

Appendix B

The Main Street Approach™

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What is the Main Street Approach to Commercial District Revitalization?

The Main Street Approach is a community-driven, comprehensive methodology used to revitalize older, traditional business districts throughout the United States. It is a common-sense way to address the variety of issues and problems that face traditional business districts. The underlying premise of the Main Street approach is to encourage economic development within the context of historic preservation in ways appropriate to today's marketplace. The Main Street Approach advocates a return to community self-reliance, local empowerment, and the rebuilding of traditional commercial districts based on their unique assets: distinctive architecture, a pedestrian-friendly environment, personal service, local ownership, and a sense of community.

The Main Street Four-Point Approach™ is a comprehensive strategy that is tailored to meet local needs and opportunities. It encompasses work in four distinct areas — ***Design, Economic Restructuring, Promotion, and Organization*** — that are combined to address all of the commercial district's needs. The philosophy and the Eight Guiding Principles behind this methodology make it an effective tool for community-based, grassroots revitalization efforts. The Main Street approach has been successful in communities of all sizes, both rural and urban. Find out if the Approach is right for your community.

The Main Street approach is incremental; it is not designed to produce immediate change. Because they often fail to address the underlying causes of commercial district decline, expensive improvements, such as pedestrian malls or sports arenas, do not always generate the desired economic results. In order to succeed, a long-term revitalization effort requires careful attention to every aspect of downtown — a process that takes time and requires leadership and local capacity building.

In this section, you can also read about Success Stories of Main Street programs nationwide and see the average economic reinvestment statistics that existing organizations have achieved.

The Four Points

The National Trust Main Street Center offers a comprehensive commercial district revitalization strategy that has been widely successful in towns and cities nationwide. Described below are the four points of the Main Street approach which work together to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort.

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

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

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

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

Coincidentally, the four points of the Main Street approach correspond with the four forces of real estate value, which are social, political, physical, and economic.

Read more about the Eight Guiding Principles that complement the four points.

The Main Street Philosophy - Eight Principles of Success

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

1. *Comprehensive*: No single focus — lavish public improvements, name-brand business recruitment, or endless promotional events — can revitalize Main Street. For successful, sustainable, long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach, including activity in each of Main Street's Four Points, is essential.

2. *Incremental*: Baby steps come before walking. Successful revitalization programs begin with basic, simple activities that demonstrate that "new things are happening " in the commercial district. As public confidence in the Main Street district grows and participants' understanding of the revitalization process becomes more sophisticated, Main Street is able to tackle increasingly complex problems and more ambitious projects. This incremental change leads to much longer-lasting and dramatic positive change in the Main Street area.

3. *Self-help*: No one else will save your Main Street. Local leaders must have the will and desire to mobilize local resources and talent. That means convincing residents and business owners of the rewards they'll reap by investing time and money in Main Street — the heart of their community. Only local leadership can produce long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.

4. *Partnerships*: Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the district and must work together to achieve common goals of Main Street's revitalization. Each sector has a role to play and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations in order to forge an effective partnership.

5. *Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets*: Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities like distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.

6. *Quality*: Emphasize quality in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies to all elements of the process — from storefront designs to promotional campaigns to educational programs. Shoestring budgets and "cut and paste" efforts reinforce a negative image of the commercial district. Instead, concentrate on quality projects over quantity.

7. *Change*: Skeptics turn into believers and attitudes on Main Street will turn around. At first, almost no one believes Main Street can really turn around. Changes in attitude and practice are slow but definite — public support for change will build as the Main Street program grows and consistently meets its goals. Change also means engaging in better business practices, altering

ways of thinking, and improving the physical appearance of the commercial district. A carefully planned Main Street program will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.

8. Implementation: To succeed, Main Street must show visible results that can only come from completing projects. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way and succeeding. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger ones as the revitalization effort matures, and that constant revitalization activity creates confidence in the Main Street program and ever-greater levels of participation.

Is the Main Street Approach right for you?

The Main Street Approach is a terrific and effective framework for addressing commercial district revitalization. But how do you know if Main Street is right for your downtown or neighborhood business district or if your community is ready to take on Main Street? You'll first need the right attitude toward revitalization and some nuts-and-bolts ingredients in order to make the program successful. Consider the following.

1. Is your commercial district a traditional business district? While any commercial district could achieve success using the Four Points, Main Street is intended for traditional business districts. You should have a good concentration of older or historic buildings remaining to give yourself a base of structures to work with. Newer, low density automobile-oriented commercial developments, strip shopping centers, or enclosed shopping malls may want to borrow techniques from the Main Street Approach, but they really aren't appropriate for consideration as a Main Street district.

2. Do you have a decent concentration of businesses remaining in your commercial district? You're much more likely to have success with Main Street if you have a core of businesses remaining in your commercial district. This gives you an economic base on which to build. While it's not impossible to revive a completely vacant commercial district, it is considerably harder to attract investment to such a district. Are you committed to addressing Main Street's revitalization in a comprehensive and incremental way? To be successful, stakeholders need to understand and be committed to the importance of working simultaneously in each of Main Street's Four Points. The community also needs to understand that the program achieves success incrementally, and that initially making smaller changes in the commercial district will lead to larger achievements and more sophisticated projects over time.

3. Do you have a broad base of support for a local Main Street program? You need a balance of public and private participants -- and funding -- in order to make the program succeed. That means that in addition to the traditional participants in Main Street revitalization -- business and property owners and city officials -- non-traditional participants need to be engaged in the revitalization effort, too. Will you be able to pull in residents, civic associations, schools and other institutions, banks, utilities, media, and more to help with the program? It is absolutely essential that your Main Street program be as inclusive as possible with a broad and varied cross-

section of the community committed to assisting and supporting the program.

4. Can participants agree? The first hurdle is agreeing whether or not to pursue a Main Street program. Beyond that, participants also need to be willing to discuss and come to agreement about a myriad of issues and projects that affect the commercial district. To be successful, local stakeholders must believe in the value of a consensus-driven program and reject the traditional notion that one or two people should call all the shots on Main Street. While this requires good processes and sometimes lengthy discussions to reach agreement, the result is a lasting and positive change on Main Street that the entire community feels good about.

5. Do you have adequate human and financial resources to implement a successful Main Street program? Average local program budgets vary, but you'll have to be able to raise money for Main Street's operation and for revitalization projects. Similarly, you'll need the ability to recruit and retain staff and volunteers who are interested in Main Street revitalization projects. It's not unusual for a local Main Street program to have 40-60 active volunteers among its board, committees, and projects. (Fortunately, implementing Main Street's Four Points leads to lots of diverse activities that can attract a variety of individuals.) For staffing, you'll need to have the resources to hire and retain an executive director for the program to assist with revitalization efforts. In smaller communities/commercial district, a part-time director is an option; larger cities/districts will need full-time staff, if not multiple staff to coordinate Main Street's efforts.

6. Does your community value historic preservation? Retaining and reusing your commercial district's existing building is an important cornerstone of the program. Local stakeholders need to be receptive to "recycling" existing businesses for new economic uses and to being respectful of the traditional architecture and overall character of the traditional business district.

If you can answer "yes" to each of these questions, then you're likely to have great success with the Main Street Approach and you should proceed with creating your own local program, and visit the Getting Started section.

If you are not fully confident that your community meets the above descriptions, then you have a couple of options. One is to continue your education and organizing efforts until you can answer "yes" to each question. The other option is to incorporate Main Street however you can into your revitalization efforts. You can borrow pieces of the Main Street Approach even if your community isn't ready to do a comprehensive Main Street program. We encourage you to take the parts that fit your community best at this time.