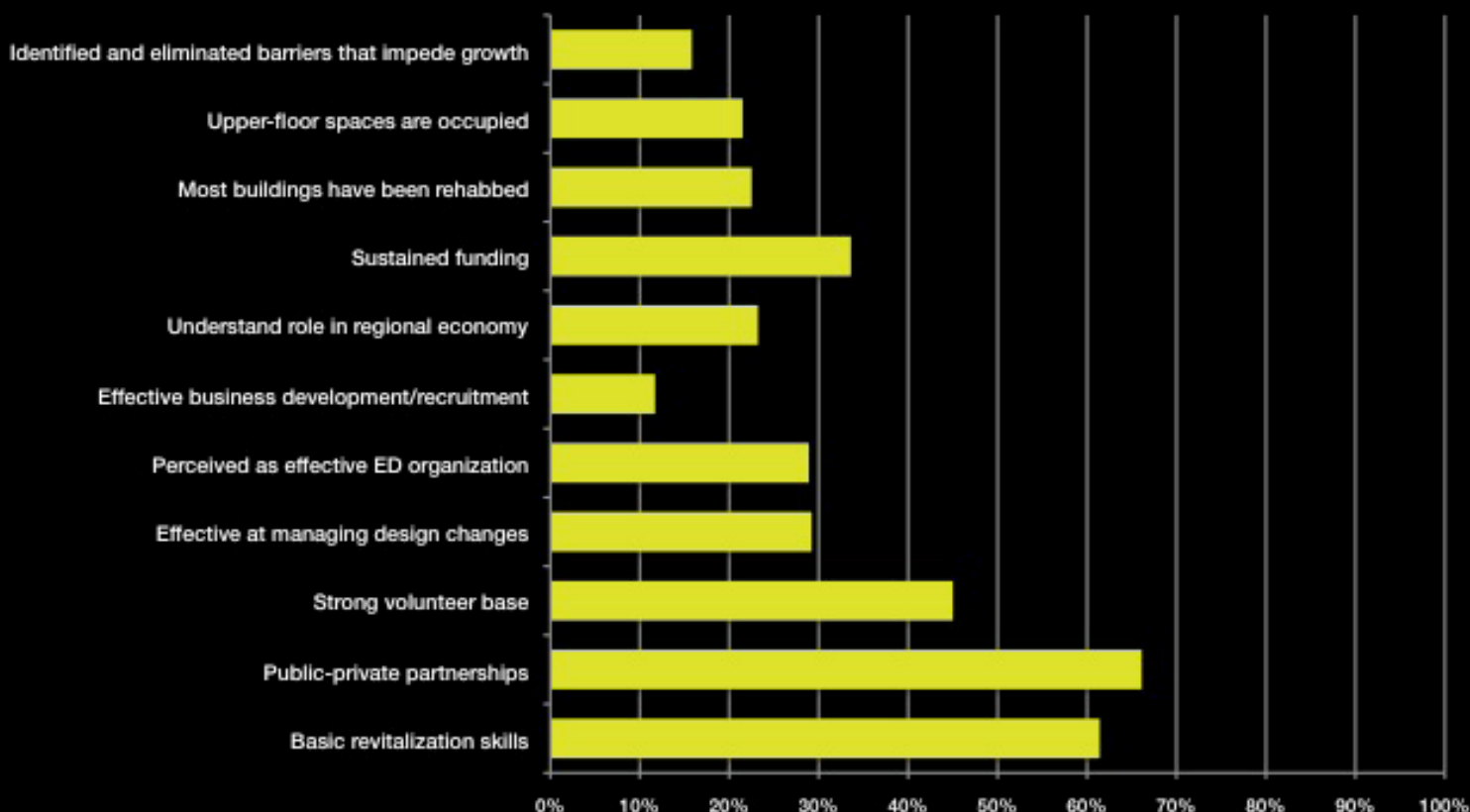
As of the date of this publication, we are partway through the refresh process and have already learned a substantial amount. While more data gathering and analysis are needed, we wanted to take this opportunity to share with you what we have learned to date.

Survey Findings

When Main Street programs were asked about their successes and the benchmarks they have achieved, 60 percent of managers said they have mastered basic revitalization skills, and over 65 percent reported strong public-private partnerships in their communities. This demonstrates that the Main Street Approach has been successful in helping many achieve a

SURVEY FINDINGS | ACTIVE MAIN STREET PROGRAMS

BENCHMARKS ACHIEVED



baseline level of knowledge about how to approach revitalization in downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts and how to work constructively with others in their district.

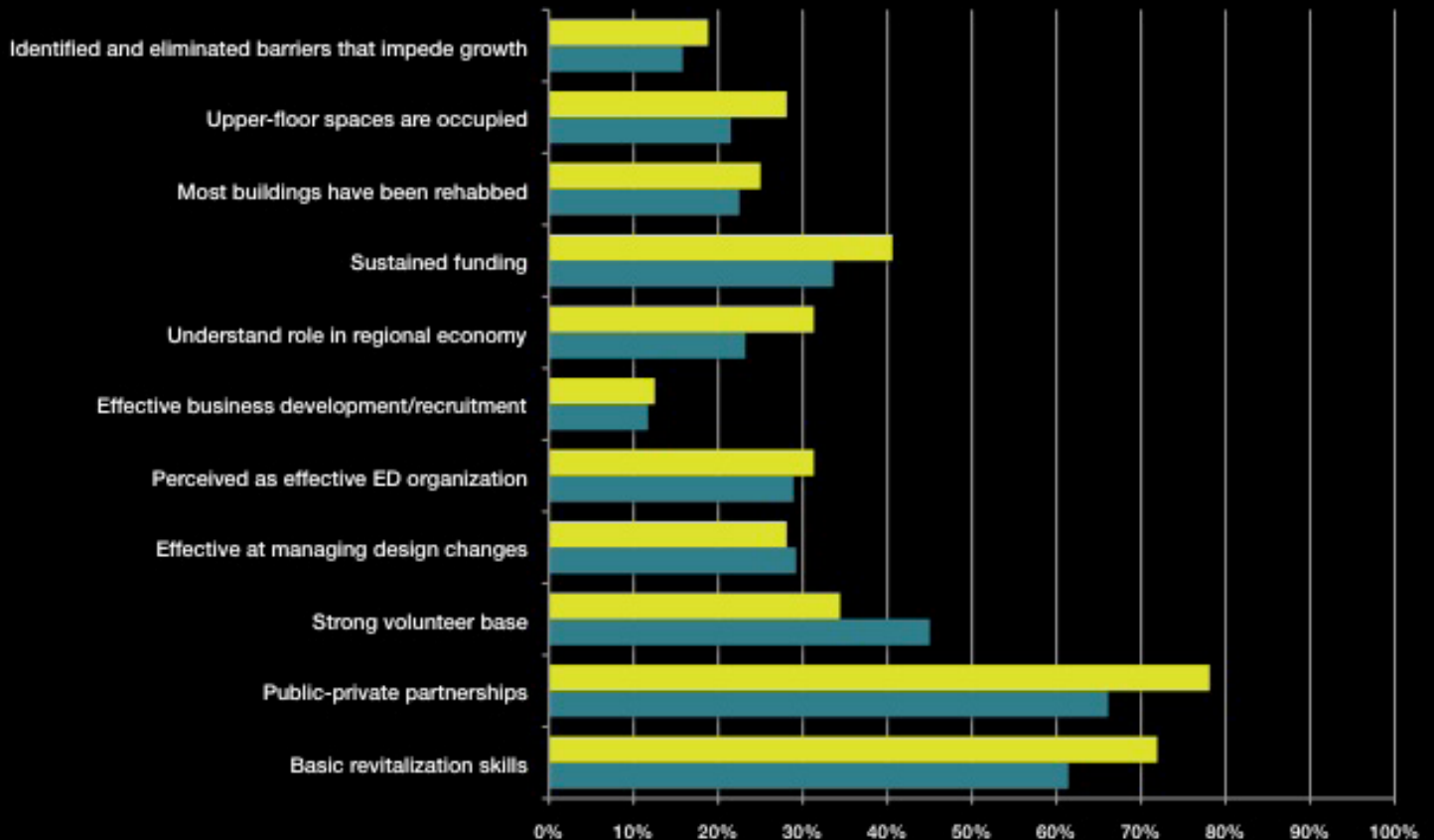
While these results are encouraging, it is clear that reaching economic development benchmarks remains a big challenge for many Main Streets.

Only about a third of respondents believed their organization was viewed as an effective economic development organization. Slightly over 10 percent said they were able to effectively recruit or retain businesses, and just 15 percent reported that they had successfully identified and eliminated barriers to growth. Only 22 percent reported

SURVEY FINDINGS | COMPARISON

BENCHMARKS ACHIEVED

■ NON-MAIN-STREET PROGRAMS
■ ACTIVE MAIN STREET PROGRAMS



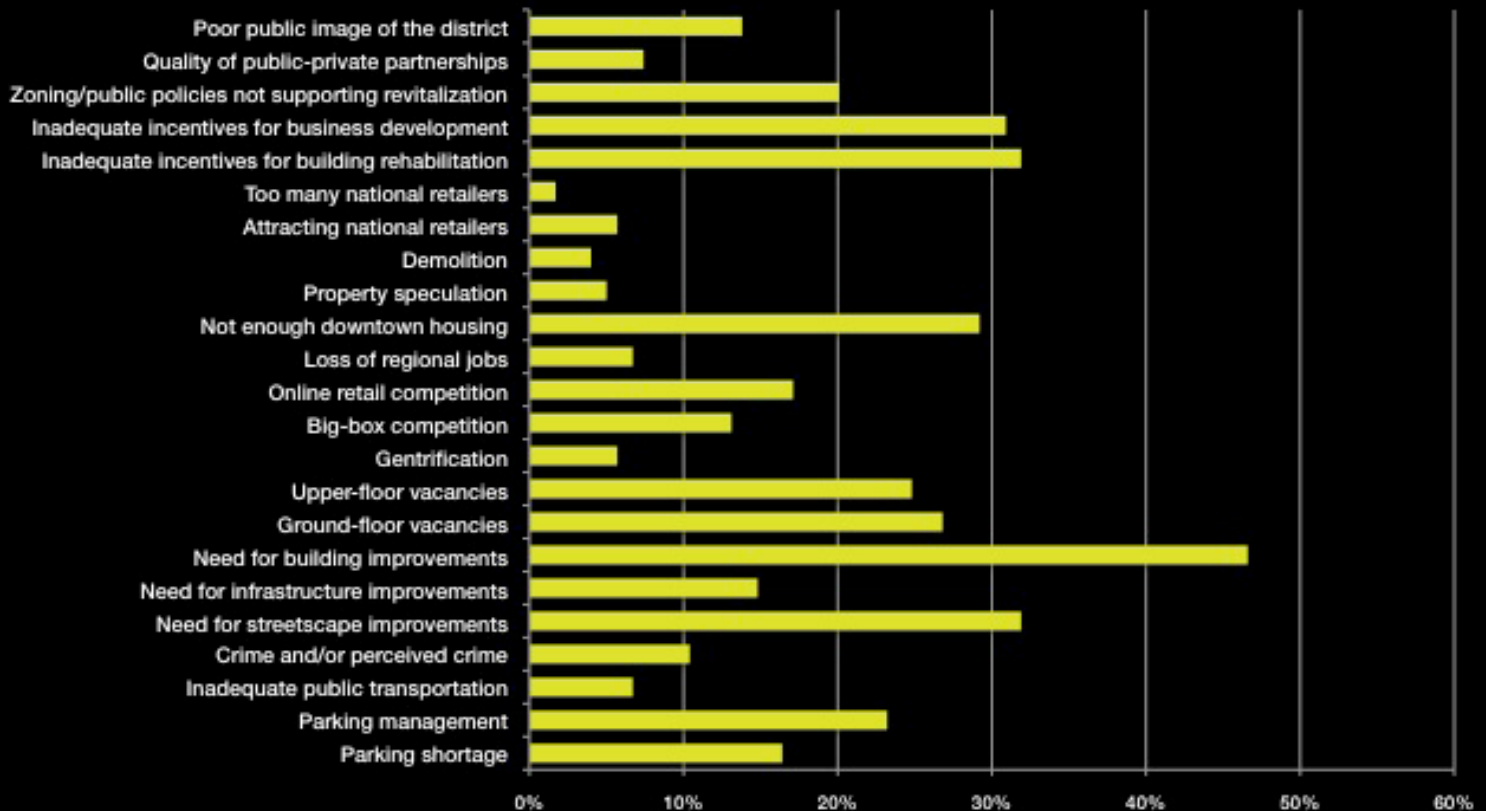
that “most buildings” in their districts had been rehabilitated. These findings suggest that the Main Street Approach could do more to address persistent issues affecting investment and business recruitment and retention.

The data we gathered also offered valuable information about today’s major revitalization challenges. Recipients cited

that the challenges they face include: inadequate incentives for business development/rehabilitation (slightly over 30 percent); not enough downtown housing (slightly under 30 percent); and the need for streetscape improvements (32 percent). By far, the largest reported need is for building improvements (over 45 percent).

SURVEY FINDINGS | ACTIVE MAIN STREET PROGRAMS

MAJOR CHALLENGES



One other issue became clear: the need for a more balanced, comprehensive focus on *all* Four Points of the Main Street Approach, as opposed to devoting the majority of time and resources on a single point. People reported spending twice the amount of time and significantly greater professional ability on promotions than on any of the other three aspects of the Main Street Approach.

Finally, only about 35 percent of respondents indicated that their Main Streets have successfully developed a sustainable funding stream for their work. Main Street managers overwhelmingly reported that attaining sustainable funding for their programs continues to be a challenge, with many managers overly reliant on funding from special events.



Key Takeaways to Date

OVERARCHING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

We have an increasingly clear picture of the fundamental and serious economic development issues communities are facing: filling vacancies downtown, attracting and retaining businesses, rehabilitating buildings, and making needed streetscape improvements. The lack of downtown housing is also a fundamental issue that more and more managers are citing as a major challenge.

Against this backdrop of serious challenges in local economies, a picture of imbalance emerges in how the Four Points are being used and how managers are approaching the revitalization challenges in their midst. This leads us to our next key takeaway.

OVEREMPHASIS ON PROMOTION

The research suggests that promotions are being overemphasized in comparison to the other three points of the Main Street Approach. While promotional activities, such as festivals, parades, and business incentive programs and events, are important to a healthy downtown or neighborhood commercial district, they must be integrated into a much larger underlying economic development revitalization strategy.

For example, Downtown Delaware's innovative Project Pop-Up initiative

successfully combines promotional activities with a cutting-edge economic development strategy. Connecting burgeoning entrepreneurs with commercial property owners, the program receives a lot of media attention while also seeding new businesses and turning local residents into Main Street entrepreneurs. Such initiatives are a better allocation of time and resources than one-dimensional promotional events that fail to provide lasting economic impact.

This heavy emphasis on events can also affect perception and create a situation in which Main Street is viewed primarily as an event-focused or promotional program, instead of a serious downtown revitalization organization. This in turn leads to a vicious cycle in which funding becomes harder to come by because financial support of Main Street is not viewed as a strategic investment, creating a situation in which funding becomes unstable. (This, perversely, can lead the program to focus on holding *more* events to help Main Street stay afloat.)

No matter how well intentioned a Main Street manager and no matter how successful the events, promotional activities simply cannot substitute for the development and execution of a sound underlying strategy to revitalize downtown.

FINDING BALANCE

This raises a fundamental question that we at the National Main Street Center are seriously and carefully addressing with our Four Point Refresh Task Force: how do we encourage a more balanced, comprehensive approach to the management of Main Streets? And how do we update the toolbox to make sure Main Street managers are well equipped to address today's revitalization challenges?

Aside from considerations about rebalancing the activities of Main Street managers, there's a clear need for professional development training to improve core economic revitalization skills, including training that will

enable managers to effectively address fundamental issues such as real estate development, market analysis, and business recruitment and retention. New skills are needed as well, such as how to work collaboratively or even drive local efforts that encourage downtown housing development. (Mary Means writes eloquently on this subject in this issue as well; see page 48 for more ideas on the skills needed by today's managers.)

There is also a significant need to help Main Street develop a more sustainable funding model, including embracing Business Improvement Districts and other special assessment districts where they are permitted by state law.



Moving Forward

The Four Point Refresh process is already yielding valuable insights into the challenges faced by managers today and how the Four Points are applied in practice. While still in progress, the process is helping illuminate a path forward that will create a stronger revitalization framework, along with the accompanying professional development training and resources needed for managers to play an important role in transforming their communities. Stay tuned to *Main Street Weekly*, [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#) to learn more as this process continues. ■



The Four Point Refresh Project has shown a clear need for professional development training that will prepare Main Street managers to effectively handle economic issues such as business recruitment and retention.

Patrice Frey is President and CEO of the National Main Street Center, where she oversees the Center's work, offering technical assistance, research, advocacy, and education and training opportunities for Main Street's network of approximately 1,100 communities. Before joining the National Main Street Center in May 2013, Patrice served as the Director of Sustainability at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, where she oversaw the National Trust's efforts to promote the reuse and greening of older and historic buildings, including research and policy development work through the Seattle-based Preservation Green Lab. Before joining the Trust, she worked for several years in the field of community development and urban research.

Mary M. Thompson is a member of the National Main Street Center board and the leader of the Four Point Refresh Task Force. She is co-manager, with her husband Dick, of Thompson Consulting, which provides services in historic preservation, planning, public policy, and project management. Mary was formerly a state coordinator of the Washington Downtown Revitalization Program and a program associate for the National Main Street Center. She also served as Washington's state historic preservation officer.



MAIN STREET: RIGHT FROM THE START

Main Street has been making creative cities long before anyone began using the term. In fact, when a community commits to Main Street, it is automatically advancing Smart Growth; Good Urbanism; Placemaking; Creative Places; and sustainable, mixed-use, resilient cities. And you've been doing that since before these labels were invented. Main Street has been right... **right from the start.**



People were working on downtown revitalization before Main Street came along; but the conventional wisdom ... was that the shopping center had replaced downtown, that those old buildings needed to be either razed or covered up, and that if downtown were to survive at all, it would be exclusively the realm of government and financial institutions. Of course, that was a recipe for a downtown that only had life from nine to five, and only on week days.

BY
Donovan
Rypkema

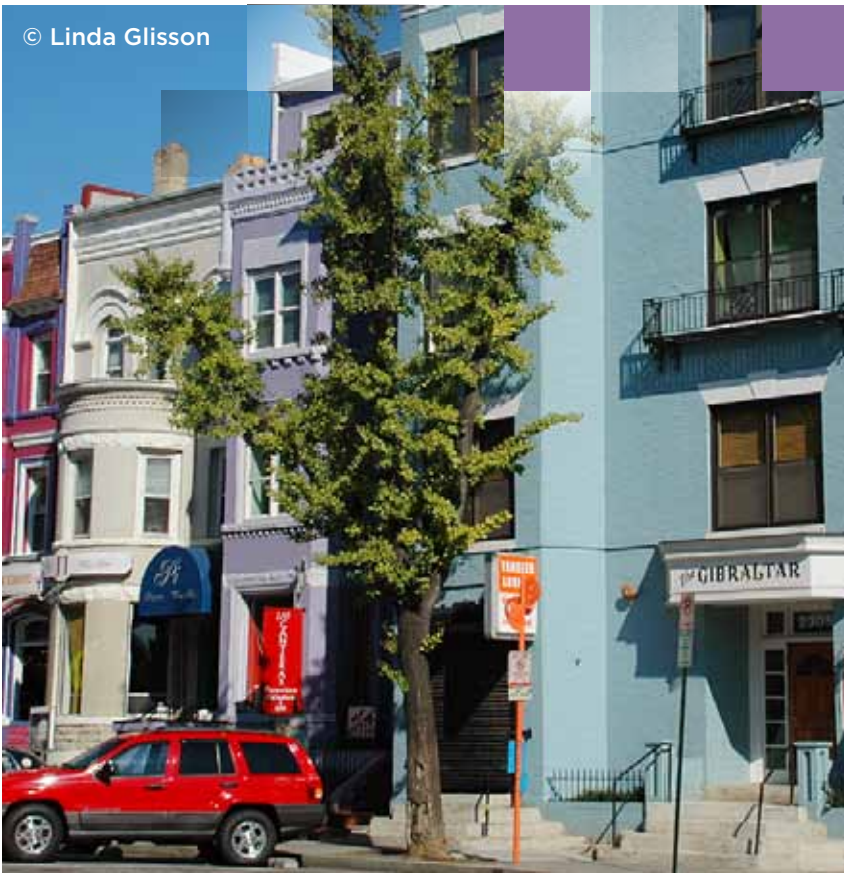


It was Main Street that argued that downtown was multifunctional, that downtown was where there was a sense of ownership by the entire community, that downtown was the public gathering place for celebration, protest, and mourning.

Meanwhile, as Main Street was making incremental, sustainable, long-term changes, the big-fix crowd came along. Every three or four years, another version of the “big fix” is proposed. [A festival marketplace, a science museum, an aquarium,

For 35 years, Main Street has been making the argument that downtown should not only preserve and reuse its historic buildings (opposite page) but that it should also be multifunctional—not just the realm of financial institutions left behind when stores migrated to shopping centers (below right) but a place where people still live, eat, shop, and play (below left).

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Downtowns should give the entire community a sense of ownership, serving as public gathering places for celebration, protest, and mourning, as well as shopping venues that can provide everything from specialty goods to locally grown fresh food.

a convention center, a football stadium, a baseball stadium, even a casino—all of these have been tried.]

Now, I'm not against big projects. Many of the things I just mentioned can have a positive impact on communities. But none, none of these always very expensive projects is the answer. They are all predicated on the trickle-down theory—we do this one big project and the benefits will trickle down to the rest of the downtown. It just ain't so. I've looked at these big-fix projects in small towns and big cities all over America, and the impact—when there is one—reaches a block and a half or two from the project.

And while millions of taxpayer dollars have gone to fund big-fix projects, Main Street has been making lasting change, building by building, block by block, town by town on an extraordinarily cost-effective basis. Main Street is, by far, the most cost-effective form of economic development of any kind anywhere in the country.



And over the years, the lessons and principles of Main Street have trickled up. Today, there is no credible downtown revitalization organization in the nation that advocates wholesale demolition of historic properties, that doesn't recognize that downtown needs to be multifunctional, that believes government and financial institutions are sufficient. There are still plenty of big-fix proponents around, but their projects are increasingly facing public skepticism about the claim that "this is the answer."



While Main Street advocated long-term, incremental change, the big-fix crowd claimed a single big project could fix downtown's woes. From aquariums (above) to convention centers, sports stadiums to casinos, it seems everything has been tried. Unfortunately, the economic benefits of these projects reach only a block or two from the development and often lead to the demolition of irreplaceable historic resources (below).





Foundation of Main Street Success: The Four Point Approach

A couple of months ago, *Smithsonian Magazine* named its choices for the “Best Small Towns in America.” These were towns with less than 15,000 in population. While fewer than 5 percent of all towns of that size are Main Street communities, at least 40 percent of Smithsonian’s best small towns were Main Street towns. That is no statistical fluke.

Fundamental to the ongoing success of Main Street is the Four Point Approach. This approach is not just some copyrighted slogan—it is the core of why Main Street works. Ultimately, the purpose of Main Street is to increase the value of downtown: the value of buildings, certainly, but also the value of businesses, value to the city as a source of tax revenues, value to the customers, value to citizens throughout the community, even value of the downtown for those who aren’t even born yet.

After 35 years, Main Street certainly needs rethinking to meet the changing context of our downtowns and neighborhood districts but the framework ... embodied by the Four Points [Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring] needs to remain the same.

One other thing that has remained the same since the beginning of Main Street is that the local executive director has to provide quantitative information every month or quarter about what’s been happening downtown:

how many net new businesses, how many buildings rehabbed, how many lost jobs, how much public investment in infrastructure. I guarantee that everyone who runs a Main Street program has complained more than once: “This is a pain-in-the-neck job.”

But that pain-in-the-neck job has really paid off. Over the past few years, we’ve been fortunate enough to take a look at that treasure trove of data in five states—data that has been accumulating for as long as 30 years. And the findings prove how right Main Street has been from the beginning.

Here are some facts from a few of those states:

Iowa: In Iowa, over the 26-year life of the program, for every dollar the state has invested in the Iowa Main Street program, nearly \$72 has been invested in buildings in Main Street districts. Every year, the additional property taxes—not from all the buildings on Main Street, just the additional value from the rehabilitation investment—provide local governments in Main Street communities with an additional \$10.8 million in revenue. Very conservatively, the net new businesses on Main Street generate \$43 million in sales tax revenues for the state coffers.

New Mexico: Since the beginning of New Mexico Main Street in 1986 [despite economic challenges in much of the state], more than \$1 billion has been invested in buildings and infrastructure in Main Street districts, over half of that in private-sector investment. During that time 11,000 net new jobs and 3,200 net new businesses have been generated on New Mexico Main Streets.

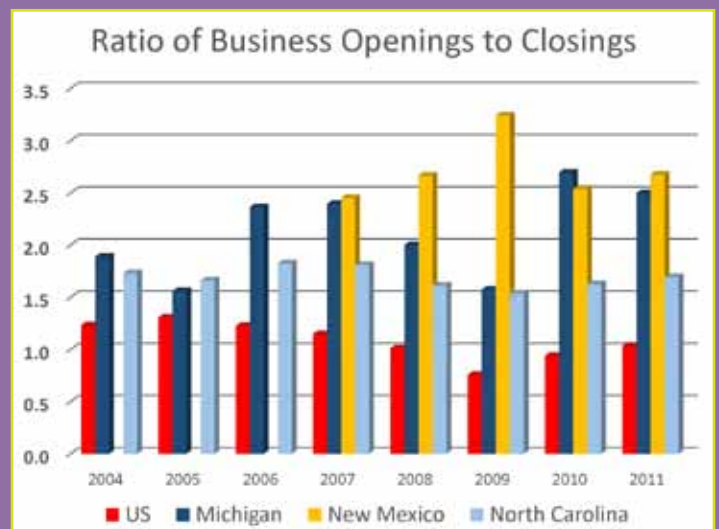
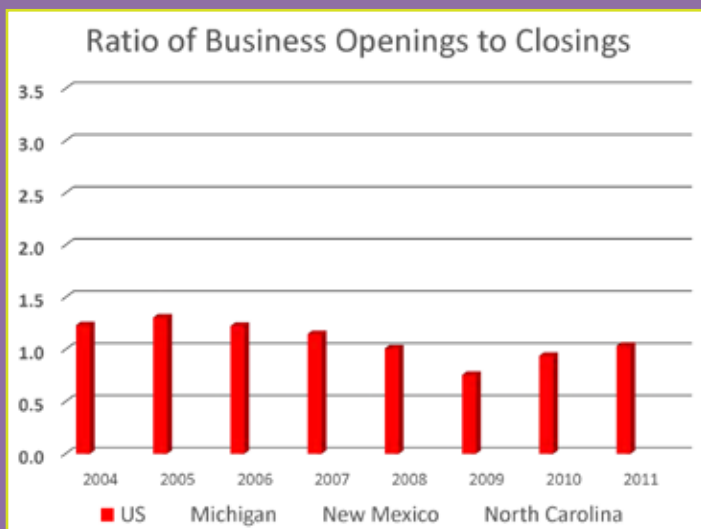
Michigan: Rehabilitation projects and façade renovations have, on average, generated 214 Michigan jobs and more than \$9 million in paychecks every year since the program began. For most of the time since the establishment of Michigan Main Street, the nation and the state have either been in a recession or anemic recovery. But throughout these challenging economic years, Michigan Main Street communities have far outperformed the state in the rate of net job growth.

Every year, the U.S. Department of Commerce calculates the ratio of businesses that opened to businesses that closed. Over the long haul, that ratio nationally is generally between 1.1 and 1.2 to 1—that is to say, for every 11 or 12 businesses that open, 10 close. In the chart at left below are the national numbers from 2004 to 2011, the latest numbers available. In 2007, the U.S. ratio

was about normal, with a ratio of about 1.1 to 1. The Great Recession began at the end of 2007; and the downturn was felt in 2008, with as many businesses closing as opening. Then in 2009 and 2010, the ratio was less than one, meaning more businesses closed than opened. By 2011, the recovery had finally begun, however meekly, and about as many businesses opened as closed.

But take a look at the open-to-close ratio in Main Street communities in three states—Michigan, New Mexico, and North Carolina in the chart below right. In all of them, there were more business openings than closings throughout the national recession. What does that mean? That Main Street has created an economic environment that is a fertile place not only for businesses to open but to stay open in tough economic times.

U.S. Department of Commerce Ratio of Business Openings to Closings, 2004-2011





Main Street has been right from the start about the importance of historic preservation to downtown revitalization. Preservation is what distinguishes Main Street from other strategies and has been key to its success.



© Main Street Dubuque

Main Street Works for Progress

So Main Street has been right from the start in its approach of preservation-based revitalization. Hopefully, that success justifies it being around for another 35 years. But to do so, there are eight things I think should stay the same and eight things that should change:

WHAT SHOULD STAY THE SAME

1 Main Street should remain historic preservation based. That's what distinguishes it; [historic preservation] has been central to its success.

2 The active involvement of volunteers is crucial. It is those volunteer hours that not only build a sense of ownership of Main Street by the community, but also what makes the investment numbers so strong. If you had to pay all those volunteers what they are worth, the leverage of public investment wouldn't look nearly as good.

3 Partnerships, especially with city hall, are important. There is simply too much to do without having partners. But as important as the partnership with city hall is, Main Street needs to maintain its independence or risk being just one more city program.

Main Street should continue to be a volunteer-driven program. Not only does volunteer support build ownership of the downtown by the community; it also leverages public investment because the program gets valuable in-kind services.





A strong partnership with city hall is crucial, but Main Street should stay nonpartisan on both the local and state levels so that there is less risk to the program if another political party takes over.

4 Main Street needs to stay nonpartisan on both the state and local levels. When Main Street becomes too closely affiliated with a partisan position, it is at risk of being dumped when the other political party takes over.

5 A long-term, incremental perspective and emphasis on quality are critical. Otherwise, Main Street will become like the strip-center developer who only thinks: “how quick and how cheap.”

6 An unambiguous commitment to locally owned businesses is essential. They provide a large measure of the differentiation of a business district, and two to three times as much of their annual sales volume remains in the community, compared to that of a chain store.

7 Main Streets must stress their differentiation, not their similarity to other places. Tearing down a historic building almost never adds to differentiation and almost always adds to homogenization. And never, ever, ever, ever tear down a historic building for a surface parking lot.

8 Keep reminding yourself, your board, and your community that Main Streets “are never done.” They are a work in progress.

An unequivocal commitment to locally owned businesses is at the heart of the Main Street movement. Local businesses distinguish a Main Street district from other shopping venues and other communities. They also provide a financial boost as more of their sales revenue remains in the community, in comparison to chain stores.



© Cambridge Main Street



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

- 1** Add public transportation to your Main Street agenda. No matter how small your Main Street town is, more public transportation will be needed in the future so Main Street needs to be part of the discussion today.
- 2** Redefine downtown and close-in residential neighborhoods as part of the larger smart growth, sustainable cities, walkability, public health, and resilient cities movements. Historic preservation became relevant when people started talking about it not as an end in itself but as a vehicle for larger ends. Downtown revitalization needs to become a means, not an end, as well.
- 3** Grab onto the “Aging in Place” movement. Aging baby boomers are prime targets as residents for downtowns and close-in residential neighborhoods and as customers for downtown businesses.

As aging baby boomers (below right) increasingly choose to live in or near downtown and neighborhood commercial districts, Main Street needs to focus on the “Aging in Place” movement and make their districts inviting, comfortable places for boomers to live. Public transportation (below left) is also an important item to add to Main Street’s agenda as communities seek to provide alternate modes of transit for those who cannot or do not want to drive.



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LOFT LIVING

GOLDMAN PROPERTIES

Downtown living in big cities and small is a booming trend throughout the nation. Add or increase efforts to provide downtown housing. Main Street residents not only add vibrancy to commercial districts; they also increase revenue not only through rent but by patronizing local businesses and eateries.



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When that key building is standing empty with no buyer in sight, Main Street needs to step up to the plate. Taking on real estate deals is crucial to a Main Street organization's credibility as an economic development organization.

4 Whatever you are doing to increase downtown housing, quadruple that effort. We found in Michigan that just one couple renting a downtown apartment for \$750 a month will spend more than \$9,000 a year in the immediate downtown area, in addition to their rent.

5 Change the property rights debate into discussions of property responsibilities. Leaving a downtown building sitting empty and deteriorating is stealing money from the building and business owners next door. One owner's property rights does not give that person the right to steal from his or her neighbors.

6 Look for strategies for economic growth without population growth. There are lots of ways to do that: a better educated workforce, greater productivity, tourism, more internet-based business activities, and others. Population growth can bring economic growth but it's not the only way to do so.

7 Do real estate deals.... When no one is stepping up to take on that white elephant project, it's time for Main Street to do it.

B Make and strengthen international connections. There is no place too small to do business internationally. Whether you know it or not, someone in your community is doing that right now. Build on those connections and get more of your downtown businesses into the global marketplace.

The Main Street Approach has been right from the start. Main Street might be a work in progress, but it's also a work for progress!

Donovan Rypkema is the principal of [PlaceEconomics](#), a Washington DC-based consulting firm that specializes in advising public and nonprofit clients on how to revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts, as well as how to reuse historic buildings. Rypkema is also the 2012 recipient of the Louise du Pont Crowninshield Award, the highest honor bestowed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



To view a recording of Donovan Rypkema's entire speech [click here](#) (speech starts at 58:52). To read the full speech, [click here](#).

Thirty-five years after its birth in three small towns, Main Street is still going strong. It has made long-term, vital changes to more than 2,000 communities and has proven the value of preserving and reusing this nation's older and historic buildings. Most importantly, it has shown the need for continuing management of downtown and neighborhood commercial districts. Main Street's work is never done! It is a work in progress and for progress.





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INVESTING IN MAIN STREET'S FUTURE

"The future ain't what it used to be."

- Yogi Berra



BY
Kennedy
Smith



Victor Gruen had a dream for America's suburbs. In the early 1950s, the Austrian-born architect envisioned places that would bring together shopping, civic spaces, post offices, libraries, and restaurants. Walkable places, like the public squares in European towns, places everyone visited at least once a day. Places that would feel like downtowns in the suburban communities that never really had them.

Gruen's dream? Enclosed, climate-controlled shopping malls. But his dream for America's suburbs turned out to be a nightmare for America's downtowns.

The first of Gruen's shopping malls—Southdale Center—opened outside Minneapolis, in Edina, Minnesota, in 1956. Incredibly, even the mall's developer, the Dayton Company, did not believe the mall would drain sales from downtown Minneapolis.

Wrong.

Southdale Center sucked hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of sales out of downtown Minneapolis and the downtowns of a dozen or two smaller towns within the region. Clocking in at 800,000 square feet, Southdale was roughly the size of 400 Main Street shops. Somehow, no one realized that filling up all those new suburban cash registers would drain lots of existing ones downtown.

This pattern replayed itself over and over as nearly 2,000 regional enclosed malls popped up across the nation in the next several decades, diverting billions of dollars of retail sales from downtowns. Without retail sales, downtown vacancy rates soared, building owners deferred maintenance, property values plummeted, and cities collected less in property tax revenue. Big-box stores followed in shopping malls' wake—and the rest is, well, history.

Later in his life, Gruen himself expressed shock at how it had unfolded. “I am often called the father of the shopping mall. I would like to take this opportunity to disclaim paternity once and for all. I refuse to pay alimony to those bastard developments. They destroyed our cities.”

Today, there are two scenarios playing out on America’s Main Streets. A growing number of Main Streets are regaining economic and cultural vibrancy. But others are slipping farther behind, still caught in a downward cycle of vacancy, disinvestment, and decay.

What's Driving The Changes?

“It is always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look further than you can see.”

- Winston Churchill

More than anything else, demographics and technology drive the changes that affect a Main Street’s future.

For the past several decades, Baby Boomers—the post-WWII generation that grew up in the suburbs, driving minivans and SUVs to shopping malls and fast-food restaurants—called the shots on community development. But, for the next decade or so, Millennials will be behind the wheel. With 83 million members,

Millennials—people born roughly between 1982 and 2000—are the largest generation cohort in American history. That’s eight million more than the Baby Boomers. And, they are changing pretty much every aspect of how towns and cities function. Their preferences are already having an impact on our Main Streets.

Local. Millennials have a strong preference for locally sourced products. And, while they move fluidly between local businesses, national chains, and online retailers, they spend a higher percentage of their dollars at locally owned businesses.

The preferences of Millennials, the generation born between 1982 and 2000, are driving many of the changes affecting America’s Main Streets.

Their tendency to seek out local investment opportunities will help spur crowdfunding and community-owned businesses.



There is ample evidence that Millennials are already turning the ship toward local shopping. For example, according to a recent Piper Jaffray survey of 7,500 people, teens reported visiting shopping malls an average of 30 times per year in 2014, a stunning 25 percent drop from 2007. According to MasterCard Advisors' SpendingPulse business research service, the amount of money American shoppers have spent in small stores has grown faster for the past three consecutive years than the amount they have spent in big-box stores. And Kimco Realty predicts that small-store occupancy will hit 90 percent in 2015, one of the highest percentages in years.

Millennials are also more likely to seek out local investment opportunities than their parents were, helping spur the rapid growth of crowdfunding and community-owned businesses.

Green. The environmental concerns of Millennials shape their decisions about what to buy and where to buy it. They want to know that the products they purchase are manufactured responsibly, in ways that do not harm the environment. They prefer locally sourced food, grown sustainably. They like repurposed products and products made from recycled materials. They share things instead of buying them. And they like historic buildings.



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Their concern for the environment leads Millennials to seek out locally sourced food (top) and products made from recycled materials (above).



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The walkability of a district is a major attraction to Millennials who are less likely than previous generations to own or drive cars, preferring instead to walk, cycle, or take public transit.

Walkable. Consistent with their interest in the environment, Millennials prefer living and working in walkable districts. They are less likely than their parents or grandparents to own a car or even to get a driver's license, relying more on, walking, cycling, taking public transit, and carsharing (Zipcar, for example). In communities where public transportation is available, they are more likely than their parents to use it.

Interactive. Millennials grew up with the internet and are drawn to interactive experiences, from animated storefront displays to MeetUp events. They use their smartphones and social media to stay connected to their networks. They value their networks' opinions about products, services, and experiences above brand recommendations. They seek out activities that introduce them to new people and new ideas. And they relentlessly document and share their experiences.

Baby Boomers might have fueled post-war suburban development, but some of them don't plan to retire there. In growing numbers, Boomers are ditching their suburban houses and heading to Main Street themselves. Millennials aren't the only generation driving development back to Main Street.

Emerging technology is, of course, also a huge game-changer for Main Streets. Location-aware apps, data



sensors, and Augmented Reality, for example, have triggered development of hundreds of new tools that help people explore, connect to, and improve older commercial districts. From parking payment smartphone apps to LED streetlights, emerging technology is making downtown more dynamic.

For Main Street businesses, nothing has been a bigger game-changer than online commerce. The retail industry

The twenty- and thirty-somethings may be leading the charge back to Main Street, but the Boomers aren't far behind. Despite having raised their families in the suburbs, many are ditching their houses and heading to Main Street to retire.

© Linda Glisson





has grown up around the need to help product producers distribute their goods to consumers. A century ago, it would have been impossible for someone to buy all the food, clothes, furniture, and other products they might need directly from growers and producers. Retail stores provided a way to aggregate those products, with merchants buying the goods from producers and reselling them, with a markup, to shoppers. With the advent of shopping malls, retail chains gained an efficiency of scale, with the ability to sell products to customers throughout the nation and around the

Online marketing benefits Main Street businesses by allowing them to expand their sales to customers all over the world. By 2017, it is expected that online retailing will reach \$370 billion in sales, a trend that could benefit locally owned businesses tremendously.

world. Big-box stores moved the needle even higher through efficient distribution systems that make it possible to restock store shelves within hours.

The internet represents yet another disruption in product distribution; but this time, it benefits Main Streets and their businesses by allowing them to reach customers throughout the world and to build ongoing relationships with one-time visitors. In 2013, 5.2 percent of retail purchases were made online, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Forrester Research, Inc., predicts that that number will double by 2017, translating into \$370 billion in sales. With good online marketing strategies, Main Street businesses stand to benefit immensely from this trend.

The Main Street of the Future

"Tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today."

- Malcolm X

What might a successful downtown or neighborhood commercial corridor look like in the not-too-distant future? And, what might the organizations and partnerships that guide their development do to help ensure that they successfully attract new investment? There are many possibilities. Here are a few that will be vital to success:



A broad mix of uses. Historically, retail businesses were a relatively small component of a downtown's economy. Look at a Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map of just about any downtown from 75 years ago or skim through a city directory; and you will see lumber yards, boarding houses, insurance agencies, bowling alleys, ice plants, wholesalers, churches, hotels, fabricators of all sorts, and a host of other non-retail uses. In even the most economically vibrant pre-1950 downtowns, retail shops rarely accounted for more than 15 percent of the district's land use or economic activity.

As shopping malls grew, Americans became accustomed to the idea that the places we shop are places we *just* shop. We began thinking of downtowns as *retail* centers, not *mixed-use* centers. We started paying more attention to ground-floor space and less attention to the upper floors. Our zoning laws and building codes reinforced this misperception, making it difficult to use upper floors for apartments and practically erasing small industries from Main Street districts.

Successful Main Streets of the future will have a broad mix of uses—and a broad range of capital sources and incentives to make this happen. Main Street districts that offer housing in upper-floor spaces and adjacent neighborhoods create a built-in, 24/7 customer base for local retailers. With rents from upper-floor spaces, property owners can better afford building upkeep and periodic rehabilitation. Fully-



Historically, retail shops accounted for only about 15 percent of downtown's activity. Main Streets that offer a broad range of uses, including small industries, such as this custom woodworking firm, are the wave of the future.

occupied buildings are usually worth more than partly-full buildings, so the local government earns more property tax revenue, which it can reinvest in the district for infrastructure, incentives, or organizational support. And, with a higher proportion of customers living and working downtown, the district depends less on regional shoppers, reducing the need for parking.

Small industries. Older downtowns and neighborhood commercial corridors are undergoing an exciting renaissance as creative-economy industries take root and grow. From custom fabricators to software engineers, from blog publishers to 3D print shops, small industry will be one of the fastest-growing components of the Main Street economy in the future.



After Holland, Mich., upgraded its downtown infrastructure by installing a snow-melt system under the sidewalks and streets, several hundred apartments popped up and ground-floor vacancies disappeared.

© CC image courtesy of Bill Couch on Flickr

Great infrastructure. When Holland, Michigan, decided to repave its downtown streets and sidewalks in the late 1980s, a local businessman had a great idea: route heated water from the local power plant through more than 60 miles of PEX pipe placed under the new paving, creating a cooling loop for the power plant and providing radiant heat that would keep downtown streets and sidewalks free of ice and snow in winter. Within a few years of installing the “snow-melt system,” several hundred new apartments popped up in downtown Holland, and ground-floor vacancies evaporated.

From snow-melt systems to LED streetlighting that brightens when pedestrians are nearby, from compacting trash cans to porous street paving that improves storm water absorption, successful Main Streets of the future will incorporate infrastructure that not only serves its utilitarian purposes better than in the past but also vastly enhances the experiences of residents and visitors. And smart infrastructure investments will trigger new investment in property and business development.

Wired. Successful Main Streets harness technology to improve how they function and enrich the experience of living, working, and visiting. In low-tech ways, this could mean QR code window stickers that make it possible for people to quickly access a business's website, or a Tweet that spontaneously offers something free at a downtown store at lunchtime, or a parking app that makes it possible for someone to extend meter time if lunch is taking longer than expected.

There are lots of high-tech tools that will make downtowns and neighborhood districts function better. For example,

more than a hundred U.S. towns and cities now use adaptive traffic-control systems to move cars and people more efficiently. These systems use sensors to control traffic lights based on actual demand rather than controlling lights at set intervals. If there are no cars traveling north-south through an intersection, for instance, the traffic light lets east-west traffic keep moving. Users report that, when driving along adaptive traffic-control corridors, their travel time is cut in half by up to 50 percent and their stops at traffic lights are reduced by 60 to 90 percent. It also means cuts in fuel consumption, emissions, and vehicle accidents.



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Adapting to new technology is essential to Main Street's success. This can range from simple QR code window stickers (left) to high-tech traffic-control systems that move cars and people more efficiently.

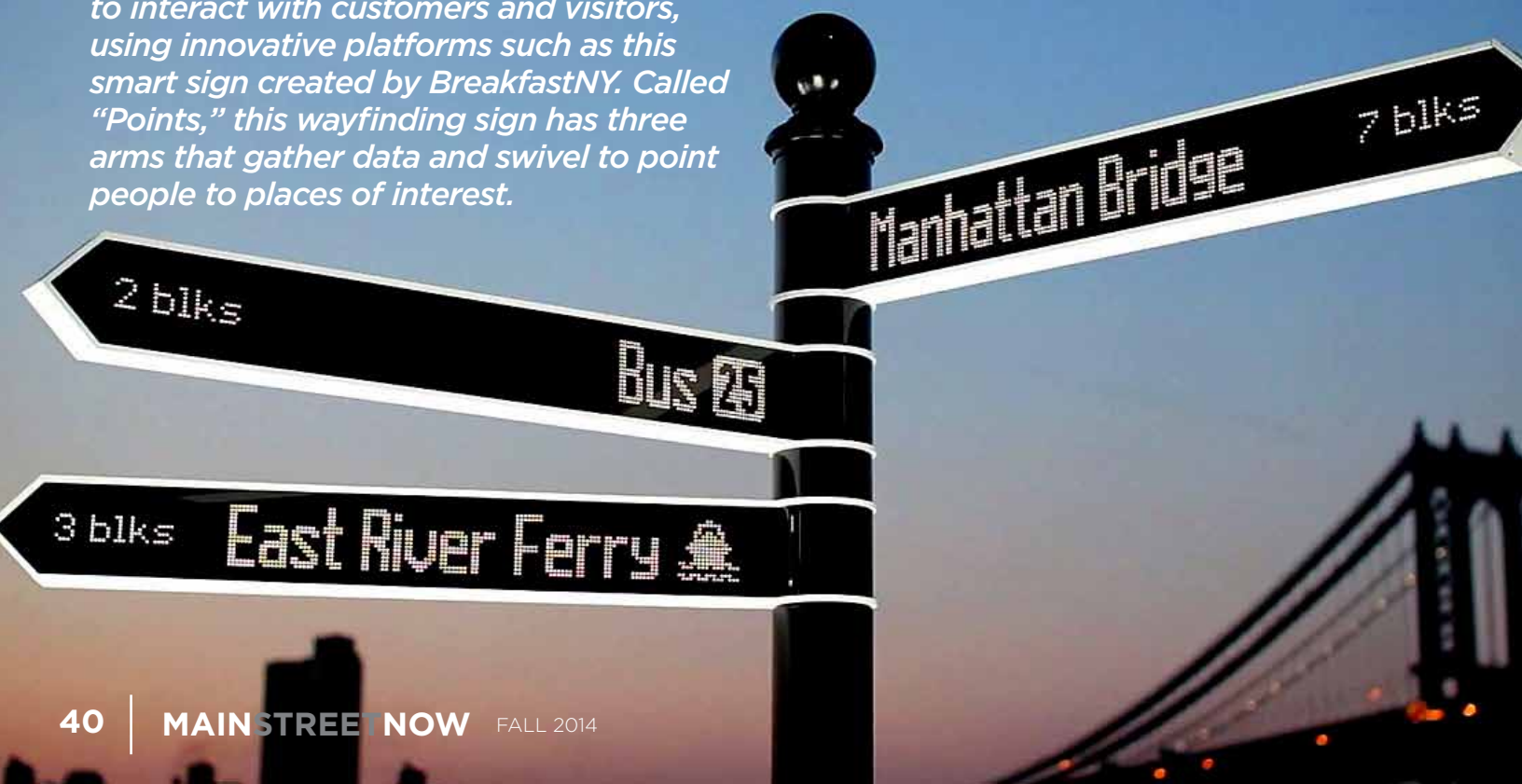
Interactive. The Main Street of the future will provide platforms for businesses to communicate with visitors (and vice-versa) and for a district's residents, workers, and visitors to communicate with one another. For example, tech company BreakfastNY has created a directional sign with three arms that swivel to point the way to restaurants, entertainment, stores offering special sales, places with lots of Tweets or Facebook check-ins, or any other geodata the sign is programmed to gather. And in the Netherlands, a red "RECORDING" sign flashes on the exterior of an apartment building where music students live when one of the students is using

the building's recording studio, inviting district residents to listen in via a website. Successful downtowns and neighborhood business districts of the future will shift emphasis from major promotional events to interactivity and to small touches that enliven the experience of visiting and using the district every day.

Local and global. Successful Main Streets will serve both local and global markets, strengthening sales in the process. Rooted in local history and culture, these districts will be central to a community's image and self-definition. And their online presence will connect them, and their businesses, to a global community of customers whose purchases will help

© BreakfastNY

Successful Main Streets will find ways to interact with customers and visitors, using innovative platforms such as this smart sign created by BreakfastNY. Called "Points," this wayfinding sign has three arms that gather data and swivel to point people to places of interest.





the district support and sustain specialized businesses and products.

Local emphasis will mean that more downtown organizations will tackle property and business development projects themselves, instead of waiting for a developer or entrepreneur to magically appear and do it for them. Capital for downtown development projects is likely to be locally sourced, too.

Economic transformation

strategies. Successful Main Street management programs will be guided by a tight, relentless focus on the economic development strategies needed to transform a district over time—not on the Four Points or other underlying organizational structure *per se* but on strategies that determine which activities the program chooses to do. These strategies will be based on a solid understanding of the district's role within the regional economy and its best opportunities for growth. And, attracting investment for strategic transformation is much easier—and invariably more successful—than simply (and repeatedly) raising money for a program's operating expenses.

A deep arsenal of business and property development tools and incentives. For many reasons, it is almost always easier to develop a new business or to build a new commercial building out on the strip than downtown. Consequently, one of

the challenges of rebuilding Main Street's economy is making it a more attractive location. Districts that offer a variety of development tools and incentives have a much better chance of attracting new investment than those that don't.

Sometimes, adequate capital might not be available for Main Street building rehabilitation or for business development. For instance, lenders might not be willing to loan enough because of perceived risk, or because of institutional requirements that borrowers invest more equity or offer more collateral than individual property owners can afford. Districts that provide financing tools to close these gaps usually have greater success supporting business growth and property development.

Shopping mall management companies exercise complete control over which businesses rent space there and which spaces they rent. Main Street organizations can't directly control business mix, but incentives offer some degree of influence. For example, districts that offer forgivable loan programs (usually funded by Tax Increment Finance revenue) typically make forgivable loans available only to their highest-priority new businesses (or at least give precedence to these high-priority businesses). Districts that offer incentives that help guide business and property development are almost always more successful at controlling business mix than those that don't.



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Organizational flexibility. In 1985, Pittsburgh's East Carson Street commercial corridor was one of the first urban neighborhoods in the nation to launch a Main Street program. In 1996, Main Street on East Carson was one of the first winners of the Great American Main Street Award. And, over the next decade, East Carson Street's successes continued to multiply: 230 storefronts rehabbed; 250 new businesses; lots of new housing; even a specialized real estate company, Cool Space Locator, to help people find store and office space in the district's historic buildings.

The program's successes stemmed, at least partly, from its organizational flexibility. Rather than adhering rigidly to a committee structure based on the

Four Points of the Main Street Approach, Main Street on East Carson loosened its organizational structure after its first year or so of activity. The Four Points provided the framework for choosing and focusing activities; but, over the years, responsibility for various activities shifted from committees to partner organizations, task forces, and the staff of the South Side Local Development Company (the community development corporation in which the Main Street program was housed).

Within its first few years, in fact, the Main Street program's board of directors was reduced from 21 members to 10 and became a committee of the South Side Local Development Corporation. Finally, in the ultimate act of organizational



Main Street on East Carson Street in Pittsburgh was one of the first Urban Main Street Programs in the nation and one of the first winners of the Great American Main Street Award. Much of its success stemmed from its organizational flexibility and willingness to hand over specific activities to partner organizations and task forces.

shopping centers, shopping malls, big-box stores, and hundreds of thousands of scattered, freestanding buildings.


All that new commercial space nudged downtowns into a downward spiral of disinvestment. With a glut of commercial space in a community, Main Street vacancies grew—and, with an oversupply of space, rents dropped. With less rental income, property owners deferred maintenance and buildings fell into disrepair. Property values dropped, so local governments collected less property tax and, in turn, had less money to invest in district infrastructure and services. Districts looked uncared-for, and customers went elsewhere. Without active intervention, the cycle perpetuates itself.

Reversing this disinvestment cycle and returning Main Street to an economically self-sustaining position is arguably the top priority of successful revitalization programs. What does self-sustaining mean? Essentially, it means that the rents commercial district property owners collect are high enough for them to properly maintain and periodically rehab their buildings. By extension, that means that Main Street businesses need to generate enough sales to pay the rents property owners need.

flexibility, the program announced in 2010 that it had accomplished all of its major goals and was therefore going out of business, handing off the remaining parts of its agenda to several partner organizations.

Successful Main Street organizations of the future will be similarly flexible, adjusting operating structure to meet new needs, work better with partner organizations, develop new capacity, and, ultimately, to achieve the organization's ultimate goal of making Main Street a high-performing, self-sustaining district.

Self-sustaining. In the years after Gruen's first mall opened its doors, American towns and cities built new commercial buildings at a frenzied pace—



Returning downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts to this economically balanced state involves attracting new investment to support business and property development. And, that almost always involves some hurdles. For example, if they lack confidence in the overall condition of the district, banks may be unwilling to lend as much as business and property owners need. Property owners might not be familiar with tools like federal historic rehabilitation tax credits and New Markets tax credits, tools that can be invaluable in financing property development. The district might need infrastructure improvements or other upgrades in order to leverage private-sector investment.

Successful Main Street management programs of the future will have a good understanding of the economic dynamics of


older commercial districts, their investment needs, and the major tools available for stimulating and supporting business, property, and infrastructure development. Even more important, successful Main Street programs will find creative and innovative ways to solve investment challenges and leverage the resources of a broad range of public and private partners.

For the Main Street organization itself, self-sustaining means that the program's ongoing work is supported by increased economic activity in the district.

When downtown and neighborhood commercial corridor revitalization programs are first launched, they raise money by selling the dream of a revitalized district. Organizations, government agencies, businesses, individuals, and other partners give money to help the organization get

As downtown economies improve, Main Street management organizations must tap into the district's increased economic success to develop a dependable stream of funding, perhaps through a business improvement or other type of special assessment district.





started because they support this vision. But, once the organization is established, its initial funders are unlikely to fund the program in perpetuity—at least not in the form of unrestricted contributions to support its operating expenses. They will want to know that the organization has identified transformative strategies to sustain the district’s economic growth—and, if persuaded, they will invest in it.

As the district’s economy improves, successful Main Street programs will tap into the district’s increased economic activity—through a special assessment district, perhaps, or through use of tax increment financing—to support the program’s ongoing work.

Business development. Main Street management programs of the past talked about “recruiting” new businesses. Those in the future will *develop* new businesses.


National retail chains are not risk-takers. They locate new stores in places that already have thriving businesses, where the strength of the district’s economy has already been proven. With rare exceptions, they will not open stores or offices in districts that do not already have a strong base of locally owned businesses.

Successful Main Street programs will seek out talented entrepreneurs and pair them with seasoned mentors to develop the kinds of businesses that advance the district’s economic development strategy. And they will create tools and resources to cultivate and support new business development, from business boot camps

to more effective loan products to local equity investment groups.

Coworking spaces are already stimulating new business development by bringing people together in a shared work environment, where ideas can cross-pollinate. A small but quickly growing number of coworking spaces have already popped up in downtowns around the country. And, they are becoming specialized, both in what they offer and how they function. There are coworking spaces devoted to woodworking, machining, sewing, and writing. Some, like Nashville’s Fort Houston, combine several of these, offering a wood shop, print shop, and photography studio. In lieu of paying a membership fee, members of the Gangplank coworking space in Chandler, Arizona, can choose to complete jobs for the city or for several corporations that support Gangplank.

Business accelerators combine coworking with seed capital, formal training, and skilled coaching to help develop new businesses and make sure they succeed. For example, The Brandery, in Cincinnati’s historic Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, provides a four-month boot camp program to entrepreneurs whose business ideas are selected through an annual competition. It then invests \$20,000 in seed capital in each business, in exchange for a 6 percent equity share. When the businesses it spins out become profitable, the accelerator, which operates as a nonprofit, invests the proceeds back into its work.



Nimble. In an era of shopping by smartphone and delivery by drone, things change quickly. Successful Main Street programs will be nimble, staying ahead of demographic shifts and emerging technology and making small shifts to stay on course while steering the district steadily toward its goals.

Five Ways to Thrive

“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

- Peter F. Drucker

There is no one starting point for positioning your commercial district to thrive in the future. But, here are a few essential actions to consider:

- Create an effective set of tools and incentives to nurture and support business and property development. Tell developers and investors what you want and back up your requests with the tools needed to do it, rather than simply dangling incentives out there and seeing who responds.
- Be sure your community’s planning and land-use laws fully support Main Street revitalization and reinvestment. In particular, be sure they don’t allow development of more commercial space than the community can realistically absorb without harming local businesses. Be sure they support mixed-use development. And be sure they make it at least as easy, if not easier, to develop a new business or redevelop a building on Main Street as it is on the highway strip.
- Define two or three overarching strategies to transform the district’s economy. Initially, this might be based on an intuitive analysis of the district’s strengths and regional opportunities. But, eventually, your strategies should be based on a thorough understanding of the district’s economic dynamics and its role within the regional economy.
- Identify the characteristics that differentiate your Main Street from all others—its architecture, business mix, uses, traditions, culture, diversity, personality. Weave this identity into the messages your organization communicates about the district.
- Play an aggressive role in catalyzing business and property development. Develop staff and organizational expertise in business and property development, and solidify partnerships with other organizations and agencies that can bolster your program’s expertise and effectiveness in developing new businesses, rehabbing buildings, and constructing new infill.

Remember those 2,000 or so enclosed regional shopping malls built after Gruen’s Southdale Center? Several hundred of them have been demolished. About one-third of those remaining have vacancy rates over 25 percent, meaning that they are dead or dying. Shopping mall profits per square foot have dropped for three straight years. And Green Street Advisors, a real estate analytics firm, estimates that 15 percent of the nation’s



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The successful Main Street needs to promote a distinct identity that differentiates it from all other districts. Pinpoint the characteristics that distinguish your Main Street—architecture, business mix, culture, diversity, traditions—and use them to market your district to community residents and visitors.

remaining shopping malls will fail within the next 10 years and will be demolished or redeveloped for new uses.

Shopping malls were an aberrant departure from the characteristics that made Main Streets function so well for so many centuries: accessibility; walkability; mixed uses; energy-conservative design; and a tangible, physical record of a community's history. The decades ahead are ripe for Main Street redevelopment and growth for those communities willing to embrace the future. Ultimately, the future of Main Street is what we make it. ■

Kennedy Smith is a principal with the Community Land Use + Economics Group, a consulting firm focusing on downtown economic development strategy. In addition to her work with the CLUE Group, Kennedy teaches a graduate-level course in historic preservation economics for Goucher College. She was a 2005-2006 Loeb Fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and in 2010, Planetizen.com included her in its list of "The Top 100 Urban Thinkers of All Time." She served as the director of the National Trust Main Street Center from 1990-2004.



LEADERSHIP AND MAIN STREET THEN AND NOW... AND LOOKING AHEAD

As the Main Street program nears its fourth decade, the enduring relevance of its comprehensive and integrated approach has been amply confirmed. The notion that thriving downtowns require deliberate management of many moving parts is now widely understood, and the National Main Street Center has played a major role in demonstrating it.



overdue next big leap forward, it is time to consider the qualities called for by

What now? As the National Main Street Center—and many local and state Main Street programs—

explore the long-

our changing times. The methodologies that have underpinned the Main Street Approach for nearly 40 years were born in a different time (the late 1970s), responding to different trends that were affecting downtowns. People were moving out and business was following them, leaving traditional centers behind. Another key factor was that older buildings were seen as failure; new construction was progress. Trying to make

Over the past 35 years, the nationwide network of Main Street leaders has kept America's downtowns and neighborhood districts alive, not only slowing the outward flow of people and businesses but even reversing it.



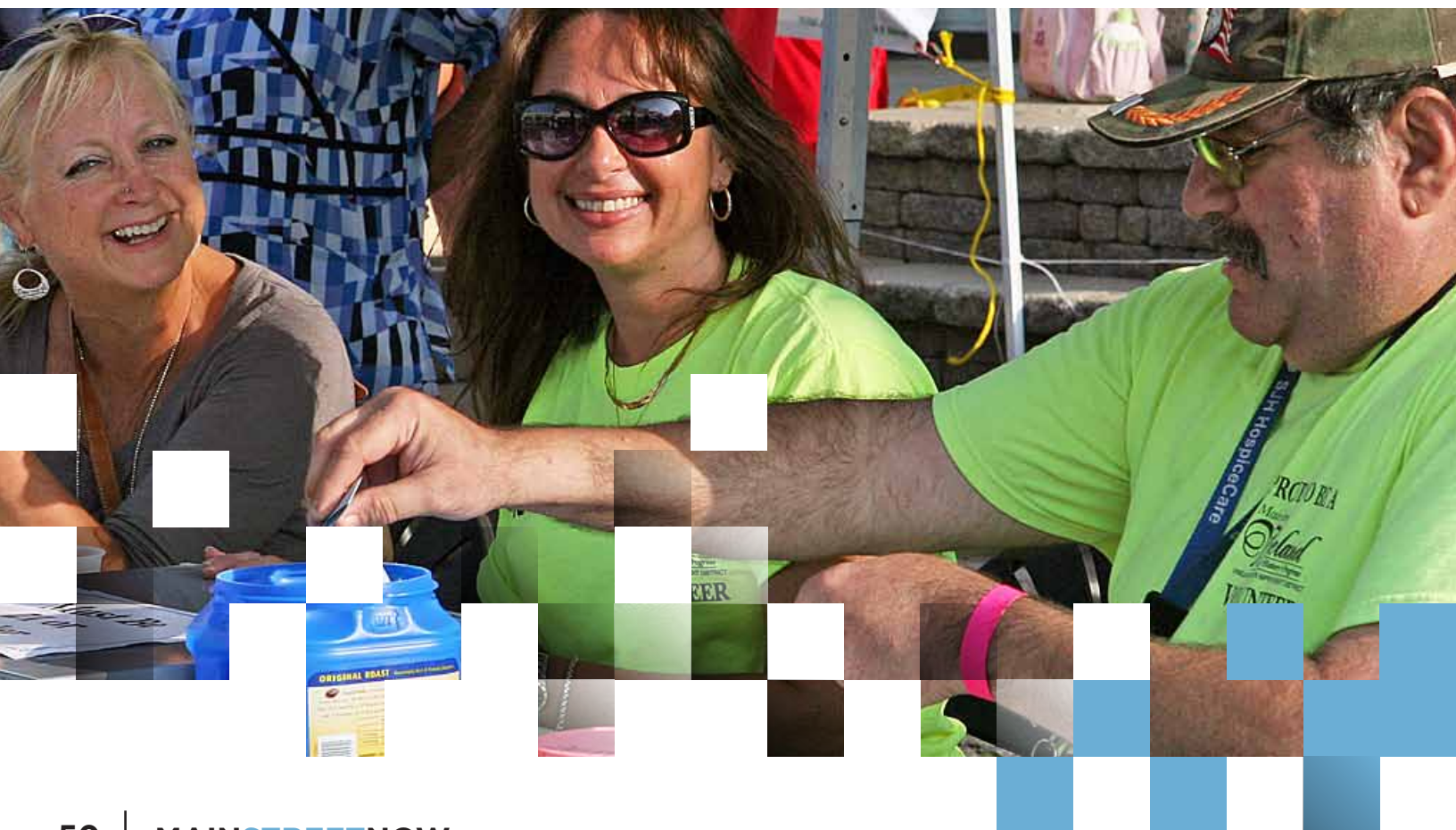
the case for preserving historic buildings was viewed by most community fathers (and let's face it, most people in power were male) as foolish dreaming.

In the ensuing years, the small but mighty Main Street movement has had a huge impact in towns and cities across the land. Its feisty leaders have turned tides in ways we could not have imagined as we sat down in the summer of 1979 to capture the essence of three years of on-site, real-life experience in three pilot communities so we could communicate it effectively to the many cities and towns struggling

to save their downtowns. That is how the Main Street Four Point Approach® was forged. We had learned that all of it was about the image of downtown—what the region thought about it and the self-image of the community. We'd learned that to change the shabby image of downtown, orchestrated attention needed to be given to four “buckets” at once:

- **Design**, which went beyond historic façades and encompassed anything the eye could see downtown: sidewalks and streets, window displays and signs, parking lots and passageways.

Using the training and technical assistance of the National Main Street Center, downtown managers in all corners of the country have tapped the energy, skills, and commitment of thousands of volunteers determined to preserve the character and heritage of their communities.



- **Promotion**, which stimulated people to return downtown by producing popular events and marketing downtown's offerings and amenities to audiences who hadn't been there in a generation.
- **Economic Restructuring**, which meant finding a new role for older downtowns because they were never going to be the retail heart of their markets again. Older buildings needed new uses and downtowns needed new investment.
- **Organization**, which involved acting collectively: property owners, retailers, local officials had to formally join hands and commit to working together on common goals.

We'd learned as well that it didn't work to focus on just one or two of these elements: success in one depended on success in all. Together, they constituted the path to a dramatically enhanced image for downtown.

There was also a fifth important lesson we learned, and it was perhaps the most important of all: downtown was too important to be left on its own. It needed constant attention over time, and it needed to be consciously managed. Having almost serendipitously placed a talented project manager in each of our pilot towns, this turned out to be *the* essential finding. Someone had to wake up every morning, dedicated to bringing vitality back downtown. Thus was born the job of Main Street manager—and with it, the Main Street organization, devoted to the heart of downtown.

Over the ensuing years, the National Main Street Center's trainings and technical assistance programs have equipped

CAUTIONARY TALES

My peripatetic life has taken me to many, many small towns and cities where Main Street programs have achieved dramatic results. One could even posit that Main Street efforts prevented the historic core of many downtowns from disappearing and readied them for the current wave of interest so many of them are now experiencing. However, I've also visited too many places where the long-established Main Street program is now skin deep, known best for periodic events and PR—communities where it is not viewed as producing sufficient results to justify compensating talented staff.

Take the town, for example, where the Main Street organization has become a merchants association which, mistakenly viewing it as competition, fought off a badly needed mixed-use development that would have solved a serious parking problem and benefitted everyone. Then there's the city where a successful new retailer said that in a year of operating her downtown location, she's never even met the Main Street manager. In both of these communities, serious downtown development opportunities are in the wings, and in neither is the Main Street manager at the table where it's happening.

hundreds of budding downtown managers and raised the game of more seasoned ones. And they, in turn, have tapped the energy, knowledge, and commitment of tens of thousands of volunteers working on thousands of boards and committees. Collectively, this network of dedicated downtown leaders has kept the fabric of America's towns and cities from fading into memory, and not only slowed the outward flow but even reversed it.

CHARTING THE FUTURE

So what does the future hold for Main Street? One thing is for sure: the same old, same old is not going to work in most

places. A paradigm shift may be called for. Among the trends that are shaping the future of downtown are these:

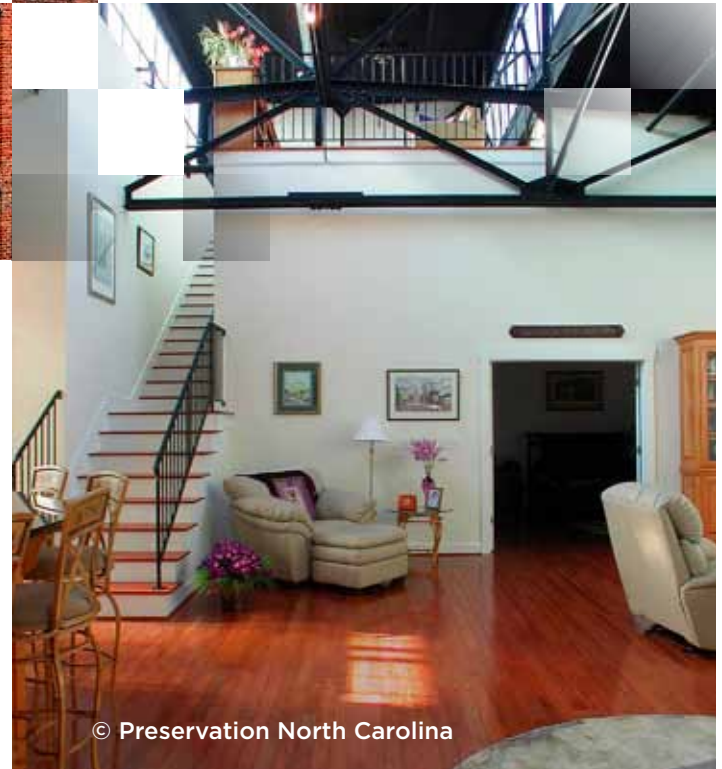
Downtowns are becoming the place many, many more people want to be. This rediscovery of downtown has been fueled in great part by personal tastes and how they influence choices about where to live. Today, many young people and empty nesters want the same thing: to live within walking distance of coffee shops, restaurants, and entertainment. This trend is benefiting many a Main Street—from Vicksburg, Mississippi, to Jamestown, New York, and even Andy Griffith's tiny hometown of Mount Airy,

One of the strongest trends in the nation today is the rediscovery of downtowns. From young people (below) to empty nesters, Americans are increasingly choosing to live in places where they can walk to shops, restaurants, and entertainment.





A 2010 Brookings Institution report estimated that 94 percent of recent college graduates want to live and work in a walkable place with authentic character. This is fueling reuse of historic downtown buildings for housing projects, such as this conversion of a former mill into the Renfro Mill Lofts in Mount Airy, N.C.



© Preservation North Carolina

North Carolina. Who would have thought people would choose to live above stores or in a repurposed cotton mill? Or that former office towers could be successfully repurposed as condos. And employers who depend on creative young people as workers are learning that the best of their workforce can go anywhere—and many of them eschew working in dull suburban office parks. The Brookings Institution estimated in 2010 that 94 percent of recent college graduates wanted to live and work

in the middle of things—in a walkable place with authentic character. This trend will continue to lift many Main Streets for at least another decade.

Success brings a new generation of concerns. Main Street leaders must deal with these challenges. Here's a big one: for a generation, we in Main Street revitalization have been pleading with people, "Wait, don't leave! Come back downtown." Okay, it worked, they are



In the coming years, many commercial districts will see increased pressure for new developments of greater size and density than in the past. Such development can be a boon for the downtown if it is well designed and compatible with the district's character.



coming back in droves, which is great! It's what we have all been working for, after all. People living downtown or near downtown will sustain revitalization for a long time. For many towns, this is a once-in-a-lifetime shot at new downtown investment. Main Street leaders who still hold a bit of an underdog attitude need to adjust and embrace the opportunities it brings.

Bigger is not always bad. Sometimes potential investment will involve a larger, game-changing project. Yet since the Main Street Approach was born in the late 1970s, a time of failing “big kahuna” plays—“let’s enclose downtown,” or “building an ice arena will draw millions downtown”—generations of Main Street managers have absorbed a message that historic preservation and “lots of little” is the only true path. Successful reuse of old buildings should remain a priority. At the same time, however, many downtowns will see increased market pressure for new development in or at the edge of the district. And it is likely to involve densities and heights that aren’t popular with preservationists. The successful downtown manager must shift gears and facilitate dialogue, must understand that good can come from compatible new development, and must be able to help people envision how the community can benefit from well-designed increases in

density. Thus, the next-gen Main Street leader needs to have a greater understanding of how real estate development works and how developers think.

Local government's transmission may need to shift gears beyond R (regulation). Urban development generally costs more than greenfield sites, so incentives such as density bonuses or property tax freezes may be necessary to attract experienced developers for either rehab or new construction projects. New development that could be great for downtown may also be stymied by permitting processes that worked fine in slower times, but that can repel investors who haven’t the patience and deep pockets to endure needless delay. The modern downtown manager is savvy at advocating for streamlined development processes and proactively running interference for important projects.



© Linda Glisson

The browning of America in towns and cities of all sizes is well under way. While recent immigration, especially from Latin America and Asia (above), has enhanced the labor pool, there remain many social and economic inequities that must be addressed. Although the Main Street Four Points, derived from work in primarily white small towns, offers no guidance, decades of experience in urban Main Street districts (opposite page) provide valuable direction for the future.

Technological change is not going to slow down. This trend has great relevance for Main Street well beyond online vendors as competitors for retail sales. The more advanced downtown organizations stay current and use software to mine data, monitor performance, visualize redevelopment opportunities, and reach the wider community through crowdsourcing and surveys. They push their retailers and restaurateurs to sharpen their social media approaches, to better their game. The websites of these organizations are state-of-the art and constantly refreshed.

The browning of America is already well under way, even in small towns. Major demographic shifts that call into question underlying assumptions we may not know we have are taking place all around us. Race has been a troubling issue from our founding; and in the 20th century, it played a huge role in flight from cities and towns to suburbia. Immigration in the 21st century, especially from Latin America and Asia, has enriched labor pools and markets but is challenging established and sometimes deeply held attitudes. And, as the commons, Main Street is likely to be where much of this

interaction will be played out. Next-gen downtown leaders must be culturally competent, for they will doubtless be called upon to deal with challenging social and economic impacts that are often rooted in inequities: homelessness, gentrification, substance abuse, and inadequate support systems. Although the Main Street Four Points, derived from field work in largely white small towns and articulated in a different era, offer no guidance, one can begin by studying decades of experience in urban Main Street programs.

Next-gen Main Street leaders will be at tables of power. It is worrying that some Main Street managers are seen as party and special-event planners and are excluded from discussions of important economic development issues. The manager who does not engage in professional development beyond certification in the Main Street Approach will be left in the dust. The next-gen downtown leaders will have a working knowledge of real estate development, planning, and zoning. They will keep current by devouring books, blogs, and articles on leading change, entrepreneurship, creativity, social media—you name it—and their relevance to downtown management. They will be proactive: reaching out to individuals and organizations that can help. The savvy leader will be skilled at facilitation and negotiation, will be able





to help competing interests find common ground, and will be capable of brokering deals that make sense for the community. And increasingly, downtown leaders will be in the inner circles of decision making because they've earned a reputation that puts them among the community's most essential players.

Next-gen Main Street leaders will be better compensated. When seen as critical players in the economy and vitality of their communities and as professionals with enhanced skills, the best Main Street directors will be paid well. Realizing their value, business and civic leaders in the community will create the platforms needed to provide consistent revenue to build an effective downtown organization. Currently, the business improvement district (BID) is the best approach in that it spreads the cost to those who benefit most from downtown management—the property owners. The volunteer-centric Main Street Approach and the BID can and should coexist. In hindsight, creating a built-in source of funding should have been the Fifth of the Four Points.

Next-gen downtown professionals know that trust is vital. And foundational to trust is having relationships, built over time, with people. And that requires *getting to know people* “face2face.” For digital natives, this is sometimes a challenge. It may be faster

and easier to use email or text, but you will never build trust without personal “face2face” interaction. That means savvy downtown leaders are seldom in the office. They are on the street or in meetings to which they've been invited. Or they're having a beer after hours getting to know that guy who might someday cut red tape at city hall or that woman who may one day tap her network of relationships to land a major new business downtown.

For several months, the National Main Street Center has been consulting with its networks as its leaders chart the future and figure out how to develop new downtown professionals, engage better volunteer leaders, and become more effective. It is a time of discernment, and local Main Street communities should take advantage of it to consider how their current downtown organizations and endeavors track with the enormous opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Built over nearly four decades, the ever-increasing evidence of the value of professional downtown management has created a solid foundation on which to build new opportunities. ■

Mary Means led the team that created the National Main Street Center. For nearly 25 years, she has headed Mary Means + Associates, an award-winning planning and community development practice known for building bridges between plans and people.

PROFILE: NEXT-GEN DOWNTOWN LEADER

Downtown in Wichita, Kansas, is huge. It takes 20 minutes to walk across it. By 2008, malls had stripped out most retail, leaving behind the carcasses of big department stores. Office buildings abounded, but with bank consolidations and office parks, many had perilously low occupancy rates. Jeff Fluhr, the newly arrived CEO of the Wichita Downtown Development Corporation

(WDDC) could envision the commercial district's potential. So could his board, which recruited him to lead change.

Jeff, who had a design degree with a concentration in real estate development, had absorbed a lot as deputy director of the downtown organization in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He quickly established trust with property owners and city officials and



Jeff Fluhr (bottom right), CEO of the Wichita Downtown Development Corporation (WDDC), worked with the University of Kansas School of Architecture to create WDDC's design and innovation center, which provides for creative discussion among the city staff, property owners, developers, and local organizations.



Major projects in downtown Wichita include this conversion of the Zelman's Building into an apartment and retail complex, with nine residential units on the second floor and 4,800 square feet of retail/restaurant space on the first floor. Completed in December 2011, the project cost an estimated \$1.7 million.

persuaded several major property owners to dig deep and invest in a well-funded, well-grounded downtown plan that would engage the entire region. With substantial private commitments in hand, he offered to partner with the city to carry out the plan.

The chosen consultants brought not only urban design expertise but also a team of highly regarded market analysts. WDDC invested in public relations and communications. The turnout for Project Downtown events surprised everyone and benefited from back-and-forth dialogue and people's ideas. The consultant team, armed with solid market evidence that downtown housing would thrive, helped people visualize its potential. WDDC spread the message throughout the region,

making a special effort to reach employers who were trying to persuade young talent to come to Wichita. Even the skeptics began to view downtown differently, to want it to be a thriving place.

Even before the Project Downtown plan was finished, WDDC started moving ahead. Jeff helped his board create its own strategic plan to help WDDC become more proactive as the private-sector implementer of the plan. WDDC got banks to create an \$8 million loan pool. It worked with the city to use public incentives more strategically and sought developers for city-owned land. Jeff recruited the University of Kansas School of Architecture and created WDDC's "design and innovation center," a working studio for



AFTER

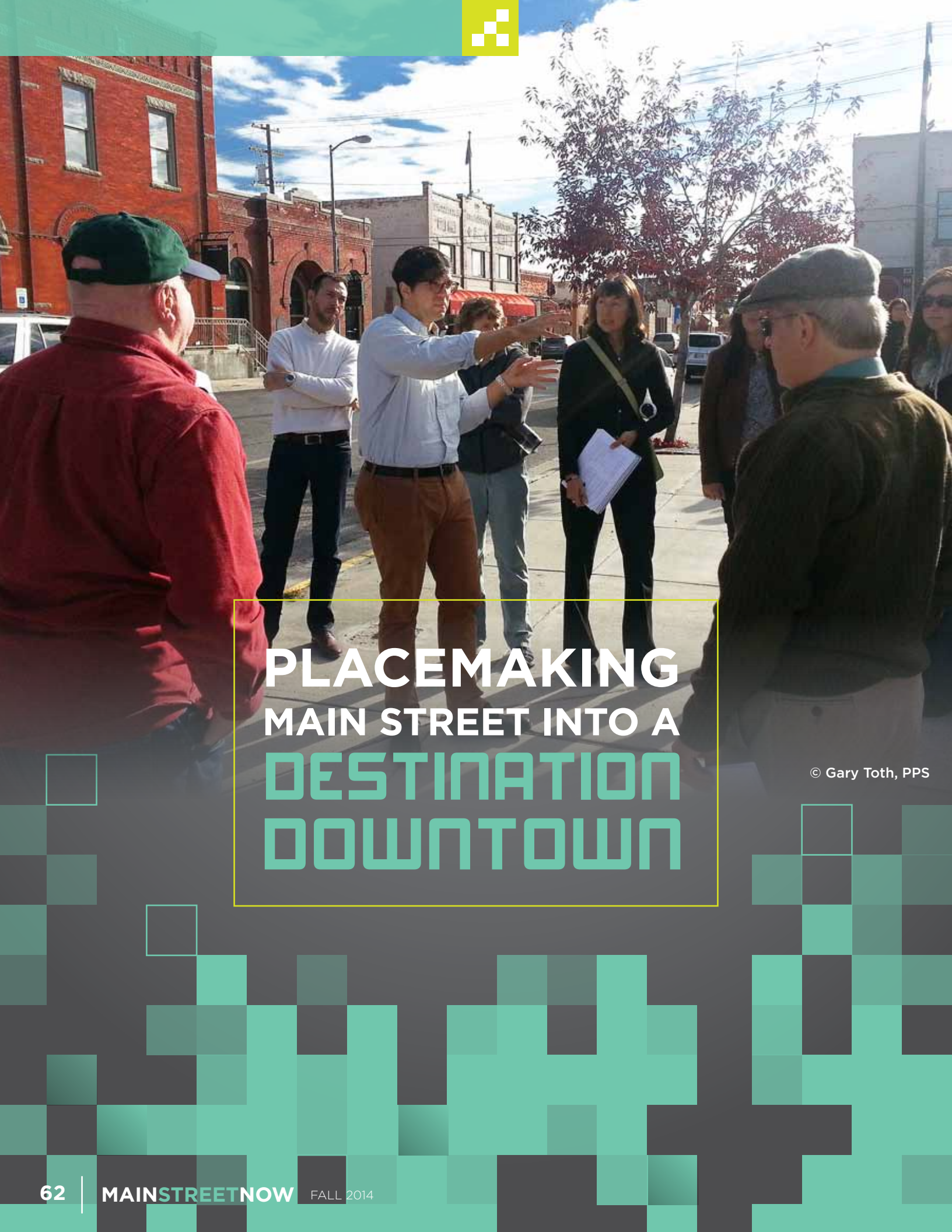
creative, shirt-sleeve interchange among property owners, developers, community organizations, and city staff.

With blocks of historic office buildings and former department stores to rehab, Jeff and the WDDC knew the importance of using historic tax credits to kick start downtown. Seeing threats from fiscally conservative elected officials, he and his board sprang into action and used all their political networks to orchestrate statewide support to keep state tax and federal credits.

Since 2010, more than \$300 million has been invested in downtown Wichita, 86 percent of it by the private sector. This investment has fueled conversion of office towers to apartments, the largest bank

building is now a hotel, and 1,600 people live downtown. Along with the region, residents and visitors enjoy more than 70 new restaurants and specialty stores.

Jeff exemplifies the downtown professional. He is a devoted advocate of historic preservation, deeply knowledgeable about development, and skilled at brokering public-private deals. He also has the energy and proactive temperament that attracts resources: people, downtown businesses, and seed funding for a host of initiatives. You'll hear him say the words: organization, promotion, design, and economic development; but rather than organize everything around them, Wichita's downtown management team intuitively incorporates them in everything they do. ■



PLACEMAKING MAIN STREET INTO A DESTINATION DOWNTOWN

© Gary Toth, PPS

BY
**Fred Kent and
Gary Toth**
Project for
Public Spaces

The traditional Main Street is one of the most iconic images of America. With its unique blend of housing, retail, and civic uses, Main Street served as the social and commercial hub of communities until World War II. Since then, suburban development favoring shopping malls and single-use zoning have driven resources away from these vital places. Furthermore, the devaluing of places due to the 20th-century obsession with tuning streets for high speed mobility has also taken its toll. Not only is fast-moving traffic less likely to stop, but speed kills a street's sense of place and diminishes its value for all users.



With
additional
writing by
**Craig
Raphael**



Thankfully, today various organizations and communities are working to restore the historic functions of main streets and reestablish them as the centers of towns and cities. Many have achieved success by using the Main Street Approach, a unique tool that combines organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring to help build a complete revitalization effort. Collectively, these tools are called the Four Point Approach and have done much to reverse damage created by the first wave of competition for Main Streets: the rise of the suburban mall.

Main Streets are now facing a second wave of competition: online shopping. The ability to “window shop” from the comfort of one’s home has created an all new challenge; but, in this case, Main Street has an advantage over malls: the power to create Place. Increasingly, as electronic communication has made it possible to live anywhere and still connect with others, the freedom to work and play apart has increased the sense of isolation and the craving for new ways of interacting socially and meeting informally. Main Street is far better positioned to fulfill that burgeoning need than malls. Being geographically positioned within walking distance of neighborhoods, Main Streets are suited perfectly to evolve, via Placemaking, into the great destinations of the 21st century.

PPS’s David Nelson leads a Walk Audit on Main Street and Park Avenue in Anaconda, Montana.



How can Placemaking help restore Main Streets to the forefront in the 21st Century?

“Placemaking” provides a powerful set of tools for change. Not a new profession, discipline, or field of study, Placemaking brings out the best of professional knowledge and skills while supporting a participatory process that challenges and empowers local communities to take ownership over the planning process. Disciplines will no longer be working in silos but instead subjugating their expertise to the larger goal of creating great Main Streets.

Stakeholder buy-in will be quicker and more sustainable. Thanks to their informality and simplicity, Placemaking tools such as the Power of Ten; Walking and Street Audits; and Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper will extend the reach and simplify conversations about a project enough to allow everyone to contribute, not just the experts and a few businesses.

These tools involve everyone directly in determining the scope and shaping the preliminary design process in informal settings, as citizens work side by side with subject matter experts. Formal roles are not predefined but emerge throughout the process, which is managed to ensure participation by all. Everyone will participate in creating Main Street goals in ways that move them from passive supporters to active project advocates. What results will be a richer more livable

plan since it goes beyond the “three D’s” (density, design, and diversity of uses) of modern smart growth planning and the Four Points of the Main Street Approach.

The Power of Ten. In a nutshell, the Power of Ten means that people will be attracted to Main Streets where there are lots of things to do. The Power of Ten (POT aka Placemapping) process will engage stakeholders to assess the assets and liabilities (i.e., underperforming places) of Main Street. Rather than have experts bring formulae in from other towns, Placemapping will allow local stakeholders to identify the best, worst, and highest opportunity places and help them figure out how to make substantive physical and social connections between existing spaces, how to strategically create new places, and how to harness the energy that can be generated through building a network of destinations.

Walking and street audits can also be conducted to diagnose places along Main Street and create a wish list of desired future change. Any potential future changes can be tested out via Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) strategies. LQC provides a visual representation of what an appropriate street, sidewalk, or building wall change can look like. It can also demonstrate how street changes would affect flow, not only for cars, but also for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit, as well as show the benefits (or detriments) to sidewalk and shopping activity. The tangibility of doing this in real life, as opposed to simply doing a traffic study, is important for developing community buy-in.



Main Street in Hyde Park, Vermont, retains much of its historic feel and small-town charm. However, over the years, it has lost businesses and restaurants to adjacent suburban development, leaving locals and tourists with little reason to visit. During a PPS workshop in 2013, a local resident commented that he now takes a walk down Main Street about once a year, to get some exercise and remember the good old days.

Which Placemaking Concepts Can Be Applied to Main Streets?

CREATING MULTI-USE DESTINATIONS

“It’s difficult to design a space that won’t attract people. What is remarkable is how often this is accomplished.”

– William H. Whyte

We know that the more uses public spaces can accommodate, the more successful they will become as community gathering places. Simply stated, the more varied the uses, the more varied the audience becomes. But still we are designing and managing too many places that have only a single purpose—whether it is a park, a square, or a street. All too often, uses and people don’t mix. As our communities become more diverse and



Better Block Philly created a series of temporary street changes to demonstrate the value of reallocating street capacity for all uses. Here a parklet was created.

populous, we will not only need more public spaces; we will need places where people of different backgrounds feel comfortable coming together. How can we promote more of the right kind of design, management, and investment to create multi-use public spaces and places?

MARKET CITIES AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

“When you want to seed a place with activity, put out food.”
– William H. Whyte

Historically, cities grew around their marketplaces—bustling centers of commerce and activity. As communities grew, they became market cities. At the National Main Streets Conference in Detroit, we talked about the need to expand the Placemaking conversation to more than traditional farmers markets and public markets—to encompass all types of districts that seed local economies while creating great gathering places. Markets are great catalysts for the creation of and organic growth of such places. The growth of farmers markets in the U.S.



(now more than 7,000) offer the raw material for a broader rebirth of local economies and places. There is new interest in all things local. How can we take advantage of these trends to advance local places and economies?

ARCHITECTURE OF PLACE/ COMMUNITY ANCHORS

*“What attracts people most,
it would appear, is other people.”*
– William H. Whyte

Placemaking brings new ways of redefining the nature and function of libraries, art and cultural institutions, city halls, and

other institutions. Indeed, there are an increasing number of innovative examples of individual institutions that are becoming multi-purpose “community anchors,” not just iconic design statements. How can we encourage more building owners (whether institutions, corporations, developers, or governments) and their designers to promote an “architecture of place”—creating place-supportive design that also redefines the public gathering roles these institutions play in communities?

STREETS AS PUBLIC SPACES

While streets are the most fundamental public spaces in communities, they may also be the most conflicted and under-recognized. “Streets as Public Spaces” is premised on the idea that streets should not simply move people from point A to point B, but must add value to the community along the way. Streets can no longer be viewed simply as arteries for conveying cars; even “Complete Streets” may not be complete enough. Great streets build communities as well as provide ways of connecting other great places. This is what links communities of all sizes together. As we gather in Pittsburgh prior to a major conference on walking and biking, how can we move communities to this broader vision of streets and transportation investments?



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Less than three months after PPS facilitated a capacity-building workshop in Brunswick, Maine, the community began lighter, quicker and cheaper changes to its Main Street, blocking off a lane with barrels to see how it affected pedestrian and shopping activity and traffic flow.

Principles for Fostering Main Streets as Public Spaces

RULE ONE: DESIGN FOR APPROPRIATE SPEEDS.

Streets need to be designed in a way that induces traffic speeds appropriate for that particular context. Whereas freeways should retain high-speeds to accommodate regional mobility, speeds on other roads need to reflect that they are places for people, not just conduits for cars. Desired speeds can be attained with a number of design strategies, including changes in roadway widths, curvature, and intersection design. Of course, Placemaking is a big part of the success; and roadside strategies, like building setbacks and sidewalk activity, can also affect the speed at which motorists comfortably drive.

Speed kills sense of place. City and town centers are destinations, not raceways, and commerce needs traffic—foot traffic. You cannot buy a dress from a car. Even foot traffic speeds up in the presence of fast-moving vehicles. Access, not automobiles, should be the priority in city centers. Don't ban cars, but remove the presumption in their favor. People first!

RULE TWO: PLAN FOR COMMUNITY OUTCOMES.

Cities and towns need first to envision the kinds of places and interactions they want to support and then plan a transportation system consistent with this collective community vision. Transportation is a means for accomplishing important goals—like economic productivity and social engagement—not an end in itself.

Great transportation facilities, such as Grand Central Terminal in New York City and the wide sidewalks of the Champs Elysées, have truly improved the public realm. Designing road projects to fit community contexts can help increase developable land, create open space, and reconnect communities to their neighbors, a waterfront, or a park. They can reduce household dependency on the automobile, allowing children to walk to school, connecting neighborhoods to downtowns, and helping build healthier lifestyles by increasing the potential to walk or cycle. Think public benefit, not just private convenience.

For years we've seen this philosophy gain traction in leading cities around the world. Barcelona has built boulevards and Ramblas (broad avenues) that give pedestrians priority over the automobile. Paris has developed a neighborhood traffic-calming program to rival that of any city anywhere. By charging


congestion fees for vehicles entering the city center, London has successfully reduced traffic levels and funded an aggressive program to improve transit. Bogotá now boasts a world-class rapid transit bus system and has established a mandate to eliminate private auto use during the morning rush hour by 2015. These projects offer strategies that can be used to redesign our transportation networks to reflect their true importance as public spaces and manifestations of our vision for our towns and cities.

It is also essential to foster land-use planning at the community level that supports, instead of overloads, the transportation network. This includes creating more attractive places that people will want to visit in both new and existing developments. A strong sense of place benefits the overall transportation system. Great Places—popular spots that have a

Narrow cross section and parking make it difficult to drive faster than 15 mph on this Lambertville, New Jersey, Main Street.



© Gary Toth, PPS



good mix of people and activities and can be comfortably reached by walking, biking, and perhaps by public transit as well as by car—put little strain on the transportation system.

Poor land-use planning, by contrast, generates thousands of unnecessary vehicular trips, creating dysfunctional roads, which further deteriorate the quality of places. Transportation professionals can no longer pretend that land use is not their business. Transportation projects that were not integrated with land-use planning have created too many negative impacts to ignore.

RULE THREE: THINK OF STREETS AS PUBLIC PLACES.

Not so long ago, this idea was considered preposterous in many communities. “Public space” meant parks and little else. Transit stops were simply places to wait. Streets had been surrendered to traffic for so long that we hardly considered them public spaces at all. But now we are slowly moving away from this narrow perception of “streets as conduits for cars” and beginning to think of “streets as places.”

The road, the parking lot, the transit terminal—they can all serve more than one mode (cars) and more than one purpose (movement). Sidewalks are the urban arterials of cities: make them wide, well lit, and stylish and accommodating with benches, outdoor cafes, and public art. Roads can be shared spaces with pedestrian refuges, bike lanes, and on-street parking. Parking lots can become public markets on weekends. Even major urban arterials can be designed to provide dedicated bus lanes, well-designed bus stops that serve as gathering places, and

multi-modal facilities for bus rapid transit or other forms of travel. Roads are places too!

Transportation—the process of traveling to a place—can be wonderful if we rethink the idea of transportation itself. If we remember that transportation is the journey, but enhancing the community is the goal. ■

Fred Kent is a leading authority on revitalizing city spaces and one of the foremost thinkers in livability, smart growth, and the future of the city. He is the founder and president of [Project for Public Spaces \(PPS\)](#). Fred offers technical assistance to communities and gives major talks across North America and internationally. Over the past 37 years, Fred has worked on hundreds of projects, including Bryant Park, Rockefeller Center, and Times Square in New York City; Campus Martius in Detroit; and a City-Wide Placemaking Campaign in Chicago. Before founding PPS, Fred studied with Margaret Mead and worked with William H. Whyte on the Street Life Project, assisting in observations and film analysis of corporate plazas, urban streets, parks, and other open spaces in New York City. He has degrees in Economics and Urban Geography from Columbia University.

Gary Toth is Senior Director of Transportation Initiatives, Project for Public Spaces. He is one of the nation’s leading experts on how to engage DOTs through transportation planning, funding, project development, and design processes to achieve sustainable and livable outcomes. He summarized these insights in a 2009 book, [The Citizen’s Guide for Engaging Transportation Professionals](#).

CHAPEL STREET, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

Situated at the southern end of the Yale University Campus, Chapel Street was a thriving residential and commercial district as late as the 1960s. But by 1983, its vacancy rate had reached 95 percent, and people found little reason to go there. A local developer began buying and renovating historic structures and hired Project for Public Spaces (PPS) to help turn the street into a vibrant place once again. Drawing on the insights of merchants, community members, and the city department of transportation, PPS came up with a plan to reclaim space for pedestrians and create a more favorable environment for retail and greater public use.

Sidewalks along Chapel Street in New Haven were widened to create a better environment for the public.



The new sidewalks and amenities made Chapel Street a place where people could feel comfortable again.

ARLINGTON DISTRICT, POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK

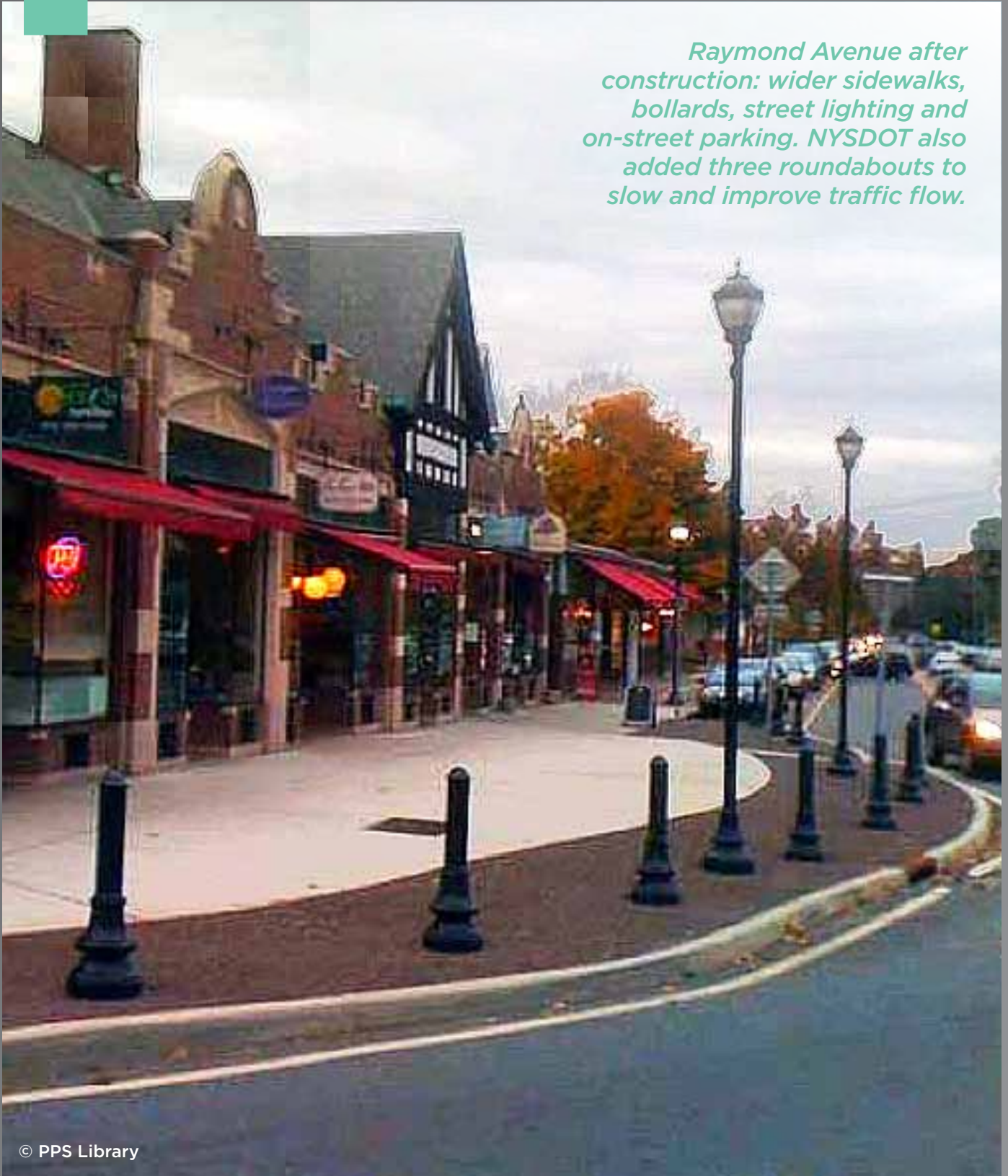
Arlington is the historic heart of the Town of Poughkeepsie, New York, where shops, movie houses, and restaurants flourished in the past alongside banks, churches, libraries, schools, and other institutions, including Vassar College. In the 1960s, the district's main street—Raymond Avenue—was widened to four lanes and landscaped medians were removed in the name of efficient traffic management. As a result, businesses suffered and

the street lost much of its small-town character. In the late 1990s, a committee of business leaders, representatives from Vassar College, and members of public and private organizations worked with PPS to develop a revitalization strategy to once again make the district a vibrant place. Recently, many of PPS's traffic-calming recommendations were implemented by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT).



*Raymond Avenue
in the Arlington
district of
Poughkeepsie,
N.Y., before
improvements
were made.*

Raymond Avenue after construction: wider sidewalks, bollards, street lighting and on-street parking. NYSDOT also added three roundabouts to slow and improve traffic flow.



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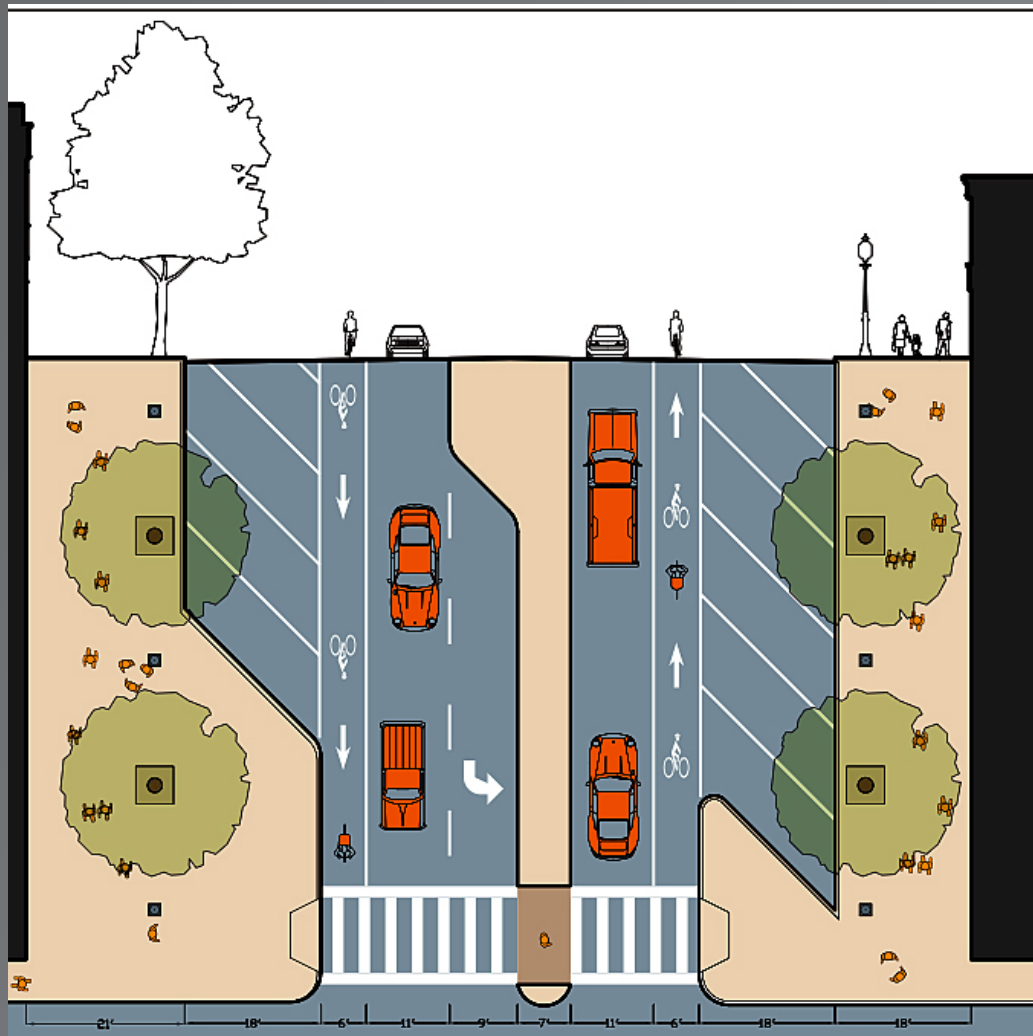
BRUNSWICK, MAINE

Over a century ago, the Main (Maine) Street in Brunswick was widened enough to facilitate the transportation of lumber through town. More than a hundred feet wide in some parts, the section that served the town so well previously, now has speeds that are too high and crossing distances that are too wide for comfortable pedestrian traffic.

The Town of Brunswick realized that its focus on tuning its streets to move vehicular traffic was constricting commerce and quality of life, while also threatening bicycle and pedestrian safety. PPS worked with Brunswick on a plan to rebalance its streets to support all modes of transportation, boost economic development, and enhance quality of life. The cornerstone street in the process was Maine Street.

Maine Street, the primary road in downtown Brunswick, Maine, is more than a hundred feet wide in some areas. The decision to focus on vehicular traffic flow created a street that threatens the safety of bicyclers and pedestrians.





© Pippa Brashear

CSS Champions: Brunswick, ME 21

Opportunity 2

Pros

- Narrower lanes encourage slower traffic
- Bump-outs and pedestrian refuge island reduce pedestrian crossing distances.
- Designated space for cyclists
- Back-in angled parking is safer for cyclists and drivers
- turn lanes allow turning vehicles to queue without stopping through traffic
- If flush, median can be used for temporary parking
- Medians and bump-outs can be used for greening, stormwater infiltration, or pedestrian amenities
- can store snow in median

Cons

- potential conflicts between cyclists and parking cars
- If raised or planted, median cannot be used for temporary parking
- Single lane of through traffic could reduce capacity (though this is offset by the addition of turn lanes)
- bump outs create some reduction in parking

PPS facilitated a community engagement process that led to development of five possible alternatives for the rightsizing of Maine, each retuning the street to a different balance of priorities (e.g. emergency vehicle access, biking, pedestrian, snow

removal and storage, etc.). Brunswick is now working on a redesign of Maine Street using these and lessons learned from the LQC intervention. One of the five opportunities that will reframe Maine Street into a Street as a Place is shown here.

"You don't
have to live
in a
Big Town
to do
Big Things"

My Main Street



You don't have to be big to be great, and tiny Elkader, Iowa, proves that point. A small town of only about 1,500 people, Elkader has been a standout Iowa Main Street Community since 1991. Despite its small size, Elkader boasts a first-run movie theater and a restored opera house and, in 2011, it led the state in per capita retail sales. This vibrant Main Street community won a Great American Main Street Award in 2001.

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**National Main Street
Center**

a subsidiary of the
National Trust for Historic Preservation

If you have a photo that captures the essence of your Main Street, e-mail it to mainstreet@nthp.org and we'll consider it for next issue's My Main Street. Please make sure the image file is at least 8.5"x11" at 150 dpi. Let your imagination run wild. We're looking for unusual, artistic shots that capture the spirit of your Main Street District.