

Be Social; Plan for a Social Main Street.

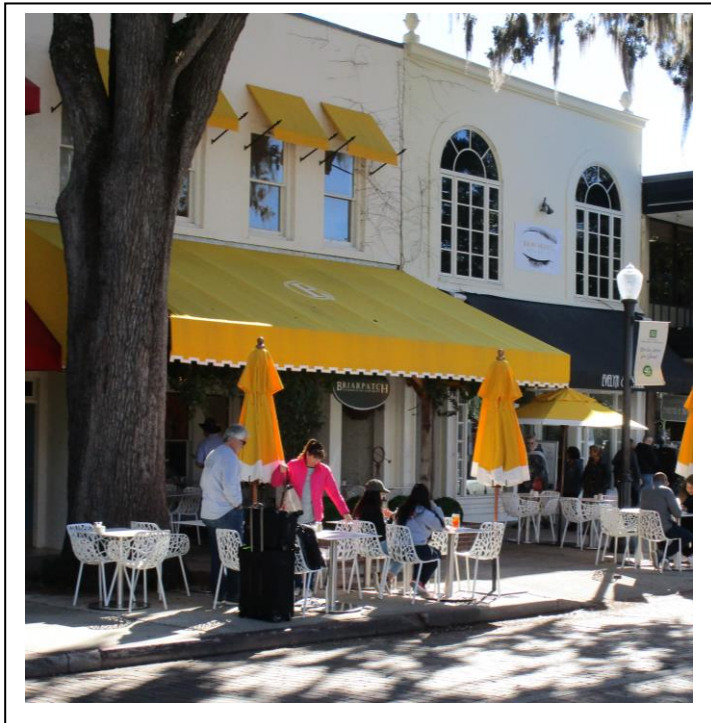
A Vision: Main Street as the Small City's Social Center.

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 with programs, places, partnerships and spaces that promote and enable community engagement and 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 judgement, a place for families, a place that enables and encourages 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 residents and visitors 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 with dining *al fresco*. Main street businesses are taking advantage of e-commerce by offering showrooms, pop-up shops, experiential laboratories, retail manufacturing of craft beers and textiles, immersion design studios and the participatory end of the purchasing spectrum.



smartcitiesdive.com/ A warning for cities: Become citizen-centric or fail.

To achieve citizen satisfaction, city leaders need to follow blueprints that put people at the center of their thinking and planning.

<https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/a-warning-for-cities-become-citizen-centric-or-fail/548346/>

"The social renaissance is happening from the ground up."

David Brooks started *Weave: The Social Fabric Project* at the Aspen Institute as he describes in The New York Times Feb. 1, 2019

A Strategy.

Leverage everything. Use parks and wide sidewalks to attract shoppers; use wayfinding to create comfort and promote exploration; use [AV] drop off and pick up areas as kiosks to direct people to eclectic destinations; 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, magnetic purposes.

An Action Plan.

There needs 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.



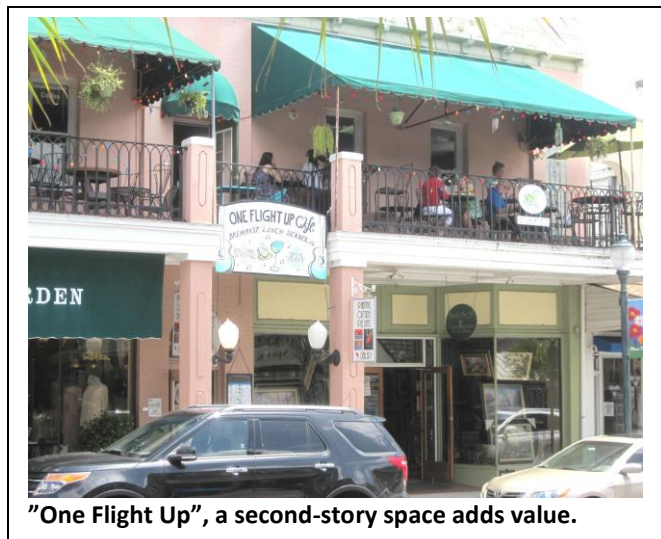
“Citizen-centric” cities is a term; an inadequate term to describe the attitude cities can take to imbue main street as the answer to the plea of those isolated for companionship, engagement and socialization; a main street with shops, cafés and plazas offering the spirit of a “third place”. A proactive 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 coming downtown or they don’t. Creating a personable feeling of comfort, convenience and warmth for a first-time visitor is the key.

The Action Plan described below is a starting point, a discussion draft, intended to begin the planning process 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 district agency with geographic boundaries.
 - b. A visual image of the district describing uses and aesthetics.
 - c. District branding, identification, signage and wayfinding.
2. 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.

3. A Business Model for the district agency for infrastructure, operations, maintenance and marketing, including:
 - a. Agreement among merchants about hours and days to be open.
 - b. A reliable continuing funding sources.
 - c. Special funding districts, such as BIDs or NIDs for administrative costs; CRAs, MSTUs and MSBUs for infrastructure and maintenance costs.
 - d. Stakeholder participation projects with in-kind contributions, sponsorships and crowdfunding for special projects.
 - e. Private development incentives for operations and capital improvements.
 - f. Grants and special tax benefit programs like Opportunity Zones and Brownfield designations.
4. A program to retain and recruit critical businesses to main street's "Active Zone", with subsidy programs when necessary to pay for start-up rents, fee abatements, or marketing support, as needed.
5. Preserved historic buildings and street patterns for adaptation to contemporary uses and conditions.
6. Universal design principles and details for buildings and streets to enable main street uses to change with the times without requiring the wholesale reconstruction of downtown; provide regulatory and infrastructure relief that facilitates re-use without compromising safety standards.
7. 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.
8. A public safety presence on main street with cameras, lighting, public restrooms, concierge personnel and kiosks.
9. A master stormwater system with a public water feature, if feasible, with user funding.
10. Fire protection service to reduce building and business insurance costs.
11. Façade improvement grants for the front, and sometimes the back, of buildings to help shop owners present a better face.
12. Partnerships with city departments, nearby cities, important downtown businesses and regional agencies with access to economic development resources.
13. 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 and institutional buildings to be constructed or relocated in the region over the next decade; find a place for them on or near main street.
 - c. Create a public gathering space that is heavily programmed; and quiet places.
14. Beauty; from tree-lined main street to flower pots to banners to a "central park" with attractive street lights and clean, wide sidewalks and plazas.



Conclusions.

Somebody has to care.

Successful downtowns and main streets do not just happen; they happen when some dedicated person or persons have a common vision driven by a persistent commitment of good will, time, creativity and the energy for its fulfillment.

A. Be the ultimate “Third Place”: Main street can be the one place in town where people gather for special occasions, for casual enjoyment or for no reason at all. It can be a place where everyone is welcome, safe and comfortable; a place of interest, a place where people and families want to be. **Main streets as “third places”** will only happen with:

- Vision and leadership,
- Concerted actions over time, and
- Citizen-centric thinking and doing.

B. Be Innovative: Technology can be used to overcome the growing forces of civic isolation and disengagement. “Smart” systems, with high speed, broadband internet service in the main street “Active Zone” bring people together for fun, enlightenment and enjoyment.

C. Be the Main Street of the Future: Many of the conditions of main street in 2050 already exist. Most of the many changes to come will not be in the form of dramatic new buildings or streets. The changes will be in how people interact, or not; how people stay home or go out to shop and dine; how they engage with learning, cultural and entertainment venues. Home life, shopping, dining, education, recreation and entertainment will become inextricably integrated or unpleasantly isolated. How the city employs main street as a vehicle of civic socialization will make the difference.



Chatting.



Biking.



Strolling.