

The Main Street Approach

The Main Street Approach is a comprehensive revitalization process designed to improve all aspects of the downtown business district, producing both intangible and tangible benefits. Improving economic management, strengthening public participation and making downtown a fun place to visit are as critical to Main Street's future as recruiting new businesses, rehabilitating buildings and expanding parking.

Building on downtown's inherent assets-rich architecture, personal service, and traditional values-the Main Street Approach has rekindled entrepreneurship, downtown cooperation, and civic concern. It has earned national recognition as a practical strategy appropriately scaled to a community's local resources and conditions. Four elements are combined to create a well balanced program:

Organization

Build consensus and cooperation between many groups playing roles in downtown. Many individuals and organizations have a stake in the economic viability of downtown, including bankers, property owners, city and county officials, merchants, downtown residents, professionals, civic groups, the chamber of commerce, schools, real estate agents, and others.

Design

Improve downtown's image by enhancing its physical appearance-not just of buildings, but also streetlights, window displays, parking areas, signs, sidewalks, promotional materials, and other elements that convey a visual message about the downtown.

Promotion

Marketing downtown's unique characteristics to shoppers, investors, new businesses, tourists, and others. Promotions create a positive image of downtown through retail promotions, special events, and on-going programs that build positive perceptions of the district

Economic Restructuring

Strengthening the existing economic base of downtown while diversifying it. Activities include helping existing businesses to expand, recruiting new businesses, converting unused space into productive property, and sharpening the competitiveness of downtown merchants.

The key to the success of the Main Street Approach is its comprehensive nature. By carefully integrating all four points into a practical downtown management strategy, the Main Street Approach produces fundamental changes in the downtown's economic base, making it economically feasible to put historic commercial buildings to productive use again. The Main Street Approach relies upon eight principles as well:

Comprehensive

Downtown revitalization is a complex process and cannot be accomplished through a single project. For successful long-term revitalization, a complex, holistic approach must be used

Incremental

Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help to develop skills so that more complex problems can be addressed and more difficult projects undertaken.

Self-Initiated Help

Local leaders must have the desire and skill to make the process successful. The National Main Street Center and Nebraska Lied Main Street provide direction, ideas, and training. Continued long-term success, however, depends upon the involvement and commitment of the community.

Public/Private Partnership

Both public and private sectors have a vital interest in downtown. Each sector has a role and must understand the other's strengths and limitations. Working together, the public and private sectors can marshal complimentary resources that can maximize the impact of a downtown revitalization strategy.

Assets Enhancement

Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities such as the distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging. The individuality of each community forms the foundation for a successful Main Street program.

Quality

Quality must be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program, from marketing materials and promotional events, to public improvements and window displays.

Change

To improve current economic conditions, revitalization program leaders must work to change public attitudes about the commercial district. Main Street requires a new look at downtown's use, purpose, and future.

Implementation Oriented

A primary goal for a Main Street program is to create visible change and activity from day-one. Small successful improvements at the beginning of the program gain public support and foster community pride.