

# Preparing Village “Main Streets” for Planning

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*A Guidebook for the Planning of Main Streets and Commercial Districts*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The *Preparing Village “Main Streets” for Planning* project is designed to address the body of issues that could potentially arise when reconstruction or rehabilitation of roadways that traverse a central business district or “main street” area is going to occur. This guidebook presents the findings of the second and final phase of the project, providing an overview of the body of information relevant to the subject area. It has been preceded by two case-study reports for the Villages of Scottsville and Newark, comprising phase 1 of the project.

Chapter I of the report explains the objective of the *Preparing Village ‘Main Streets’ for Planning* project to the reader. The project’s structure and components are explained. In order to address several recurring terms early on in the report, the terms *rehabilitation*, *reconstruction* and *revitalization* are defined and explained with regard to their context.

Chapter II provides the reader with a comprehensive review of the significance of main streets over time. The historical context of main streets is described in detail, illustrating the influence that these spaces have had on and within communities since the 1800’s. Main streets are described in terms of the functions that they served – as both a commercial district for the exchange of goods and services and as a civic center that facilitated the convivial interaction between residents for the purposes of finance, worship, governance, relaxation, or celebration. The variety of economic conditions, societal trends, and national policies that brought a decline to main street areas after the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century is briefly described. During this period of decline, and partly as a result of it, many main streets were adapted to serve primarily as transportation corridors. Physical alterations that were made to promote the safe and efficient movement of traffic came, at times, at the expense of their historic attributes, detracting from their overall character and ambiance. The chapter concludes with a call for developing effective solutions that address the needs of today’s main street areas. The development of an adaptive, context-sensitive approach that strikes a balance between transportation, commerce, public interest, and community character is identified as an amenable framework.

Chapter III, *What Makes a Great Main Street?*, is intended to familiarize main street stakeholders with key terminology and background information relative to roadway construction best practices, as well as the various options that may be before them pertaining to the structural and physical elements of their main street area. The chapter deconstructs the components of a typical main street area into three primary categories: roadway area, sidewalk area, and building area. The components that comprise each category are then described in detail. Issues such as traffic flow, pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, street signs, outdoor lighting, green infrastructure, local laws, and parking are among those described. The chapter includes a variety of photographs taken throughout the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region which illustrate facilities in place.

Chapter IV, *Preparing Your Main Street for Planning*, is intended to act as a primer for main street stakeholders, providing recommendations for local committee organization, public involvement, data gathering and inventorying of main street resources. The importance of encouraging a meaningful citizen/stakeholder role in the decision-making process is described in detail, including six key components of an effective public involvement program. The importance of creating and maintaining an effective main street committee or task group is emphasized and frameworks are briefly discussed. The

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project development process is described in detail, including explanation of when communities need to involve key parties in the planning process.

Once the interpersonal and chronological aspects of main street organization are understood, the physical aspects of the main street corridor can then be assessed. Delineating the study area, understanding the recent history of the corridor, and conducting a variety of corridor profiles are described as important initial steps. The types of profiles recommended to be conducted within the corridor include: a local regulatory profile; a transportation profile; an infrastructure profile; a land use profile; and a demographic and economic profile. Other important project corridor inventories are described in detail, including building footprint, parking, historic structure, façade, and tree inventories, among others.

Chapter V, *Lessons Learned in the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region*, describes two successful main street reconstruction projects – Routes 5 and 63 in Batavia and Routes 63 and 31E in Medina. Important aspects of the projects are described in detail, including project timeline, budget, partnering with agencies, difficult challenges, and facility installation. Descriptive pictures of the construction communities accompany the sections.

Chapter VI, *How to Guide Your Main Street Revitalization Effort*, describes important programmatic and organizational aspects of the main street revitalization process. A general overview of four common main street revitalization organizational structures is provided. The four frameworks described include the Business Improvement District, the Merchants Association/Partnership, the Free-Standing Non-Profit, and the Private Revitalization Organization. Each framework includes an example of an active organization in the Western New York which utilizes the described structure. Funding sources for main street reconstruction efforts are also included in Chapter VI. The Transportation Improvement Program and other federal and state funding sources are described in detail. A summary chart summarizing a variety of other possible sources that can be leveraged for a main street revitalization effort concludes the guidebook.

The *Preparing Village “Main Streets” for Planning* guidebook concludes with seven appendices, including a list of project technical committee members, a NYS DOT Village Survey tool, four individual evaluation worksheets created by the NYS Main Street Program (a program of the Division of Housing and Community Development), an example of a main street overlay district law from the town of Wellfleet, MA, a summary list of cited resources, a Works Cited list, and a combined glossary/list of acronyms.