

# Hamlet Revitalization Master Plans

Source: NEMO: Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials  
Jim Gibbons, Land Use Specialist  
University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System  
Reissued March 1998

**Definition:** Master Plan is a detailed study of the specific planning issues related to a residential neighborhood and its commercial component.

Several hamlet master plans are recommended as implementation actions for the overall Town and/or County comprehensive plan. A plan may assist in determining hamlet identity, interests, and concerns. These preliminary efforts, which could be organized around a successful public participation model such as a Community Visioning Session, could lead to the initiation of a hamlet master plan. Upon completion, a plan may recommend and suggest that a Town helps to facilitate hamlet organization and revitalization activities.

Each hamlet master plan will be unique. However, there are several common elements that should be included in the process.

**Boundary:**

- The typical distance between center and edge would be between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile, which is the distance that someone can comfortably walk in 10 to 15 minutes.

The plan should consider:

- the appropriate mix of land uses,
- architectural and urban design characteristics,
- transportation (including all modes),
- economic development opportunities,
- natural resource conservation,
- recreation, and
- other areas of concern

The plan should:

- make specific zoning code recommendations,
- identify sites for appropriate residential and commercial development,
- provide suggestions for pedestrian circulation, trails, traffic calming, automobiles and public transportation, and
- locate areas for recreation and for open space conservation

The plan should include an implementation section. This section would:

- detail public and private sector activities that would advance the recommendations in the plan,
- identify methods of funding neighborhood improvements, and
- prioritize actions



# Local Business Benefits

Source: © Jeff Milchen 1998-2005  
*The author is the co-founder of the Boulder  
 Independent Business Alliance and AMIBA*

## The Benefits of Doing Business Locally

From rural to urban areas, an ever-growing chorus of citizens laments losing a sense of community. Meanwhile, national chains continue displacing locally-owned businesses countrywide. This trend is considered symptomatic of our loss of community orientation, but could it also be a primary cause? And how is our economic well-being impacted?

Before developing shopping habits, we typically choose to do business where we perceive the best value for our time and money. But perceptions only are as sound as the scope of information creating them, and we humans like short-cuts. Thus, it's as easy to accept as truth the omnipresent corporate chain ads bombarding us daily as to miss information about the values independent businesses provide us, both personally and in community.

The disappearance of local businesses leaves a social and economic void that is palpable and real -- even when it goes unmeasured. A community's quality of life changes in ways that macroeconomics is slow to measure or ignores completely.

Local officials often fall for the seductions and political appeal of luring new national chains. They may even provide public funds or sales tax rebates for development. They're baited with promises of jobs and tax revenue, but they often fail to consider the greater losses that occur when the local business base is undermined. A chain may crowd of creating 300 new jobs for a new big box store, but numerous studies indicate they displace more than one job for each (mostly part-time and lower-wage) job created.

And when communities like Barnstable, Massachusetts performed studies to assess the local impact of chains, they concluded such development actually costs more taxpayer dollars to support in safety and services than would return to the community.

Scrutiny consistently demonstrates that most income of new chains comes directly from established businesses. A 1995 landmark study of new Wal-Mart stores by Iowa State University professor Kenneth Stone found that 84% of Wal-Mart's sales simply shifted dollars away from existing local (including chains) merchants. Stone's 2001 study of the local effect of new home improvement center developments concluded, "Is it fair to give taxpayers' money to big corporations that will then use it to help put existing firms out of business?"

## Economic Value of Independent Businesses

It's time to consider the real costs to a community that loses its locally-owned business base. Independent local businesses employ an array of supporting services. They hire architects, designers, cabinet shops, sign makers and contractors for construction. Local accountants, insurance brokers, computer consultants, attorneys, advertising agencies help run it.

Local retailers and distributors also carry a higher percentage of locally-produced goods than chains, meaning more jobs for local producers.

In contrast, a new chain store typically is a clone of other units, eliminates the need for local planning, and uses a minimum of local goods and services. A company-owned store's profits promptly are exported to corporate headquarters. Dollars spent at community-based merchants create a multiplier effect in the local economy that, by most findings, typically amounts to three times that of a chain. This is well-evidenced by a 2003 economic impact study by our IBA in Austin, Texas that concluded for every \$100 spent at a chain, \$13 remained in the

community while \$45 remained when spent with home town businesses.

### **Ensuring Choice and Diversity**

Retailers sift through competing goods and services to find those appealing to their customers. Though a single local shop may carry a smaller selection than a big chain, a multiplicity of independent retailers creates great diversity. When thousands of independent book and music shops serve their local tastes and each owner's preferences, the result is demand for a wide variety of ideas and music. This makes accessible controversial books or music from new artists with the expectation that a market exists somewhere within a variety of stores. As fewer giant corporations dominate production and sales, our options -- determined by a powerful few -- dwindle.

Our freedom of choice is imperiled when a few buyers from national chains choose what reaches customers -- perhaps moderately disturbing for most goods, but truly frightening when you consider the impact on our choice of news sources, books, music and other expression modes.

### **Maintaining Community Character**

When asked to name our favorite restaurant, cafe, or shop, it's typically a unique local business. Just look at the results in any community's "Best of" polls as proof. Those businesses define our *sense of place*, but we often forget their survival depends on our patronage.

Local owners, typically having invested much of their life savings in their businesses, have a natural interest in the community's long-term health. Community-based businesses are essential to charitable endeavors, and their owners frequently serve on local boards and support numerous causes.

Yes, some chains give back to towns in which they do business, and not all local businesses are exemplary models. However, the overall impacts are clear: locally-owned businesses play a vital role in our community that chains rarely do, while chains often even undermine community interests.

For long-term progress, a conceptual change also is necessary. We must consciously plan that future with rules that will encourage the values we want reflected in our communities. And each time we spend a dollar, we would do well to weigh the full value of our choices, not solely to ourselves immediately, but for the future we want for our home towns.

### **American Independent Business Alliance**

222 South Black Ave.  
Bozeman, MT 59715  
(406) 582-1255  
info@AMIBA.net  
www.AMIBA.net

### **About AMIBA**

In 1998, the Boulder (Colorado) Independent Business Alliance was created to help locally owned independent businesses to succeed, ensure continued opportunities for entrepreneurs, and reverse the trend of chains or other absentee-owned operations displacing community-based businesses.

After substantial success in its first three years, BIBA's model is spreading nationwide. BIBA's directors established AMIBA in 2001 to address community demand for establishing IBAs and to share resources among them while creating a stronger voice nationally for community-based business.

AMIBA offers a wealth of resources, including a detailed information packet (\$14) that includes sample materials and provides a sense for what IBAs do and how one might benefit your community.

# The Main Street Approach

Source: National Trust Main Street Center  
National Trust for Historic Preservation

## 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.

## 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.

### **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.

**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*.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

# Using the Main Street Approach

Source: National Trust Main Street Center  
National Trust for Historic Preservation

## Getting Started: Using the Main Street Approach

If your community plans to start a Main Street program to revive your commercial district or reinvigorate a struggling or previously failed revitalization attempt, look over the first steps listed below. These recommendations will help you generate the local support necessary to establish a revitalization initiative, as well as to apply to your coordinating program for designation as a Main Street organization.

First, begin building support for a commercial district revitalization program:

- **Form a working group:** Ask colleagues in your community about starting a revitalization initiative. Canvass all 'stakeholders' who have an interest in the future of your downtown or commercial district, including merchants, business owners, property owners, and residents. Contact the mayor and other local government officials, the city planning department, city economic development officials, and other organizations, such as the chamber of commerce or merchants association. Form a working group or task force of interested individuals and community leaders to explore launching an initiative. The wider the group of people you gather, the easier it is to build support and spread the word. All of these entities will benefit from a revitalized district and should support your effort, both programmatically and financially, so you need to bring them to the table now.
- **Take a good look at your district:** Look at your downtown or commercial district as if you are a first-time visitor. What are its strengths? What needs improvement? Take photos and make notes.
- **Generate broad-based local interest and support:** Hold a community meeting to discuss the idea. Call your statewide or citywide Main Street coordinating program for advice and possible attendance at the meeting. Show the Main Street Approach PowerPoint presentation (often available on loan from coordinating programs or for purchase from the National Trust Main Street Center). Also use photographs to illustrate what needs to be done. Ask for feedback from participants and invite them to join the effort. Take their contact information and follow up later.
- **Find out how to obtain designation:** Contact your Main Street coordinating program to find out about the application process to obtain designation as a Main Street organization in your state. Learn the requirements and process.
- **Network with successful programs:** Invite an executive director or board president from another Main Street community to talk with your working group or community about their accomplishments and answer questions about how the program works. Their enthusiasm, stories, and pictures will make a strong argument for a preservation-based revitalization program. Facilitate discussions among your stakeholders and those already involved with other Main Street programs. This type of dialog is invaluable, especially for members of the working group. Get mayors, business owners, and economic development staff talking.
- **Spread the word:** Ask the local newspaper(s) to run a story about the commercial district revitalization initiative. Position a member of the working group as a guest on the local radio station to explain how the community can start a program.

If you decide to launch a commercial revitalization program, here are the next steps:

- **Apply for designation, if applicable:** Complete and file an application to become a designated Main Street program in your state or city through your Main Street coordinating program. Attend an application workshop, if available.
- **Get informed:** Get a copy of the *Main Street Board Members Handbook* to learn about starting a Main Street program. The handbook discusses options for an organizational model, along with other details, such as the financial costs of running a Main Street program. Another helpful book is the Center's basic manual, *Revitalizing Downtown*, which offers a detailed explanation of how the Main Street approach works.
- **Incorporate the organization:** Determine which organizational model will work best. If you plan to incorporate as a nonprofit organization, get an application from the IRS website ([www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)) to obtain tax-exempt status. If you decide on another organizational model, contact the appropriate city agency or organization to begin discussions. Work with an attorney, if possible, to write by-laws and articles of incorporation and file them with the appropriate state agency. Sample by-laws can be found in this website's Knowledge Base. Contact your city about regulations, business licenses,

and/or any fees. Select an address or set up a post office box for mail deliveries, and choose a contact person for phone communications.

- **Recruit board members and develop committees:** Learn more about structuring a Main Street program's board and committees in the *Main Street Board Members Handbook*. Recruit board members from your working group or elsewhere to lead the organization, and draw upon enthusiastic individuals from your community meetings to serve on committees. Establish board and committee roles, including board president, officers, and committee chairs.
- **Visit another community:** With your board and committee members or working group, take a field trip to other downtowns or commercial districts to meet with peers, hear about lessons learned, and see how your commercial district compares.
- **Tap into the Network:** Sign up for the National Trust Main Street Center's Network Membership, which will bring you a monthly newsletter full of news and ideas; access to member-only information; and the Main Street List Serve, a forum for discussion among revitalization peers.
- **Draft a budget:** Draw up a budget that corresponds with your plans. Decide if you can afford to hire a program director, or more importantly, if you can afford *not* to. Read about staff, budget structures, and potential funding sources in the *Main Street Board Members Handbook* and *Revitalizing Downtown*. Look at sample budgets from other Main Street communities with the same size population in our online Knowledge Base. Talk with other community entities about financial support.
- **Develop job descriptions** for board members, officers, committee chairs, committee members, and staff. Descriptions can be found in the *Main Street Board Members Handbook* and *Committee Member Handbooks*. Other Main Street organizations can also provide samples.
- **Train and inform participants:** Educate your board and committee members. Use slide shows or PowerPoint presentations. Distribute copies of the Center's Committee Member Handbooks. Tour the neighborhood with all board and committee members to inspect the district and get to know it well.
- **Develop a fund-raising plan:** Draw up a plan outlining financial support for the program. Remember those stakeholders you contacted early on in the process? Now you will need to work with them as potential supporters. Funds should come from a diverse range of sources, not just one entity, to ensure financial security. Sources include local government, large and small businesses, membership programs, fund raising, community groups, earned income, corporate sponsors, and foundation donations.
- **Develop a work plan** that includes a vision for the district, a mission statement, and a set of goals, both long and short term. Don't overwhelm your first year's work plan with too many projects; prioritize your activities by choosing projects that are easy to accomplish as well as those that can have visible impact while you are building capacity. More information on how and why to do work planning can be found in the *Main Street Board Members Handbook* as well as *Revitalizing Downtown*.
- **Schedule regular meetings** with board members and committees, as well as with stakeholders and partners.
- **Recruit volunteers** for key projects, events, and activities; create a volunteer file and develop a volunteer recognition system.
- **Promote the program:** Use a variety of public relations tools, including brochures, newsletters, article placement, and website to get the word out. Develop a media list for press releases.
- **Take inventory of what you have:** Identify economic development and historic preservation resources in your community. Inventory the district's buildings, businesses, parking, etc., including photos.
- **Collect information:** Begin to build your own clearinghouse of resource materials by collecting website addresses, articles, books, presentations, sample documents, and samples of marketing materials. What you don't use now you eventually will. Join and use the Main Street List Serve, (a benefit of the National Trust Main Street Center's Network Membership), to connect with other Main Street program directors, board members, and volunteers and learn about their challenges and solutions. Use this website's Knowledge Base to research sample documents and past articles from *Main Street News* to build your files. Identify existing events and collect information on past promotional activities. Collect and review any studies, market analyses, or master plans that have been done.