

The Character Main Street.

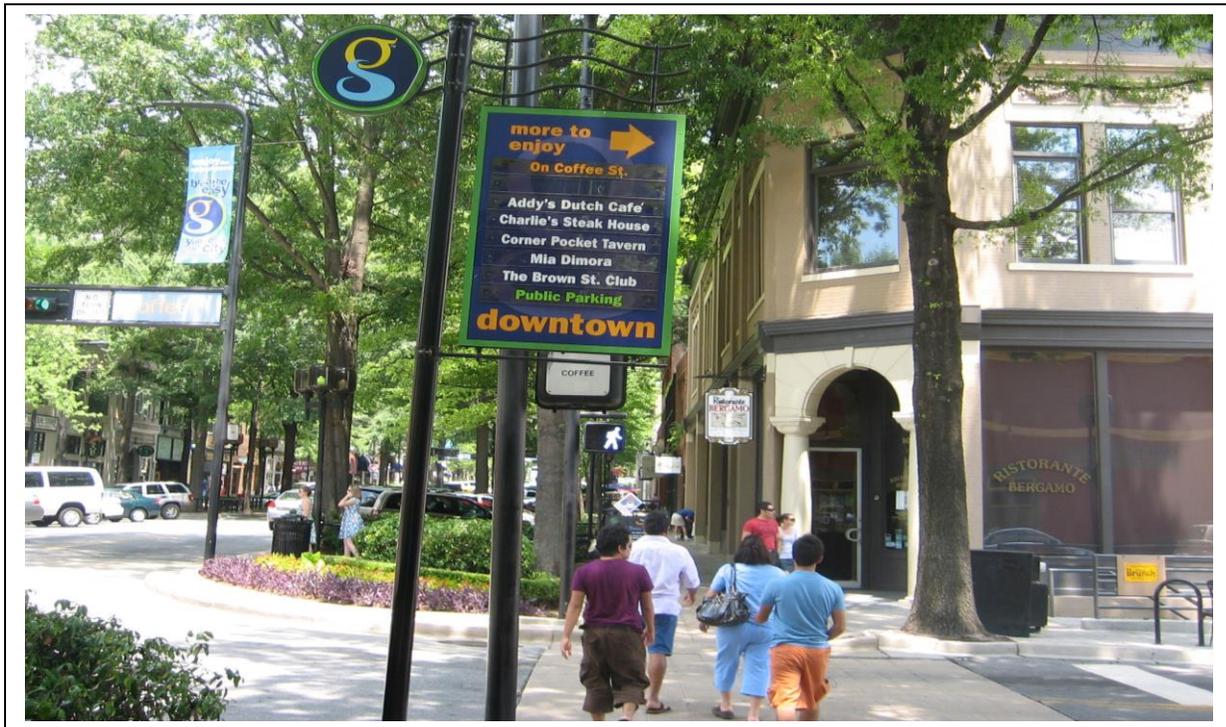
A VISION FOR MAIN STREET: SOCIAL.

Main street has done a lot for America; and more will be asked of it in the coming decades. The main value of downtown, and specifically main street, by mid-century will expand from its civic and commercial purposes to become the primarily social center of the city; main street will save the city by serving as the place that combats isolationism by providing programs, partnerships, places and spaces that promote and enable community sociability.

As community and personal isolation spreads across America, cities have the opportunity and responsibility to provide the antidote. Main street can be the town's "third place"; the place where everyone is welcome, a place without social or economic pressure, a place for families, the old, the young, the impoverished and the infirmed, a gathering place with activities and assets that accommodate and encourage civility and sociability.

Main street can be a place where people spend the night. Downtown residents are becoming more common with apartments on or near main street and close-in neighborhoods a short walk away. Downtown hotels and inns also invite people to spend the night downtown; engaging in business, simply enjoying restaurants, cafés, movies and shows or just window shopping while enjoying the evening.

Main street restaurants are already finding sidewalk space for dining *al fresco*. Main street businesses are taking advantage of e-commerce by offering showrooms, experiential laboratories, retail manufacturing of craft beer and textiles, immersion design studios and the participatory end of the purchasing spectrum. Automated vehicle [AV] services with convenient drop off/pick up areas are providing increasingly easy access to and from main street destinations.



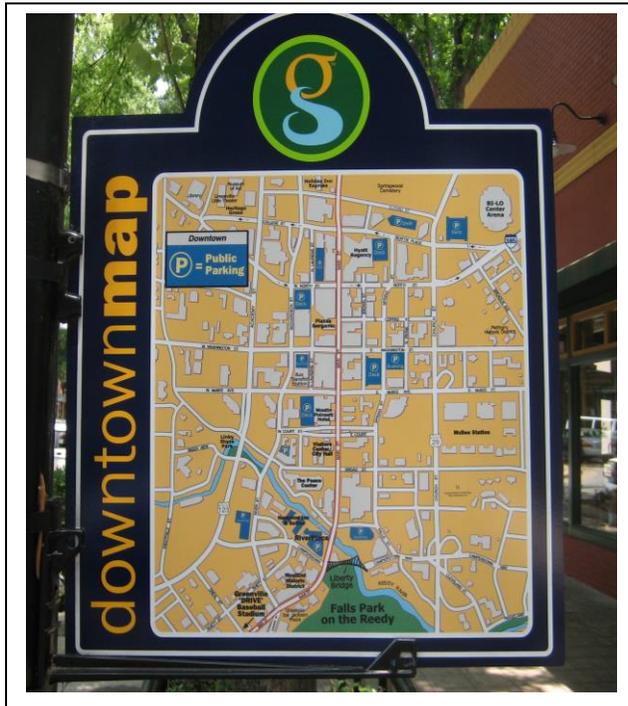
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A STRATEGY.

Leverage everything. Use parks and wide sidewalks to attract shoppers; use wayfinding to create comfort; use [AV] drop off and pick up areas as kiosks to direct people to businesses, civic offices and entertainment venues; use the master parking system to direct pedestrian traffic to sponsoring businesses; use museums, galleries and libraries to attract people downtown for entertainment and education. Use every asset and program for multiple purposes.

AN ACTION PLAN FOR MAIN STREET.

There need to be more and more reasons for people and families to go to main street. Customers, merchants, employees, residents, visitors and downtown property owners are making decisions about the future of main street by their actions. The wide variety of stakeholders on main street have opinions and are finding a voice.



A proactive approach to focus the growing stakeholder voice is to organize a process for soliciting the stakeholder-based vision for main street. A grass-roots vision can drive a successful strategy to turn the vision into actions.

Comfort is an important attitude to create on main street. Wayfinding, easy parking, beautiful sidewalks and inviting storefronts set the tone. People either feel good about coming downtown or they don't. Creating a good feeling is the key.

The Action Plan described below is intended to begin the debate to be followed by the additions, deletions and revisions necessary for an implementable Go-forward Action Plan. The elements are:

1. An organization focused on the specific issue – the success of main street and each of its members with:
 - a. The establishment of a geographically bounded district.
 - b. A visual image of the district describing uses and aesthetics.
 - c. A Business Model for the district and the managing agency for infrastructure, operations and maintenance and marketing.
 - Agreement among merchants about hours and days to be open.
 - Funding sources and requirements for participation.
 - d. District branding, identification, signage and wayfinding.
2. Stakeholder participation projects with in-kind contributions, sponsorships and crowdfunding for special projects.

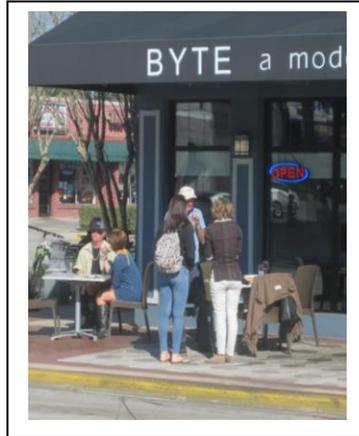
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3. Reliable continuing funding sources primarily from main street sources; financial independence is important.
 - a. Create special funding districts, such as
 - BIDs or NIDs for administrative expenses.
 - CRAs, MSTUs and MSBUs for infrastructure and maintenance costs.
 - b. Use sponsored events and advertising to provide funds for special projects.
 - c. Offer private development incentives when linked with public improvements.
 - d. Pursue grants and special tax benefit programs like Opportunity Zones and Brownfield designations.
4. A focus on the “Active Zone” of main street, i.e., the few blocks with the most action; don’t dilute or disrupt the energy along the “Active Zone” of main street with empty spaces or buildings.
5. **A Long-Term Civic Building, Place and Space Location Plan** to retain and recruit public and institution buildings to locations on or near main street.
 - a. Identify public and institutional buildings vulnerable to relocation out of downtown; plan for them to stay put.
 - b. Identify future public buildings that will be constructed or relocated in the region over the next decade; find a place for them on or near main street.
 - c. Employ “smart” systems, with high speed, broadband internet service in the “Active Zones” and all public places.
6. Preserved old buildings and street patterns for adaptation to contemporary uses and conditions; provide regulatory and infrastructure relief that facilitates re-use without compromising safety standards.
7. Universal design principles and details for buildings and streets in new character downtowns to enable main street uses to change with the times without requiring the wholesale reconstruction of downtown.
8. A program to retain and recruit critical businesses to main street’s “Active Zone”, including: a café, an ice cream shop, a book store and a bike shop with subsidy programs when necessary with start-up rent subsidies, fee abatements, marketing support or other methods as needed.
9. Controlled on-street parking with free off-street parking in lots and/or decks with pleasant pathways to main street; develop a master parking system for the main street district funded by users.
10. A public safety presence on main street with cameras, lighting, public restrooms and concierge personnel and kiosks.
11. Fire protection service to reduce building and business insurance costs.
12. A master stormwater system with a public water feature if feasible with user funding.
13. Beauty; from tree-lined main street to flower pots to banners to a “central park” to attractive street lights to clean, wide sidewalks and plazas.
14. Façade improvement grants for the front, and sometimes the back, of buildings to help shop owners present a better face.
15. A public gathering space that is heavily programmed.
16. Partnerships with departments of city government, adjacent cities, important downtown businesses and regional agencies with access to economic development resources.

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CONCLUSIONS.

Somebody has to care. Successful downtowns and main streets do not just happen; some dedicated person or some dedicated group of persons must have a common vision backed with a focused commitment of good will, time, creativity and the energy for its fulfillment.



A. Be a Destination: Main street can be the one place in town where people gather for special occasions or for no reason at all other than casual enjoyment. Main street can be the place where business is conducted, a place where citizens participate in their own governance, a place where everyone is welcome, a place where spaces are safe and comfortable, a place of interest and a place where people and families want to be.



B. Be a "Third Place": Main streets as "third places" don't just happen.

- Vision and leadership are necessary.
- Concerted actions over an extended period of time are necessary.
- Community and main street stakeholder support is essential.

C. Be accountable: A performance dashboard is important to record and monitor sidewalk pedestrian, parking availability and use, special event participation, traffic counts, delivery disruptions, changes in property values, building conditions, rent and occupancy rates, retail sales, and other metrics; the dashboard should be designed for frequent review by city leaders, stakeholders and the public.

