

## Main Street's Potential.

### A Vision-Driven Asset.

Think of your children's children on the main street in town in 2050. Why will they be there? What will they do? Will they have fun?

Extending today's trends, they will not be there, partly because there is nothing downtown or on main street they will find interesting. Believing they will be active, reasonably intelligent and socially engaging, much like kids in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, mid-century kids will seek out entertainment, recreation and education where ever it may be found. Competitive sites for their interests will be as fierce as it is today. Small city downtowns have the potential to be places that will successfully compete for their interest.

Towns people and their leaders can choose to have downtown and main street join the pantheon of competitive sites, or not. Based on the town's vision of itself and the lives of its citizens, main street can be a place that attracts people to downtown, or not.

Main street is an asset that needs exercise, an asset that diminishes with neglect and an asset that truly benefits from the synergistic effects of its many components. Main street can become and remain the center of civic society if properly managed.

### Physical Form.

Main street in the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century will look much as it does today, 2019. Hopefully there will be more trees and flowers, more transit and bike/ped accommodations and more emphasis of sidewalks as places to linger, dine and shop. But, the look will not change radically.

The changes which may be profound will be in the economic and social realms. The town and its leaders may have used its time to build a strong business model for main street along with growing civic pride and a strong main street social infrastructure system.

### The Main Street Business Model.

**The Public Sector.** The public sector either has or will have provided what it can to support businesses on main street. What the public sector can do is provide the necessary physical infrastructure including utilities, master drainage and parking systems, high-speed, broadband internet service, wide sidewalks, bikeways and pedways, transit service and street trees. Mixed use land use entitlements are as critical as is public safety.

The public sector locates its retail-oriented services downtown. City hall, the post office, the library, the community center and a central plaza or park are located downtown; not in the Active Zone, but close enough to draw people downtown to participate in the town's governance, celebratory and civic events. The public sector leads, "sets the table" and entices institutional and private sector investments.



**The Institutional Sector.** The community theater, the local history museum, public galleries, cultural venues medical and educational facilities not operated by the city are located on or near main street's Active Zone. Foundations, charities and other quasi-public activities participate on main street. The institutional sector of the community is committed to the importance of a successful downtown and main street; and there they invest their time and treasure.

**The Private Sector.** Business finds it important to be downtown, on or near main street. Professional offices, the administrative offices of businesses located throughout the community along with restaurants, shops and entertainment venues form the foundation of storefronts in main street's Active Zone.

### **Main Street's Social Infrastructure.**

People are the essential ingredient to a successful downtown. A self-evident truth, but true nonetheless and not an automatic achievement. Main street can languish even with the best, most comprehensive investment program. Main street can be a dead zone for restaurants and entertainment without the supporting social and civic infrastructure that invites people to be downtown, to be on main street to enjoy their experience, spend their time and money and return.

Programs, organizations, partnerships and facilities complete the package that appeals to people and draws them downtown. Residents, downtown employees and visitors are the invited guests. Downtown residents are a bonus; they come with time.

Programs are designed to appeal to every segment of the community. Organizations provide the focus, the manpower and energy to orchestrate events, celebrate community achievements and advocate for city, business and institutional attention.

Partnerships combine the resources of parties with mutual interests to pursue common goals and facilities make main street a pleasant and safe place to be. The combined power of people interested in historic preservation, community aesthetics, environmental sustainability, and civic responsibility is formidable when properly lead by a consensus community vision.

Attention and purpose given to civic events social infrastructure, public safety and community sociability produces civic pride, hometown spirit and the right balance of personal and community interests.

### **Main Street's Vision, Strategy and Action Plan.**

The **vision** of a character town is one that is an interesting, pleasant and prosperous place for residents, businesses and visitors.

The **strategy** is to build holistic systems that cross-leverage the town's physical, economic and social assets to achieve the community's vision. Strategic objectives are:

- To build a holistic community with great neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown, productive development corridors, superior schools and sound, green infrastructure.
- To use a systems approach to create adaptable and durable networks of physical, economic and social assets.

Three **action** plans to guide main street's development:

- The Physical Development and Preservation Plan for Main Street.
- The Main Street Business Plan including the Economic Development Plan and the Public Long-Range Comprehensive Finance Plan.
- The Social Infrastructure Plan for Main Street and Downtown.

### Find the Role for Main Street.

As e-commerce continues to intrude into the downtown market place, as the next generation of ride sharing and autonomous vehicles become more prevalent, as communications become more immediate and visual, and as the have – have not dichotomy grows, it becomes harder and harder to anticipate outcomes. What is “known” and “unknowable” becomes more important to understand.

Human needs are “knowable”. Maslow got it right over 60 years ago. Human needs for food, shelter and safety will not change substantially in the next fifty years. Despite Ray Kurzweil's melding of man and machine, basic human needs and wants will persist.



In addition to Maslow's “Hierarchy of Needs”, it is highly probable that people will continue to want a private place to live, 25% of families will continue to have children, people will still need to work for a living even as the nature of work changes, wastes will still need disposal on site or off, and potable water and electricity will still be demanded. People will still need people.

### The Fight Against Civic Isolation.

Over time, people seem to be becoming more and more isolated. The antidote is the mixed-use activity center be it a downtown, a regional hub or a village center. The mixed-use center business model goes beyond jobs and trade toward entertainment, education and culture. The primary value of downtown will transcend jobs and trade to emphasize social engagement.

### Employ the Innate Character of Main Street as the Center of Social, Commercial and Civic Life.

The historic role of main street and downtown in many cities has fluctuated between wild exuberance and abandonment. But in the end, the form and function of many main streets have prevailed and adapted themselves to e-commerce, downtown residents and small town tourism. While not all downtowns prevail, many have the will to succeed based on the innate character of their people and their leaders along with their strategic location, regional economy and traditional building stock.

### Articulate A Vision of Character.

Envisioning a future based on noble values is critical. Basic lessons have been learned and re-learned: separation of compatible uses is bad, separation of home from all but the most obnoxious uses is bad, separation of home from work is bad, as is the destruction of natural and historic resources and the subjugation of human values to those of machines. Character main streets build on their strengths, shore-up their weaknesses and constantly strive for civility and sociability.

## Build a Holistic Center.

Downtown is the holistic vessel for all the social, economic and physical assets and interactions of any town. Main street has been “main street” for centuries. While the fortunes of every downtown rise and fall, many small city and town main streets survive because they were designed with universal principles.

As a result, main streets remain highly adaptable to changing uses and activities; even the dormant main streets have an adaptive re-use future. Revitalization is always an option. As technologies morphed the horse and buggy into the horseless carriage and the Pony Express became the internet, three essential features of many downtowns remain:

- their adaptable and durable building stocks and street grids,
- their locational advantages that led to its initial founding, and
- their main street’s centrality in the social, civic and commercial life of the city.

## Create an Adaptable and Durable Building Stock and Street Network.

Whether by chance, purposeful action or general good fortune, many American towns have the quintessential main street.

Traditional main streets have several active commercial and civic blocks of 2-3 story “centennial” buildings designed in a way that accommodates a wide variety of changing uses.

The size and shape of blocks, the height and depth of buildings and the network of streets has proven adaptable to changing technologies, market conditions and lifestyles for over two centuries. Traditional main streets can re-constitute themselves without wholesale reconstruction.

An adaptable main street can welcome:

- Downtown residents,
- Small city tourist venues and hotels,
- E-commerce, and
- The evolution of main street as the social center of the city.

The “unknowables” of mid-21<sup>st</sup> Century main streets are simple. Except for the mysterious future of transportation, communication, housing, education and health systems, the future is clear.



**Boutique hotels fit character main streets.**

The “knowable” features of character downtowns and main streets include:

- a familiar looking main street having 2-3 story buildings adapted to their next century of useful life,
- an appreciation for beauty’s contribution to character for its own sake, for the competitive advantages it offers and for its environmental service,
- entertainment, education and social activities full of linked cafés, shops, restaurants, theaters, libraries, museums, schools, offices; and a variety of residences,

- a public street for multiple modes of travel,
- historic buildings, homes, places and lore of interest to residents and visitors,
- celebrated natural resources, and
- an inviting atmosphere for visitors with hotels, concierge attitudes and information to encourage exploration and participation.

### Employ a Leverage-Driven Strategy.

Leverage everything. Use what you have to get what you want. Attractive parks and wide sidewalks attract diners and shoppers. Use wayfinding guides to create comfort and to promote exploration to downtown venues.

Thoughtfully locate kiosks and signs that direct people to eclectic destinations; sign the master parking system to direct pedestrian traffic to sponsoring businesses; activate museums, galleries and libraries to attract people downtown for entertainment, education and collateral commercial encounters. Use every available asset and program for multiple, magnetic purposes.

### Build Systems as the Foundation of the Main Street Action Plan.

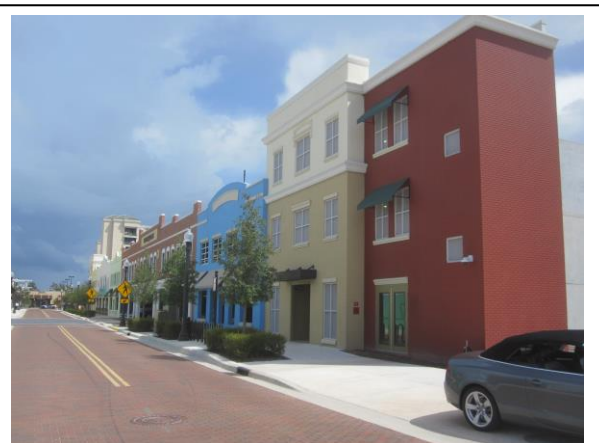
“A system is the interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves” a purpose. [Meadows, 2008]. Public systems are designed with the long view and a broad scope.

Cities and main streets are systems of systems; therefore, every action had best contribute to a sound system for main street that perpetually cross-leverages every asset to achieve its vision.

Parking downtown is a big deal; and the absence of parking is a big deterrent to many people otherwise interested in a main street

experience. The main street parking system can combine on-street parking with time limits that favor shoppers and not employees; and off-street parking lots or decks located within a block of main street. Many small cities are constructing 2-3 level parking decks with an open, airy and non-intimidating feel with storefront looking facades.

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



**Kissimmee – A parking deck designed with storefront facades located one block from main street.**



**Winter Garden – Another attractive parking deck located one street over from main street.**

**Comfort** is an important attitude to create character on main streets. Friendly parking, ever-present wayfinding, beautiful sidewalks and inviting storefronts set the tone. Successful main streets have a personal feeling of comfort, safety, convenience and warmth for the first-time visitor, the every-day employee and the returning resident.

### Build a Main Street Business Plan.

In summary, the main street organization can:

1. 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.
2. Create a public gathering space that is heavily programmed along with quiet places for contemplation and conversation.
3. Prepare a **Long-Term Civic Building, Place and Space Location Plan** to retain and recruit public and institutional buildings to locations on or near main street.
4. Identify public and institutional buildings vulnerable to relocation out of downtown; plan for them to stay put.
5. 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.
6. Adopt 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.
7. Document agreement among main street merchants about operational aspects including hours and days to be open, maintenance and marketing.

8. Prepare a Business Model for the district agency with secure, reliable and continuing funding sources for infrastructure, operations, maintenance and marketing, including:
  - a. Locally sustainable tax and fee sources of revenue for operating costs.
  - b. Special funding districts, such as BIDs or NIDs for administrative costs; CRAs, MSTUs and MSBUs for infrastructure and maintenance costs.
  - c. Grants and special tax benefit programs like Opportunity Zones and Brownfield designations.
  - d. Stakeholder participation in projects with in-kind contributions, sponsorships and crowdfunding for special projects.
9. Support private development incentives for business operations and required capital improvements.
10. Exploit competitive advantages such as beauty, access, entrepreneurial support and holistic, green infrastructure.



11. Assist the transition of main street businesses to e-commerce by providing education of trends in store and display designs, delivery services, “experience” shopping and partnerships between retailers and restaurateurs.

12. Offer education and training on new business technologies, such as blockchains, using existing main street businesses, nearby colleges and business organizations.
13. Partner with city departments, nearby cities, important downtown businesses and regional agencies with access to economic development resources.
14. Accentuate 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.

### Solidify a Social Infrastructure Plan for Main Street.

Stakeholder-based visioning sessions in big meetings and small group conversations is a proactive approach to focus the growing stakeholder voice. A grass-roots vision can drive a successful strategy to turn the vision into actions that build social infrastructure.

In summary, the main street organization can:

15. Find the main street leaders interested in strengthening main street’s role in building economic and social value for the city.
16. Establish a “steering committee” as a precursor to a district agency with geographic boundaries.
17. Articulate a vision for the district and create a visual image of the district describing uses and aesthetics. Leverage city investments, like the Boynton Beach [FL] Town Square, to catalyze private investments.
18. Focus on the specific issue at hand – the success of main street as an economic and social entity with an expanded role that addresses the increased isolation of society.
19. Recognize that the future value-add of downtown and main street will increasingly be social engagement.

20. Select district branding, identification, signage and wayfinding symbols and language.
21. Muster all physical and economic assets to serve people’s shelter, educational, cultural, recreational and social needs.
22. Harness the social power of the new “sharing” and FOMO obsession to attract people downtown with frequent refreshers to the names of businesses, the facades of buildings, the messaging and lighting from “smart poles” and program offerings.
23. Support main street organizations, the city permitting agency and businesses as they learn to act fast and thoughtfully.
24. Fully employ main street’s public open spaces and plazas by expanding their 24/7/365 use with more frequent events, markets with local foods and crafts, recitals, celebrations, art shows, festivals, concerts and car exhibits.

**Build community trust, hometown spirit and civic pride to establish main street as “the place to be”.**

### Town Square A 16-acre site in downtown Boynton Beach



Town Square is a 16-acre mixed-use project on main street in downtown Boynton Beach. The project includes the renovation of the historic Boynton Beach High School into a cultural center, residential and retail spaces, a hotel, playground, amphitheater, open spaces, parking garages, a fire station and a new city hall with a new library. Questions? Contact us at 561-742-6025 or [TownSquare@bbfl.us](mailto:TownSquare@bbfl.us).

## Promulgate a Physical Development and Preservation Plan.

25. Coordinate physical improvement plans with the adopted *Long-Term Civic Building, Place and Space Plan* for downtown's main street and the city.
26. Preserve historic buildings and street patterns for adaptation to contemporary uses and conditions.
27. Use historic preservation to preserve and enhance the existing building stock.
28. Use vision-consistent standards and guidelines to direct the design and construct new vision-consistent buildings complementary to the city.
29. Provide regulatory and infrastructure relief that facilitates infill and redevelopment without compromising safety standards.
30. Institute 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.
31. Fund façade improvement grants for the front, and sometimes the back, of buildings to help shop owners present a better face.
32. Partner with the city to ensure that streetscape improvements and infrastructure upgrades include "smart poles" with high-speed broadband internet service, security, lighting and other information capabilities connected to a dashboard in city hall.
33. Leverage the location of public and NGO buildings to gain multiple benefits, co-locations and civic partnerships.
34. Develop a master parking system for the main street district funded by users with controlled on-street parking and free off-street parking in lots and/or decks with pleasant pathways to main street.
35. Protect existing pathway systems and expand them to serve walkers and bikers with the full range of uses.
36. Exploit ridesharing, electric vehicles and the general disdain people have for finding convenient parking by offering real or virtual valet service and drop-off/pick-up zones.
37. Provide a master stormwater system for main street development funded by users with a public water feature, if feasible.
38. Provide high-speed, broadband internet service to everyone in the "Active Zone" and other districts as feasible.
39. Provide a public safety presence on main street with cameras, lighting, public restrooms, concierge personnel and kiosks.
40. Provide fire protection service to a standard that protects the public and reduces building and business insurance costs.
41. Partner with city agencies to properly locate last-mile warehouses, loading zones and rideshare delivery facilities to ensure their efficiency and service to main street businesses and customers.

### Conclusions: Main Street's Potential.

#### Character Main Streets will prosper by:

1. Being the ultimate "third place", engaging and social.
2. Becoming the city's center that provides economic value, promotes community trust and combats civic isolation.
3. Inviting people to live and visit downtown as full-time residents and small city tourists.
4. Employing technologies to build civic pride and hometown spirit.
5. Embracing beauty and fun, and
6. Envisioning a forward-thinking main street with enduring character based on sustainable social and economic systems.