

Ideas and
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Practitioner's Guide

Revitalizing Commerce for American Cities

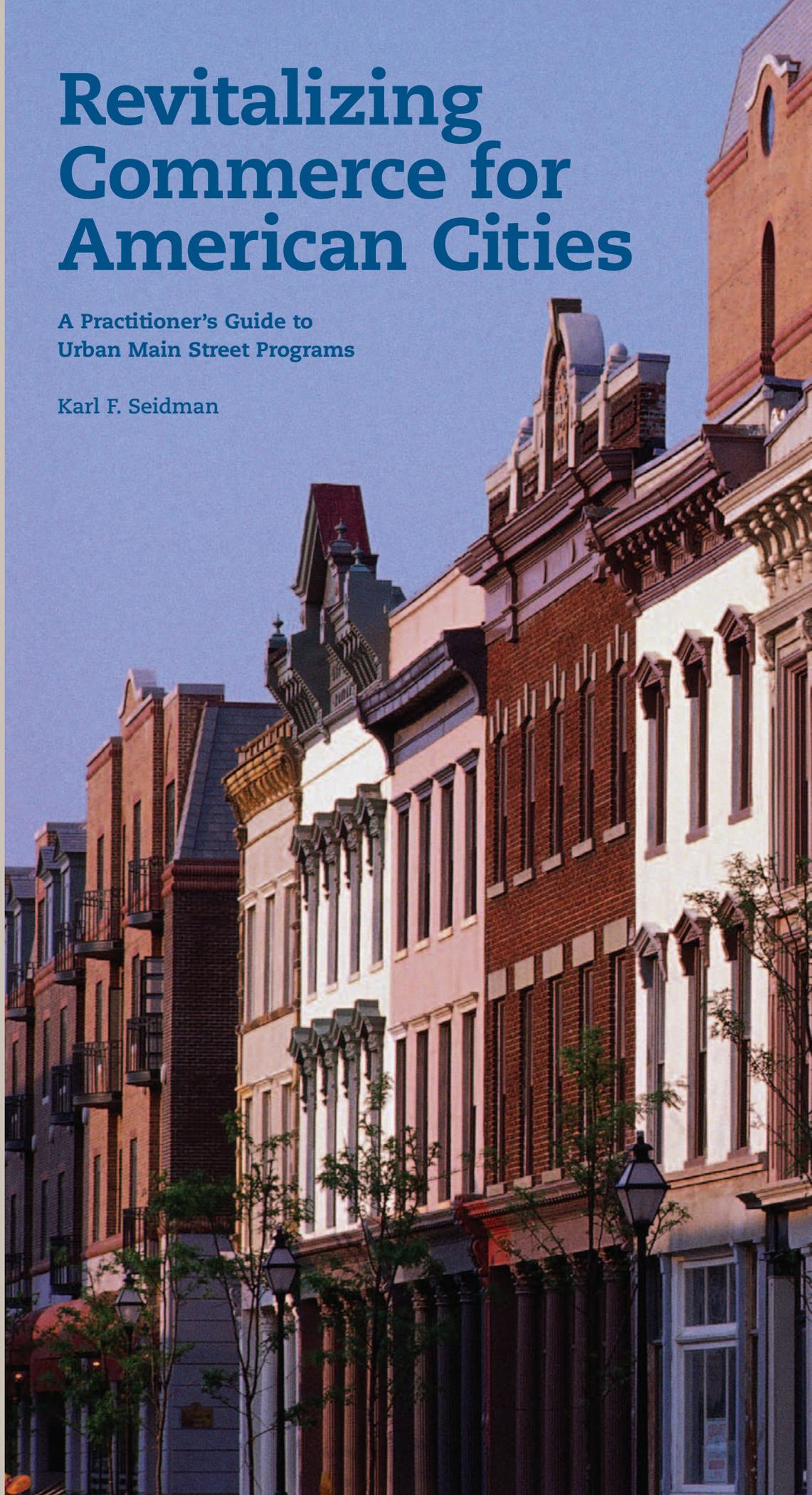
A Practitioner's Guide to
Urban Main Street Programs

Karl F. Seidman

Fannie Mae

Foundation

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Commercial districts play a central role in the life of urban neighborhoods. When vibrant and healthy, these districts attract residents and promote investment. When dormant and distressed, they attract criminal activity and promote disinvestment. The condition of the commercial district shapes a neighborhood's image and signals its desirability as a place to live, work, play, and invest.

During the 1990s, revitalizing neighborhood business districts emerged as an important community development priority. After widespread reinvestment in inner-city housing, cities and community-based organizations have learned that housing development alone is not sufficient to rebuild communities and strengthen local economies. A healthy commercial district is essential.

When faced with the challenge of returning vibrancy to a commercial district, practitioners are turning with increasing frequency to the Main Street model. Developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the 1970s, this model uses a four-point approach to commercial revitalization that integrates design improvement, image enhancement, economic development, and organization. More than 20 cities and 50 urban neighborhoods have used the Main Street approach to revitalize neighborhood business districts.

This publication aims to help community development practitioners successfully implement a Main Street program in their neighborhoods. It offers guidance on applying Main Street principles to city neighborhoods and expanding those principles to effectively address two key urban challenges: improving public safety and securing services from a fragmented city government. By culling effective practices from seven Main Street programs in three cities (Figure 1 briefly describes the four programs for which case studies are presented in the second half of this guide), this guide offers a version of Main Street practice geared to the special needs of inner-city commercial districts. This urban model embraces many standard Main Street practices, but both alters and augments these practices to ensure their applicability and relevance in an urban setting.

The first part of this report contains 10 chapters:

- Chapter 1 summarizes the Main Street promise and examines its promise for inner-city commercial districts.
- Chapter 2 discusses the unique challenges confronting urban neighborhoods and the modifications to the Main Street model that are necessary to meet these challenges.
- Chapter 3 presents a four-part agenda for building effective Main Street organizations.
- Chapter 4 examines the implementation of design goals.
- Chapter 5 outlines effective approaches to district promotion.

- ▶ Chapter 6 focuses on ways to establish a desirable and viable business mix.
- ▶ Chapter 7 outlines the key elements in Main Street crime prevention initiatives.
- ▶ Chapter 8 discusses the use of Main Street programs to advocate for improved city services and increased city investment.
- ▶ Chapter 9 considers four ways to phase in implementation activities.
- ▶ Chapter 10 summarizes urban Main Street practice and future research and policy issues.

The second part of the report presents four case studies that describe the organization and its funding, program activities, Main Street adaptation, lessons learned, and effective practices.

Figure 1.

Main Street Program Case Studies

BOSTON

Washington Gateway Main Street — An independent Main Street organization designated by the City of Boston Main Street Program that grew out of a mayoral task force on revitalizing a major commercial corridor impacted by urban renewal, disinvestment, and the relocation of an overhead subway line.

ST. PAUL, MINN.

East Side Neighborhood Development Company, Payne Avenue Main Street Program — A program sponsored by Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) within a community development corporation working to revitalize the linear Payne Avenue corridor in a working class neighborhood with fast-growing Hispanic and Hmong populations.

Riverview Economic Development Association District del Sol Program — A LISC-sponsored program within a community development corporation working to revitalize a predominantly Mexican business district across the Mississippi River from downtown St. Paul.

OKLAHOMA CITY

Stockyards City Main Street — An independent Main Street organization designated by the state of Oklahoma Main Street Program within a city-approved business improvement district working to enhance a cowboy-oriented commercial district next to the Oklahoma National Stockyards and near low-income residential neighborhoods.

The Main Street Model

Since the introduction of the Main Street model more than 20 years ago, close to 1,600 U.S. communities have used it to revitalize their downtown or neighborhood commercial districts.¹ The Main Street model combines activities in four intersecting areas:

- ▶ **Design and physical improvements** to enhance the district's attractiveness
- ▶ **Promotion and marketing** to strengthen the district's image and attract more customers
- ▶ **Economic restructuring** to identify the district's economic potential, build on existing assets, and attract new business and capital
- ▶ **Organizational development** to create a strong volunteer-driven organization that engages all major concerned parties in planning and executing commercial district revitalization

The Main Street approach focuses on local initiatives that build on community assets, involve government/private sector partnerships, and create change incrementally.² A guiding principle of Main Street programs is that small improvements can have big consequences.

Most Main Street programs operate as independent 501(c)(3) corporations with a small staff and a volunteer board drawn from local businesses, property owners, nonprofit organizations, and government. Volunteers set program goals, design activities, and assist staff with implementation. The responsibility for designating local organizations as Main Street programs usually falls to the state government, which provides training and technical assistance. Programs raise operating funds from the local community through pledges, membership fees, in-kind contributions, and fund-raising projects. Local businesses are the primary funding source, with state and local governments sometimes providing support. Special improvement projects are funded through a mix of government and foundation grants, business contributions, sponsorships, and other revenue-generating activities.

The Main Street model offers a comprehensive revitalization approach that transcends commercial real estate development and small-business assistance. The aim is to build both capacity and community support, create an appealing environment, and attract the pedestrian activity necessary for

¹ The estimate of 1,600 communities that have used the Main Street approach is from the National Main Street Center Web site.

² These principles are summarized in Dane, *Main Street Success Stories*, pp. 6–8.

a vital commercial district. Main Street practitioners have access to a well-established network of resources for information, training, and technical assistance. (See Appendix for more information about these resources.)

Main Street Works!

Data assembled from more than 1,600 districts by the National Main Street Center indicate that the Main Street approach leads to substantial reinvestment and new economic activity. The average Main Street district reports \$9.5 million in new investment, 49 building improvement projects, 32 net new businesses, and 129 net new jobs.³ A 1997 report by Suzanne G. Dane on the most successful programs, *Main Street Success Stories*, documents the potential impact from long-term Main Street program implementation. On average, the 44 “success story” communities reported \$20 million in new private and public investment, 95 building rehabilitations, 72 net new businesses, and 348 net new jobs after nine years. Vacancy rates declined from an average of 21 percent at program initiation to 5 percent when the final data were collected in February 1997. Outcomes from 14 neighborhood programs in eight cities demonstrate that the Main Street program can be as effective in urban neighborhoods as they have been in suburban and rural communities. After adjusting for different implementation periods, urban neighborhood districts generated annual outcomes on a par with the “success story” programs. (See Table 1.)

Table 1.
**Outcomes for Urban Neighborhood and
“Success Story” Main Street Districts**

Outcome Category	Urban Neighborhood Cumulative Average	“Success Story” Cumulative Average	Urban Neighborhood Annual Average	“Success Story” Annual Average
Net new businesses	38	72	8	8
New job creation	192	348	38	39
Total private building projects	78	95	15	11
Total private and public investment	\$5,183,785	\$19,997,995	\$1,088,259	\$2,221,999
Average program age in years	5	9	NA	NA

Notes: Data sources include Suzanne Dane, *Main Street Success Stories*; Suzanne G. Dane, editor, *New Directions for Urban Main Streets*; Karl F. Seidman, *Wanted Solutions for America: Boston Main Streets Final Research Report*; author’s calculations from data provided by state Main Street programs in California and Oklahoma; and data provided by St. Paul Payne Avenue Main Street Program. Outcome data for urban neighborhood districts are based on 14 districts for net new businesses, 13 districts for net jobs, 10 districts for building projects, and 11 for total private and public investment. All outcome data for success-story districts are based on 44 districts.

³ Figures calculated from data provided on the National Main Street Center Web site, www.mainstreet.org/. District average assumes 1,600 districts.

Inner-city commercial districts, like downtowns in small cities and towns, have faced decades of disinvestment and physical decline, confront competition from large shopping malls and big-box retailers, and need to coordinate actions with government, businesses, and property owners to create a healthy commercial center. Some urban and non-urban districts also share similar assets to spur rebirth, such as historic buildings, pedestrian-oriented public spaces, entrepreneurial talent, and effective local leaders. Urban neighborhoods, however, must fashion their revitalization strategies in a different demographic, political, and social environment. That's why the Main Street model must be adapted for the inner city.

Urban Environment

Urban neighborhoods have multiple racial, ethnic, and income groups within their population and business community. This diversity creates a special character that helps attract customers, provides a range of perspectives from which to plan program activities, and taps into varied social and political networks to support revitalization. But diversity also can impede revitalization when language and cultural differences are barriers to communication and cooperation among groups, when businesses cannot serve varied consumer preferences, and when weak organization or political influence limits access to resources and power.

Urban Main Street programs must navigate a complicated political and organizational environment. Neighborhood programs compete with downtown development, public education, basic city services, affordable housing, and other priorities to gain city attention and resources. Downtowns in small communities, on the other hand, often house the local government and are a prominent part of the community, which makes revitalization a clear priority at City Hall. Moreover, businesspeople in small communities often have close ties to local government through service on municipal boards and through personal or family relationships. The size and number of city bureaucracies is another obstacle for urban Main Street programs. Service fragmentation also is a problem at the neighborhood level, where numerous nonprofit civic, social service, and development entities operate. Consequently, urban Main Street programs need to establish credibility with these organizations to gain their commitment to the revitalization effort.

Urban Main Street programs must respond to the central importance of public safety in successful revitalization. Many inner-city neighborhoods are plagued by violent and nuisance crimes that deter customer shopping, new businesses, and investment. Even when crime activity is minimal, the perception of crime can inhibit economic activity as much as actual crime. Thus, reducing crime and increasing perceived safety is a central agenda for urban commercial districts.

Given these urban conditions, the four-point Main Street framework is most effective when it is modified to fit these three urban-environment challenges.

Urban Main Street Model

Although each neighborhood needs to adapt the Main Street model to its own goals and conditions, common issues and effective practices across the seven case study neighborhoods yield an urban-neighborhood version of the Main Street model. The major parts of this urban Main Street approach, elaborated in the following chapters, include:

- ▶ **Organizational adaptation and partnerships.** Urban neighborhood programs need to come up with the organizational structure that best fits their environment rather than accepting a separate nonprofit organization with the four standard committees as the best model. Urban Main Street programs also must devote more effort to collaborating with their rich network of community-based organizations.
- ▶ **Extensive outreach, communication, and relationship building.** Ongoing outreach builds trust with a diverse residential and business community, addresses language and cultural barriers, and overcomes past failures or organizational rivalries. Special efforts, including communication in multiple languages, are needed to work with the immigrant business communities in inner-city commercial districts.
- ▶ **Building of specialized retail niches and market opportunities.** Compared with small towns, urban neighborhoods have access to larger markets, specialized consumer groups, and business clusters that provide market opportunities for commercial district revitalization.
- ▶ **Large-scale investment in the early stages of revitalization.** With their blighted buildings and vacant sites, inner-city commercial districts require large-scale investment early in the revitalization process to address physical decline, change negative perceptions, and reduce potential sources of crime.
- ▶ **Making public safety part of the revitalization agenda.** Reducing crime and the perception of crime is a precondition for revitalizing neighborhood commercial districts.
- ▶ **A proactive strategy toward city services and investment.** Urban Main Street programs need to create a strong partnership with city government to improve the quality and responsiveness of city services, help businesses and developers navigate city permitting processes, and encourage increased city investment.

A strong organization is what keeps you going when times are tough. A strong organization makes it possible to get results and produce the repeated victories that you need to reverse years of disinvestment.

A five-part agenda will help urban Main Street practitioners create a strong and sustainable organization:

- ▶ Create a shared vision that converts the Main Street mission into clear goals and defines the organization's role in revitalizing the commercial district. Translate the vision into an action plan that adapts the four-point Main Street approach to fit the neighborhood.
- ▶ Reach out and build relationships with many concerned parties. Hear their concerns, foster their understanding of the revitalization agenda, and gain their trust, commitment, and participation.
- ▶ Develop strong partnerships that expand the program by making the resources of other organizations available to help get projects done.
- ▶ Create, structure, and staff the Main Street organization.
- ▶ Build fund-raising capacity.

Create a Shared Vision

There are two ways to create a shared vision that unites the community behind revitalization goals.

1. Set up a formal community-based planning process. In urban neighborhoods with diverse racial, ethnic, and income groups, broad participation in this process requires outreach to all segments of the community, diverse forms of participation (for example, surveys, focus groups, workshops, and communitywide meetings), and translation and meeting facilitation in multiple languages. Since disenchantment with previous planning efforts and skepticism about change pose obstacles to participation in many communities, practitioners should design and manage the process to show steady progress and reach completion promptly, preferably within four to five months.⁴ (See Figure 2.)
2. Rely on the Main Street manager to research the goals, priorities, and ideas of concerned parties and assemble them into a unified whole.

⁴ ESNDC used frequent meetings to complete its revitalization plan in three months. See the Payne Avenue case study for more details.

Figure 2.

Payne Avenue Physical Improvement Plan

After the vision is created it must be translated into a detailed action plan that connects specific Main Street projects, services, and activities to long-term goals. The action plan lets concerned parties see how their individual steps contribute to larger-scale change.

One way to approach the plan is to target a high-priority part of the district. Concentrating efforts to achieve visible change in one area builds momentum for revitalizing the entire district. Effective revitalization plans also need short-term and long-term elements. Short-term projects demonstrate success and help sustain the support of concerned parties until long-term projects are completed. However, short-term projects should be chosen for their strategic value, not just because they are easy to do.

Even after a successful participatory process, a new vision needs one to two years to take root. Regular communication spreads and reinforces the vision by reaching people who did not participate in the planning process, reminding others of what they agreed to, and demonstrating progress. Effective ways of communicating include:

- ▶ A brochure about the Main Street program, vision, and activities
- ▶ E-mail messages and updates
- ▶ Newsletters
- ▶ Regular press releases and coverage in local newspapers
- ▶ Periodic information meetings
- ▶ One-on-one outreach

Reach Out and Build Relationships

To realize different parts of the revitalization vision, Main Street programs must invest significant staff time in gaining the trust of and establishing effective relationships with the following concerned parties:

- ▶ **Property owners and developers**, to improve commercial district design and shape the district's economic development
- ▶ **Business owners**, to retain and strengthen key existing economic enterprises, improve district marketing, and enhance the appearance of stores and public spaces
- ▶ **City agency leadership and line staff**, to improve city services and secure funds for large-scale projects
- ▶ **City council members and other elected officials**, to gain political support for improved services and expanded funding
- ▶ **Residents and civic associations**, to provide volunteers, expertise, and political support to make the Main Street agenda happen
- ▶ **Nonprofit organizations**, to extend capacity and gain support across program areas

One-on-one contact is the cornerstone of building trusting relationships with all groups, facilitating two-way communication and personal commitment. Outreach in multiple languages is essential in districts with concerned parties who do not speak English. This is best accomplished through bilingual Main Street staff, but conducting outreach with partner organizations that have bilingual staff is a second option, especially in districts where several languages are spoken.

One-on-one contact is especially critical to reaching **small business owners**, who have little time to attend meetings or seek help on their own. Managers in all seven case study districts devoted significant time to walking their districts to develop personal relationships and keep in close contact with businesses, communicating with them on a weekly basis. Through this regular contact, managers learn about and help resolve individual business issues while identifying common needs.

Property owners require separate relationship-building efforts. To gain the participation and support of property owners, Main Street staff members can emphasize financial incentives for property improvements and offer help in finding tenants and securing city approvals. Practitioners also need to stress that revitalization will improve economic conditions and increase the demand and rent for the owners' property.

Develop Strong Partnerships

Partnerships with nonprofit organizations and city agencies expand the Main Street program's capacity to advance its revitalization goals. Collaborations are valuable to all Main Street programs, but they are especially important in inner-city neighborhoods where community-based entities have a strong presence. Partnership-building efforts should focus on five types of nonprofit organizations:

- ▶ Business associations that have a membership base and potential revenue stream to support the Main Street program
- ▶ Community development corporations (CDCs) and other housing agencies that bring real estate expertise and the potential for complementary housing initiatives
- ▶ Neighborhood associations and civic organizations that can produce resident volunteers and support and may have strong political standing
- ▶ Religious organizations that control important properties in the district, provide related services, and can enlist volunteers and generate support for the program
- ▶ Nonprofit organizations that control the condition and use of key real estate assets through their ownership or leasing of property in the district

Practitioners can follow four steps to create effective partnerships.

1. Reach out and invite other nonprofit organizations to help plan and implement the Main Street program. Ask them to participate in program governance, serve on committees, and co-sponsor events and activities.
2. Understand the mission, goals, and values of other organizations and seek to incorporate them into the Main Street agenda.
3. Develop good communication and working relationships with the executives of other organizations to build the foundation for more formal partnerships.
4. Define complementary roles that build on the special capacities of the Main Street program and other organizations. For example, Main Street programs can collaborate with CDCs on real estate projects, using their market analysis and business recruitment activities to identify tenants for commercial space in CDC development properties. By defining complementary roles for other community organizations, Main Street programs can avoid duplicating efforts and competition for funding. Strong coordination might even expand funding opportunities by presenting a more comprehensive revitalization agenda to funding agencies.⁵

⁵ This occurred in District del Sol, where three community-based organizations formalized their respective roles in neighborhood revitalization and collaborated to get city support and foundation funding for their integrated agenda. See District del Sol case study for more information.

Create, Structure, and Staff the Main Street Organization

First, decide whether to implement the Main Street program through an existing entity or a new organization. An existing entity must meet three criteria to be a sound candidate to oversee the program:

- The existing entity must have a mission that encompasses or is closely aligned with commercial district revitalization. Community development or economic development entities are most likely to meet this criterion. A board that represents key groups of concerned parties is a plus, but shortfalls in board composition can be overcome with a separate Main Street oversight board and by involving all concerned groups in program committees.⁶
- The existing entity must possess strong leadership, staff capacity, and management systems. Staff expertise in Main Street program areas, such as urban design, real estate development, or small business assistance, is highly desirable.
- The existing entity must have good standing and relationships with key concerned groups.

When no existing organization meets these criteria, a new entity must be formed to implement the Main Street program. To create a new organization, incorporators must recruit a board of strong leaders who are highly committed to the Main Street mission, collectively represent all concerned groups, bring a network of important relationships, and provide management and programmatic expertise. Funding agency requirements may mandate which organizational path to follow. Boston's Main Street program requires a separate 501(c)(3) Main Street organization to receive city designation and funding, while the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) funds Main Street programs through existing CDCs.

Second, establish the Main Street program's committee structure. Committees plan and oversee program components and provide volunteers to help make projects happen. The committee structure should reflect the local Main Street strategy and situation rather than automatically replicating the standard four-committee structure. Consider eliminating the organization committee and using the governing board to oversee hiring, fund-raising, and other organizational development matters.⁷ Also consider adding new committees to undertake crime and public safety initiatives or other new activities or to oversee major activities or events. Create subcommittees to focus on more demanding or high-priority activities. For example, the design committee might create a subcommittee for project design review or to prepare plans to address parking problems. Coordinate the plans and work of each committee through board oversight, annual planning, and regular communication among committee members.

Third, hire effective staff. Many organizations rely on one professional staff person⁸ (the Main Street manager). Look for:

- Ability to form relationships and work effectively with diverse groups
- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Volunteer recruitment know-how

⁶ For example, ESNDG governed the Payne Avenue Main Street program jointly with the Payne Arcade Business Association to ensure strong business community oversight.

⁷ Three case study programs made this change: Payne Avenue, District del Sol, and Washington Gateway.

⁸ Among the seven cases studied, six had only one professional staff person, with a second part- or full-time support staff person in some instances.

- Skill in designing and managing multiple projects and activities
- Capacity to think strategically and improve the program over time in response to changed conditions and program experience
- Problem-solving skill
- Knowledge of small business and real estate development issues

Although effective managers need technical skills related to Main Street activities (retailing, real estate, promotion, and design), the outreach, organizing, communication, and strategic management skills are the ones that are essential to building and sustaining the program. Hiring committees need to carefully assess these candidate skills via thorough interviewing, scrutiny of past accomplishments and experience, and other tools.⁹ Finding one person with knowledge in all aspects of the Main Street program is unlikely, but skill gaps can be overcome through training, using consultants, and calling on volunteer expertise.

Urban Main Street programs should seek to expand their professional staff beyond a single manager, especially in neighborhoods where large low-income and/or immigrant communities limit volunteer recruitment.

Consultants expand Main Street programs' capacity to plan and implement a multifaceted agenda with a small staff. Professional experts help practitioners manage complex activities, accelerate implementation, avoid mistakes, apply best practices, access funding, and build credibility with concerned parties. Common consulting needs include planning, building design, market analysis, business technical assistance, marketing, and event planning. National organizations, such as the National Main Street Center and LISC, and local nonprofit or university-based technical assistance centers can help practitioners craft a good request for proposal, evaluate consultants, and manage their work.

Practitioners should also confer directly with developers and businesses—with developers to find out what will attract them to the commercial district, and with businesses targeted for recruitment to learn about their space needs and location requirements.

Build Fund-Raising Capacity

Creative fund-raising finds new uses for long-standing funding sources, accesses alternative sources, creates revenue-generating products and services, and finds the link between program needs and the interests of potential contributors. An appeal to local residents might emphasize how the program has improved the district's appearance and recruited new stores, while applications for government funding would focus on projects that increase jobs and tax revenue.

Main Street programs need to diversify revenue sources and reduce their vulnerability to changing government or foundation priorities and reduced funding as their program matures. Key steps toward building fund-raising capacity include:

- Create a team of board leaders, senior staff, and (possibly) consultants to develop and oversee a fund-raising strategy. Recruit at least one board member with previous fund-raising experience to take an active role.

⁹ Stockyard Cities Main Street program used a personality test from a local bank in its hiring process.

- Devote time to building relationships with potential funding sources and learning how the Main Street program can address their funding goals. The Main Street manager (or parent agency executive director) and board president should lead this effort.
- Institutionalize capacities needed for your fund-raising strategy. This may entail a staff position or consultant contract for grant writing, creating membership- or assessment-based revenue, developing recurring fund-raising enterprises, and formalizing long-term funding relationships with key concerned parties or sponsors.

Main Street programs draw on four major funding sources: government grants; foundation grants; revenue from local businesses, residents, and visitors; and corporate support. However, funding opportunities and sources change over time. Government grants are important in the early stages of revitalization, when market conditions are weak and the reuse of blighted properties and physical improvements are priorities. As program priorities shift to maintenance and marketing, funding by local concerned parties becomes more important, and the potential for private investment and funding grows.

Local governments are a critical source for operating support (especially in the early years), for facade and infrastructure improvements, and for financing gaps in development projects. While most programs readily gain city funding for operating costs, securing several hundred thousand or million dollars for infrastructure and development projects is a far greater challenge. Chapter 8 discusses the importance of developing a clear funding agenda for city government and using persistent advocacy, relationship building with elected officials, and internal agency allies to secure this funding. Private funding commitments also help leverage large public investments by demonstrating a project's value to the business community and showing that government funds will be matched by private investment.¹⁰

Foundation grants fund Main Street programs in several cities, especially when the programs are based in CDCs. Since funding opportunities reflect local foundation priorities, practitioners need to become familiar with these organizations. In cities where intermediaries, such as LISC or the Enterprise Foundation, assemble funding to support community development initiatives, practitioners should study the funding opportunities and requirements for these initiatives. Since foundations focus on program results and how efforts will be sustained, funding proposals need to address these concerns persuasively.

Local revenue from businesses, property owners, residents, and visitors helps to build a sustained funding base. Businesses and property owners can support Main Street programs by contributing a share of their association's revenue, making a multiyear funding pledge, and creating a Business Improvement District. With this last mechanism, a special assessment on property owners funds Main Street activities.¹¹ Special fund-raising events, membership dues, and direct contributions raise revenue from residents, while special events and sale of merchandise (for example, T-shirts and calendars) also generate revenue from visitors.

¹⁰ For example, a local business association's commitment to help with funding helped establish a supplementary police patrol along St. Paul's Payne Avenue.

¹¹ The Stockyards City Main Street program generated \$80,000 in annual revenue from creating a Business Improvement District (BID).

Corporate donations and in-kind contributions are a final funding source. The Boston Main Street program created a corporate buddy program whereby major corporations provide \$10,000 a year to Main Street programs for four years. In many cases, these contributions have led to a larger commitment of board participation, volunteers, and additional financial support. Corporate sponsorships also can generate in-kind contributions, such as donation of materials for facade renovations, installation of banners, and supplying of pro bono legal services.

Summary

Goal

- Build a highly effective organization to create and sustain a vital commercial district.

Agenda

- Establish a shared vision from broad-based community thinking.
- Conduct ongoing outreach and communication to sell the vision and form relationships needed to implement revitalization plans.
- Build partnerships with community organizations, city agencies, and elected officials to extend Main Street capacities and broaden support for the revitalization agenda.
- Structure and staff an organization by finding or forming a lead agency, establishing appropriate committees, and hiring the right people.
- Execute a creative fund-raising strategy to sustain the organization and complete projects.

Effective Practices

- Involve all concerned parties in defining a shared vision at the beginning. Convert the vision into an action plan that adapts the four-point Main Street approach to fit your neighborhood context.
- Use separate outreach approaches for businesses, property owners, community organizations, and public officials. Use as many languages as it takes to reach concerned parties who don't speak English. Invite key organizations to participate in program governance, planning, and implementation, and recognize their values and goals in the Main Street vision and revitalization plan.
- Define complementary roles and activities with partner organizations.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, District del Sol looks better and seems (and is) safer, thanks to Main Street design and physical improvements. Bold colors and signs reflect the district's Hispanic character. Boston's Washington Gateway Main Street program has used larger-scale buildings with ground-floor retail and prominent windows and entrances to advance its vision for a grand urban boulevard. And, while funds from a corporate sponsor lasted, Gateway paid homeless people to clean the sidewalks every weekday.

These are a few of the ways of doing what all urban Main Street programs need to do: improve their commercial district's design and physical environment.

Physical improvements help change negative perceptions; improve the district's attractiveness to shoppers, businesses, and investors; and generate new investment to reverse the disinvestment cycle. Design improvements also contribute to crime prevention efforts, a topic addressed under public safety practices in Chapter 7.

Compared with standard Main Street programs, inner-city Main Streets need more—bigger improvements, more help to achieve design goals, more education and technical assistance to convince business and property owners to make improvements. Finally, urban districts need to work hard to maintain clean and attractive public spaces.

This chapter describes a five-part design agenda for inner-city commercial districts:

- ▶ Creating a district design vision
- ▶ Applying the design vision to new investment
- ▶ Using financial incentives to stimulate improvements
- ▶ Implementing building improvement projects
- ▶ Carrying out cleanliness and beautification projects

Creating a District Design Vision

A design vision defines the desired appearance and character of the district. This vision should encompass the district's buildings and public spaces and be codified in two documents: (1) design guidelines for building projects¹² and (2) a districtwide streetscape and public space plan. Design

¹² Written guidelines are not always needed to codify the building design vision. Washington Gateway's design vision was embodied in critical design features, such as ground-floor retail space, large front windows and entrances, and interior ventilation, rather than in formal guidelines. This allowed the program to define its concerns while allowing developers flexibility in how to address them.

plans usually are developed through a separate effort by the design committee with help from urban design professionals. The design vision should pay special attention to physical elements that have the greatest impact on the district's appearance and image, such as the district gateways, core nodes and commercial areas, and landmark buildings. A districtwide streetscape and public space plan advances the Main Street design agenda by setting community priorities to push for in city capital funding¹³ and by providing specific proposals that can be incorporated in public projects when they are designed.

A district's design vision should reflect the neighborhood character and desired image, rather than copying standard urban design or historic preservation rules. This is especially true for districts where physical features help to set the district apart. Building materials, color selection, sign design, window and door placement, building scale and style, streetscape elements, public art, and open spaces all contribute to the local district character and image. Mission Hill Main Street allowed great diversity in materials, colors, and sign features in its design guidelines to foster a creative and artistic district image. Boston's Hyde/Jackson Square Main Street, like St. Paul's District del Sol, emphasized bold colors and signs to reflect the district's Hispanic and Caribbean character.¹⁴ And, as mentioned, Washington Gateway focused on larger-scale buildings with ground-floor retail and prominent windows and entrances to advance its vision for a grand urban boulevard.

Applying the Design Vision

To carry out the design vision, Main Street programs need the capacity to review the design of proposed projects and the authority to get property owners, developers, and public agencies to participate in the review process. Practitioners have two options to put this process in place:

- Have Main Street design guidelines adopted as city regulations, which gives them legal standing and calls on city staff for design review and enforcement.¹⁵
- Create a volunteer committee to review project designs and negotiate changes with developers, property owners, and government agencies. This committee needs professional design expertise from volunteers and/or paid consultants to have the standing and technical skills to work with project architects.

While it is easier to get property owners who receive financial assistance to accept design guidelines, the impact of the guidelines is limited when they apply only to properties that receive incentives. By publicizing their guidelines, intervening in the public approval processes, and persuading project sponsors of the value of their design vision, Main Street programs often can gain voluntary compliance. In District del Sol, the Riverview Economic Development Association (REDA) used this approach to convince the Girl Scout Council to change the design of its new building to

¹³ Stockyards City Main Street used its own design for new streets and sidewalks to successfully lobby the city to fund and construct the improvements. The plan's visualization of the improvements helped to mobilize local community support.

¹⁴ See Seidman, *Wanted Solutions for America: Boston Main Streets Final Research Report*.

¹⁵ This approach was used in Oklahoma City, where the Stockyards City and Capitol Hill Main Street districts were designated as Urban Design Districts and their design guidelines incorporated into city regulations.

place it at the street edge with parking at the rear of the lot (Figure 3) and to incorporate retail space and an improved design at a new health center. Washington Gateway Main Street convinced developers to accept its design review process and recommendations for ground-floor retail space, underground parking, large windows and entrances oriented toward the street, and interior ventilation systems. It did so by cultivating personal relationships with developers and by using its potential to oppose projects in the city zoning and Landmarks Commission approval processes.

Figure 3.

New Girl Scout Building in District del Sol



Using Financial Incentives to Stimulate Improvements

Financial incentives include direct grants or low-interest loans used to fund improvements made by a business or property owner. Grants provide a larger incentive than loans by offering a direct up-front reduction in private investment and are simpler to administer.

Neighborhood Main Street programs should seek funds to establish their own building improvement fund that provides matching grants¹⁶ for private property improvements, with the private investment at least equal to the grant amount. With such neighborhood building improvement funds, local practitioners can target incentives to priority buildings and use them to advance their design and development vision. Cities, through community development block grants (CDBGs) or economic development programs, often fund these programs, but foundation or federal grants are additional sources.

¹⁶ District del Sol provides loans that are forgiven over a five-year period as long as the recipient remains in the commercial district.

Providing large grants, in the \$25,000 to \$50,000 range, helps to convince property owners to make substantial investments.¹⁷ The Main Street manager at East Side Neighborhood Development Company, Inc. (ESNDC) in St. Paul, Minn., portrayed large grants as generating “20-year investments” that demonstrate long-term faith in the district. Large incentives also help owners update building interiors, an investment that is often needed to attract new tenants.

Creating multiple funds to support different project types also stimulates more widespread property improvements. District del Sol used three funds to support small facade improvements, upgrades to facades at the district’s gateways, and large high-impact projects.

Incentive programs must choose between awarding funds on a rolling basis or a competitive basis. Rolling grants allow projects to proceed at different times, when the business or property owner is ready, and avoid the potential loss of momentum from holding a competitive funding round with few applications. Competitive funding rounds, however, provide a more urgent motivation for property owners to invest (since funds are available only for a limited time and may get awarded to other properties if the owners don’t apply), which can accelerate improvement projects.

Implementing Building Improvement Projects

Through encouragement, education, and technical assistance, Main Street practitioners overcome obstacles to improving their building stock.¹⁸ Direct personal contact by the program manager is the most effective approach to outreach and education, selling the property owner on the revitalization vision and spelling out the ways in which the owner will benefit from improving his or her property. Once a business or property owner decides to improve a building, Main Street programs should provide design assistance, either by hiring an architect or by using staff architects in city or state commercial revitalization programs.¹⁹ Practitioners also can help property owners get any required city permits by familiarizing them with permitting requirements, distributing applications, writing or speaking in support of applications, and accompanying businesspeople to city permitting offices and hearings. Finally, Main Street help can speed up building in a number of ways, from providing a directory of reputable contractors to directly managing construction. ESNDC took this latter approach, assembling all the projects that received grants in each competitive funding cycle into one construction bid, hiring a contractor, and overseeing the work. This practice allowed ESNDC to complete many improvements at one time, which magnified their visual impact and provided strong evidence of revitalization progress.

¹⁷ Large grants (up to \$50,000) helped the Payne Avenue and District del Sol programs complete 20 to 30 improvement projects within four years. Boston’s Hyde Park Main Street program used an “enhanced” storefront improvement program with \$20,000 to \$25,000 grants to rehabilitate five prominent properties (see Seidman, *Wanted Solutions for America: Boston Main Streets Final Research Report*).

¹⁸ These obstacles include a lack of information and expertise about undertaking projects, financial uncertainty about potential returns from sizable new investments in their properties when existing rents are low, and the disincentive of surrounding blighted or vacant buildings and/or undesirable uses.

¹⁹ Boston Main Street districts use architects under contract to the city Main Street Program, while St. Paul’s districts hired their own architects with funds from the LISC program grant. A staff architect from the state Main Street program prepares designs for projects in the Oklahoma City programs.

Seeing change quickly and in a concentrated way motivates property and business owners to invest and increases community awareness and support. That's why Main Street programs should target physical improvement efforts to high-priority locations and properties: core commercial blocks, district gateways, prominent activity nodes, and key intersections. Priority buildings should have at least one of the following traits:

- ▶ They are located at major nodes, intersections, or gateways.
- ▶ They contain many storefronts.
- ▶ They are prominent vacant or blighted structures.
- ▶ They are district landmarks or architecturally significant.

Historic buildings are also important targets, especially when the district's character and image are tied to historic assets.²⁰

Carrying Out Cleanliness and Beautification Projects

Ongoing cleaning and beautification activities foster civic ownership of the business district and prevent trash, graffiti, and poorly maintained public spaces from creating a negative image. Although property owners in many downtowns use a Business Improvement District (BID)²¹ to institutionalize funding and hire clean-up staff, inner-city Main Street programs generally use less costly approaches to district cleaning. Lower-cost options for regular trash pickup and clean-up services include part-time workers, local prison work-release programs, and youth programs. When a dedicated funding source exists, more intensive cleaning can be feasible: With \$40,000 in annual funds from a corporate sponsor, the Washington Gateway Main Street program hired Clean Corners, an employment program for the homeless, to clean sidewalks every weekday.

Main Street programs also need to educate businesses about their responsibilities and organize them to keep their storefront and sidewalk areas clean and attractive. Information brochures, like the one prepared by the Mission Hill (Boston) Main Street program (Figure 4), and education campaigns are first steps. Next, practitioners can organize merchants and give them supplies for cleaning storefronts and planting flowerpots. These small projects can become symbols of communitywide commitment to an attractive district.²² Periodic projects, such as installing lamppost banners, cleaning up vacant lots, and staging volunteer clean-up days, supplement ongoing education and clean-up efforts.²³

²⁰ Smith, Joncas, and Parrish emphasize the importance of preserving and improving historic buildings in their *Revitalizing Downtown*.

²¹ A BID is a legal vehicle authorized by state law that allows property owners and/or businesses to establish a special assessment to fund specific services and projects to improve a defined business district. Houston (1997) provides a detailed explanation of how BIDs are organized and what they do. Mitchell (2001) summarizes the results of a survey of 264 BIDs.

²² This was the case for the Payne Avenue Main Street program when residents and businesses joined to replant flowerpots and prevent their removal after they were repeatedly vandalized.

²³ Lamppost banners in District del Sol and Stockyards City reinforce the districts' image by using the same logo and colors featured in brochures, advertisements, business signs, and special event materials.

Figure 4.
Mission Hill Cleanliness Brochure

DUMPSTERS

- The City of Boston Site Cleanliness Ordinance applies to all dumpsters, whether commercial or residential; all food and beverage establishments; and all automotive establishments.
- A license must be applied for and obtained at the Inspectional Services Dept., 1010 Mass. Ave., Boston. The fee is \$25.00. Penalty for violating the ordinance is a fine of up to \$1000 per day and/or closure of the business for repeated violations.
- Dumpsters must be placed on private property; have lids which are closed at all times; and be picked up regularly to avoid a health hazard.

GRAFFITI

- If your building has been vandalized by graffiti, call the Mayor's Office Graffiti Busters line at 635-4500. You must fill out a waiver form, signed by the property owner, and the city's team will clean your building. Call Mission Hill Main Streets for a form.
- Report all graffiti incidents to the police, Area B2. Call 911 to have an officer come out to take a report, or call community service at 343-4278. Talk to, or leave a message for Office Karen Allen.



SIGNS & PERMITS

- Signs may not be posted without permission.
- All licenses and permits must be posted and clearly visible.

RUBBISH



- No rubbish may be placed out for collection on a public street, sidewalk or alley between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Rubbish may be picked up during these hours, but must be transported directly from your premises where it is stored.
- Rubbish must be stored in durable containers, dumpsters, or tightly secured plastic bags.
- Rubbish shall not be placed out in cartons or paper bags.
- Receptacles must be returned to their normal place of storage as soon as possible. When pickup occurs between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. receptacles must be returned to their place of storage immediately.
- Containers, dumpsters, and storage areas must be thoroughly cleaned following removal of garbage and rubbish.
- The business owner is responsible for cleaning up loose trash from the sidewalk following collection.

SIDEWALKS

- The property owner, or the business, if specified in the lease, must clear sidewalks of snow and ice, or make sidewalks safe for walking with salt, sand, or ashes within three (3) hours after a snowfall (between sunrise and sunset).

Summary

Goal

- Create an attractive and well-maintained physical environment that changes negative perceptions, attracts new customers and businesses, and reverses historic disinvestment patterns.

Agenda

- Formulate a district design vision with design guidelines and a public improvement plan.
- Create a design review process and get property owners, developers, and public agencies to use it.
- Establish a building improvement fund and use it to complete facade improvements at strategic buildings and locations.
- Foster broad ownership of and participation in improving and maintaining the district's cleanliness and appearance.

Effective Practices

- Tailor the design vision and guidelines to the neighborhood's character and desired image rather than using standard guidelines and rules.
- Use design guidelines to shape all new buildings and facade changes, not just projects that receive financial incentives.
- Target high-priority locations and properties for improvements.
- Offer large incentives, when possible, to motivate substantial improvements and tackle larger and blighted properties.
- Provide encouragement, education, and technical assistance to stimulate building improvements and guide them toward the district design vision.

The challenges that urban neighborhoods face in promoting their commercial districts are different from those of traditional Main Street programs—and so are the opportunities. Image-building is especially important and difficult for inner-city districts,²⁴ which must overcome negative images of crime and physical decline and create a new positive image that distinguishes the district from similar neighborhoods. Practitioners also must overcome public safety concerns, problems related to ethnic and racial diversity, and the loss of historic community gathering places. On the other hand, the dense nearby population provides a larger market for inner-city business districts than exists for downtowns in small and medium-sized communities. Cities also have many customer segments with specialized shopping preferences that neighborhood commercial districts can attract to expand their customer base.

This chapter describes effective approaches to a four-part marketing agenda:

1. Creating a positive image
2. Defining target markets and attracting customers
3. Staging special events
4. Promoting the Main Street revitalization effort

Creating a Positive Image

The first step in re-imaging is addressing the key sources of a poor image. The second step is defining a new, positive image, based on such characteristics as:

- Physical attributes, such as historic buildings, landmarks, and geographic features
- Cultural and heritage assets, such as ethnic identities, cultural attractions, and connections to historic events and periods
- Stores, businesses, and economic uses
- Festivals, celebrations, and other special events

An image is formed both by what people see and what they do in the commercial district. Stockyards City Main Street's cowboy image, for example, draws on the district's history as a cattle stockyard and cattle auction center and its western architecture, but it also relies on a cluster of "cowboy businesses" (western wear, western art, and cowboy supply stores) and two large events

²⁴ Some of these challenges were noted and discussed in Dane's 1988 report on the National Main Street Center's Urban Demonstration Program.

with cowboy themes. Since new images have failed in several districts and a large investment is needed to promote a new identity, careful research and consideration are needed to define an image that truly captures the district's character and draws on strong assets. For example, marketing of the Payne Avenue Main Street district as Old Town, based on its antique stores, did not succeed because of the limited draw of the shops on which the image was based and because of an emerging multiethnic character inconsistent with the new image.

The way that REDA went about establishing a new, attractive image for the commercial district under the District del Sol name exemplifies the magnitude of the effort needed. REDA spent several months conducting a public awareness campaign, holding meetings with business owners, and working with a marketing consultant to define District del Sol as the new district brand (Figures 5-1 and 5-2).

Figure 5-1.

Elements of District del Sol Image



An effective campaign to build awareness and acceptance of a new image might include:

- ▶ Installing signs and banners with the new name and logo throughout the district
- ▶ Incorporating the new name and logo in all Main Street literature and media
- ▶ Placing group ads under the new name in a number of media outlets
- ▶ Getting businesses to incorporate the name and logo in signs, facades, and ads
- ▶ Holding festivals, special events, and other activities that reinforce the district image
- ▶ Installing public art and streetscape elements that reflect the image
- ▶ Recruiting new businesses that contribute to the district image

While the first four items can be completed in the near term, the last three will take several years to fully implement and indicate the importance of integrating image-building into all Main Street activities, including physical improvements and economic restructuring.

Figure 5-2.
District del Sol Ad in St. Paul Visitors Guide



Defining Target Markets and Attracting Customers

Neighborhood residents are often too small a market to rebuild a vibrant district. Practitioners should seek to expand local patronage and tap new markets to support existing stores and attract new businesses. To add to neighborhood customers, neighborhood business districts can draw on three potential markets:

- ▶ Workers within the district and at nearby employers
- ▶ Citywide and suburban residents, especially in consumer segments whose preferences match the district's offerings
- ▶ Tourists and visitors who might come to the district for restaurants, specialized shops, or historic and cultural attractions

A good market analysis can evaluate the market potential and preferences of these different customer groups, support a decision about which ones to target, and help to formulate effective marketing strategies to attract them. A market analysis might:

- Define the district’s geographic trade area and key customer segments in this area
- Estimate the spending potential for different goods and services across major customer groups;
- Conduct shopper surveys and focus groups to understand consumer preferences and their opinions of the commercial district
- Analyze the district’s economic role, business clusters, and anchors
- Assess the district’s major sources of competition

Given its technical nature and the amount of work required, having a professional consultant work with Main Street staff and a volunteer committee²⁵ is the best way to complete a market analysis. The consultant should help the Main Street program apply the study findings to come up with an overall marketing strategy and action plan. Market analysis findings should also be circulated to district businesses, via meetings, fact sheets, and articles, to allow them to apply this information to their own merchandising, marketing, and advertising.

The marketing plan should spell out how to reach each customer segment. Marketing to neighborhood families might use local newspapers and focus on convenience retail goods and services, while advertising for a citywide or regional ethnic segment needs to emphasize specialized goods and ethnic businesses and use newspapers, radio, or other media that serve that community.

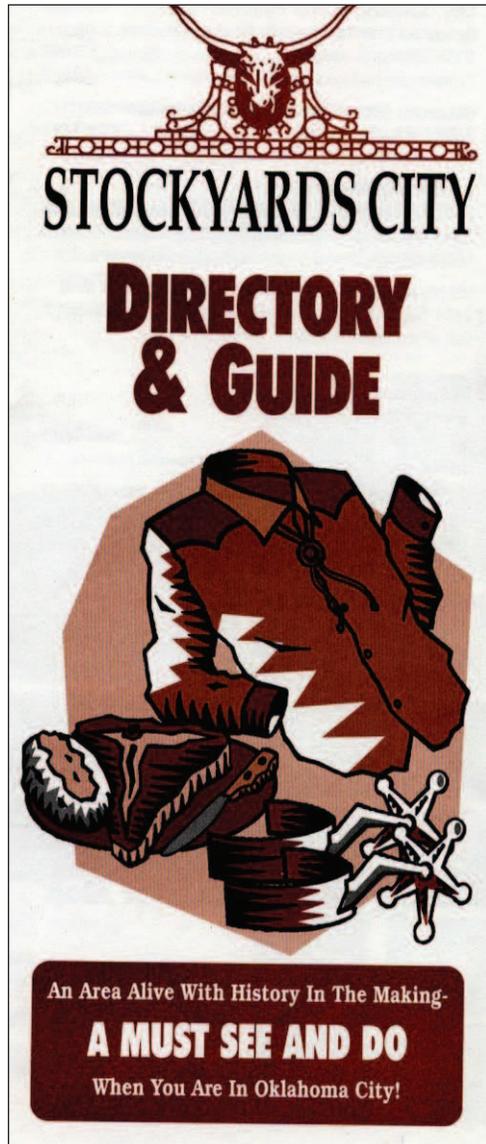
Marketing plans should include:

- Cooperative advertising, in which several businesses share the cost of advertising their own business and the entire commercial district
- Business directories or shopping guides that list all businesses in the district or specific clusters (Figure 6)
- Marketing promotions that use sales and/or special activities to attract shoppers to the district at a specific time
- Media coverage to promote awareness of the district, specific businesses, and special events via free news reporting

Cooperative advertising is a particularly flexible and cost-effective way to reach new audiences and underwrite marketing of the overall district, because the featured merchants and media outlets can be tailored to different customer segments. Since it directly benefits merchants by lowering their advertising costs, and allows small enterprises to access media that they cannot afford alone, cooperative advertising is a good way to broaden business involvement in Main Street activities. Co-op advertising can also combine business ads with neighborhood news, including news about

²⁵ The specific composition of the committee overseeing the market analysis varies with each district. Some establish a separate committee to oversee this work, while others use the economic restructuring or promotions committee. However, it is important to involve a diverse group of concerned parties, including business owners, property owners, residents, developers, and other economic development entities.

Figure 6.
Stockyards City Directory



the Main Street program, either through a stand-alone publication or a Main Street section within a larger newspaper or magazine.

Business directories and guides increase awareness of the district's services and shopping, especially for nonresidents. Guides also help market important or emerging clusters—for example, restaurants or health services—that are not well known or that appeal to specific consumer groups. Practitioners need to find ways to get the directory to the targeted customer groups. For example, Mission Hill Main Street works with local hospitals and universities to distribute its guide to their employees and students.

Marketing promotions are sales and/or special events designed to attract shoppers to the district at a specific time. To be effective, they need to be well-advertised and have a special attraction to draw targeted shoppers. The Boston Main Street program runs a citywide shopping promotion, Boston Unwrapped, that uses advertising, special shopping bags, and bumper stickers to encourage holiday shopping in neighborhood commercial districts. Local districts add their own events and activities—such as tree-lighting ceremonies, performances, window display contests, and local advertising—to the citywide promotion. Promotions held around new store openings are a good way to attract shoppers, introduce a new business, and highlight a revitalization success story.²⁶

Media coverage is a low-cost way to publicize the business district and attract shoppers as well as to promote the overall revitalization initiative. News reports, calendar listings, and public service announcements publicize special events. Main Street programs can invite media coverage of individual businesses by issuing press releases for store openings and encouraging restaurant reviews and business profiles, which frequently appear as newspaper features.

Staging Special Events

Main Street events take varied forms to achieve three different purposes:

- ▶ Large festivals, fairs, and celebrations build a district's image and expand its market.
- ▶ Community-building events bring people together to foster stronger community connections and overcome negative perceptions of the neighborhood.
- ▶ Organization-building events advance fund-raising, volunteer recruitment, and other organizational goals.

Large festivals require considerable time, planning, and funds and must be held regularly for several years before they build strong recognition and attract substantial attendance.²⁷ Community-building events can operate on a smaller scale to achieve their goals but require collaborations and

²⁶ Mayoral visits help attract shoppers and media coverage to store openings in Boston. Washington Gateway Main Street organized the openings of five new businesses that appeal to similar customers into one “ribbon-cutting event” and promoted it through a postcard mailing to residents and a local newspaper ad.

²⁷ Two successful large events, District del Sol's Cinco de Mayo Festival and the Stockyard Stampede, have been held regularly for more than 20 years and 9 years, respectively. Riverview Economic Development Association (REDA), District del Sol's parent organization, uses a special planning committee, professional consultants, and corporate sponsorships to gear up for successful Cinco de Mayo festivals.

activities that bring people together and build new connections.²⁸ Organization-building events, which are oriented toward program supporters and concerned parties, should offer something new and interesting to motivate contributions and reward hard work.²⁹

Promoting the Main Street Revitalization Effort

Promotion includes building awareness of and interest in the Main Street program. While publicizing the program helps market the district, the most important thing about it is that it sustains the momentum of revitalization. The increased awareness and legitimacy gained from successful public relations attract volunteers, create an aura of success, and enlist political support—all key ingredients for ongoing success.

The two main parts of program promotion are (1) keeping supporters and concerned parties informed about the Main Street agenda, activities, and accomplishments and (2) generating media coverage to build broader community awareness. General brochures, newsletters, regular newspaper columns, e-mail, community meetings, and one-on-one outreach all have a role to play. Practitioners should combine several media to reach as many audiences as possible. A general program brochure helps attract new volunteers, while e-mail is effective in keeping core members informed about upcoming meetings and pressing issues. A monthly column or newsletter informs the broader community about program accomplishments and new activities. Information about the program and its accomplishments should be available in several languages to reach the multi-lingual populations in urban neighborhoods. Main Street managers also promote their program by being active and visible in their community, attending community meetings, explaining the program to other organizations, and keeping concerned parties informed and involved through personal outreach.

By cultivating relationships with media outlets, Main Street programs can generate coverage for the revitalization initiative along with reporting about specific projects, activities, and events. Stockyards City Main Street's manager worked with the regional chamber and marketing association to identify key media contacts in radio, TV, and newspapers and then invited reporters to visit the district to learn more about the Main Street program. These personal relationships and the reporters' firsthand knowledge of the program increased Stockyards City's media coverage. To generate regular press coverage for its program, Washington Gateway sends news advisories and press releases about all new commercial district improvements, projects, and events to contacts at a dozen news outlets, including community newspapers, the major Boston newspapers, and special-interest papers.

²⁸ Two examples of community-building events: the Payne Avenue Main Street weekly summer farmers market, which used international food and entertainment to highlight the neighborhood's multiple ethnic groups and nurture connections between them, and a campaign co-sponsored by the Boston Main Streets program and the Boston School Department to enlist Main Street businesses to support children entering kindergarten by having new kindergarten students visit and receive gifts from the local businesses.

²⁹ For several years, Washington Gateway held a Halloween ball fund-raiser that used elaborate party sets donated by a business owner to create a special ambience and excitement for the event.

Summary

Goals

- Build a positive district image, attract an expanded customer base, and build community support for and involvement in the Main Street program.

Agenda

- Cultivate a positive image for the district.
- Undertake market analysis to understand current and potential consumer markets.
- Create and carry out a marketing plan to attract targeted customer segments.
- Organize special events that are consistent with marketing, community-building, and fund-raising goals.
- Promote the program to build community awareness and sustain revitalization momentum.

Effective Practices

- Integrate what people see and what they do to re-image the district.
- Tailor marketing messages and media to distinct customer segments.
- Use cooperative advertising to expand marketing and program participation among merchants.
- Sustain and expand key events over time to increase their draw and build the district image.
- Court free media coverage to market the district and to publicize program successes.
- Build program visibility and legitimacy through active staff participation in community activities and organizations.

When the Payne Reliever—a notorious strip club in St. Paul, Minnesota—came on the market, the Payne Avenue Main Street program jumped at the chance to do something major about the neighborhood’s unsavory image. Something major involved recruiting a new owner and helping him create a redevelopment plan and get city funding. The Payne Reliever property is now a branch of a local restaurant—and a bingo parlor (Figure 7).

Figure 7.
**Redevelopment of the Payne Reliever
Strip Club**



The metamorphosis of the St. Paul strip club illustrates one of the two big tasks on the economic restructuring agenda: changing economic uses to create a desirable and viable business mix. The other task is keeping and growing the businesses that already are there. But before practitioners can influence their district’s economic course they need two things: (1) working relationships with business and property owners and (2) a clear idea of new economic uses that match the local revitalization vision and are likely to succeed.

Fostering Working Relationships with Business and Property Owners

Urban practitioners must reach out to business and property owners to develop personal relationships and build trust. Linguistic diversity, immigrant businesses, and absentee owners create special challenges. To work with non-English-speaking segments of the business community, Main Street programs can hire bilingual staff or collaborate with other economic development entities that have multilingual staff.³⁰

Special efforts to establish relationships with property owners should include:

- ▶ Maintaining a property owner inventory with information from tax records, tenants, and other concerned parties
- ▶ Targeting owners who own multiple properties or particularly important ones, or who are likely to cooperate with the program to shape initial economic restructuring projects
- ▶ Meeting regularly with property owners to discuss how they can benefit from and contribute to the Main Street agenda and specific projects to advance the agenda

Developing a Clear Idea of New Economic Uses

A formal market analysis, discussed in Chapter 5, helps to set economic restructuring goals in two ways:

- ▶ It defines existing destination businesses and economic niches that must be retained and expanded to attract customers from outside the nearby market area.
- ▶ It identifies underserved and emerging markets to target.

The relative importance of convenience or comparison retail goods also frames effective economic restructuring strategies, especially for recruiting new businesses.³¹ Convenience-oriented retail serves consumer needs for frequently purchased—and often lower-priced—goods, and typically draws customers from a small area, usually one mile or less in cities. Comparison retail supplies more expensive and less frequently purchased items but usually requires several stores with related products to attract customers who seek choice. With several shops offering similar items, comparison retail districts can draw customers from a larger area. Thus, economic restructuring strategies focused on expanding comparison retail need a group of related stores or an anchor store to build upon.³²

³⁰ ESNDC hires Hispanic and Hmong staff to reach out to these two growing segments of the Payne Avenue commercial district, while the Boston Main Street programs work with a multilingual CDC business development network to reach and engage Hispanic, Asian, and other non-English-speaking entrepreneurs.

³¹ A good discussion of the distinction between convenience and comparison retail and its application to inner-city business districts is provided by Waxman.

³² A convenience-oriented district may be able to create a new comparison retail destination with a large development project.

Supporting Existing Businesses

Small, independent businesses, the primary tenants in urban commercial districts, shape the districts' vitality, special character, and customer appeal. Main Street business development services build small firms' capacity to understand and serve customer needs, effectively manage their businesses, and respond to competition from large businesses. These services also help immigrant entrepreneurs surmount language and cultural barriers. Effective Main Street business development programs provide three services:

- Training and technical assistance
- Access to capital
- Fostering of peer-based assistance and advocacy

Basic technical assistance focuses on (1) help in getting city licenses and permits; (2) design assistance for facade improvements; and (3) general business planning and problem-solving. Basic services must be available at flexible times and convenient locations, including one-on-one assistance at the place of business outside normal business hours. Main Street programs can combine their own staff expertise and collaborations with business development staff at nonprofit, city, and state agencies or private consultants to deliver these core services.

Providing specialized training and technical assistance is more challenging because practitioners must understand diverse business needs and identify the resources and capacity to address them. However, Main Street programs can apply the following successful approaches used in other districts to craft a plan to address specialized technical assistance needs in their neighborhood:

- Collaborate with technical assistance providers to deliver expanded services in your district
- Develop formal assistance networks
- Sponsor training courses on specialized business issues
- Create specialized services for key business niches

Figure 8 provides examples of each approach.

Figure 8.

**Ways to Provide Specialized Business
Technical Assistance****COLLABORATE WITH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS**

- > Boston's Egleston Square and Mission Hill Main Street programs use small business development staff from a nearby CDC, Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation, to provide one-on-one assistance with business planning, marketing, finance, and real estate issues.
- > Oklahoma City's Capitol Hill Main Street Program hosts a bilingual business counselor from the Small Business Development Center on a weekly basis to provide technical assistance.

DEVELOP FORMALIZED ASSISTANCE NETWORKS

- > New York City's Business Outreach Centers, which operate in eight low-income neighborhoods, identify and formalize relationships with a network of service providers, refer businesses to appropriate service providers, and then monitor the quality of services.
- > Pittsburgh's South Side Local Development Corporation formalized its referral system through Business Assistance Teams. Government and private sector members offer quarterly workshops, provide information leaflets on key business issues, review business plans, and help firms access a local revolving loan fund.

SPONSOR TRAINING COURSES ON SPECIALIZED BUSINESS ISSUES

- > REDA offers workshops on crime prevention and restaurant management for District del Sol's many Mexican restaurant owners.
- > Boston's Community Business Network sponsors workshops in multiple languages on marketing, tax preparation, licensing, and securing commercial real estate.

CREATE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES FOR BUSINESS NICHES

- > ESNDNC secured a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to help food-related businesses, such as restaurants and small grocery stores, allowing it to expand outreach and technical assistance to Hispanic and Hmong businesses.
- > Two Boston CDCs established a shared kitchen facility to support neighborhood catering and food-processing businesses.

Small firms need capital to expand and improve their operations, but they often lack formal banking relationships and loan-getting know-how. To expand access to capital, Main Street programs need to identify businesses that need financing and help to prepare business plans, package loan applications, and resolve problems in the lending process. Where local banks overlook neighborhood business credit needs, Main Street programs also need to create or tap alternative loan funds to fill gaps in conventional lending markets. While some programs provide these services directly, most use larger economic development organizations to help district entrepreneurs secure loan packaging services and alternative credit sources.³³

Supporting local business associations and promoting communication and peer-based assistance among entrepreneurs strengthen businesses' ability to advocate for the commercial district, tap local expertise, and foster a sense of shared goals and collective power. Main Street programs should help to establish a business association when one does not exist. After one is formed, the program should coordinate its agenda and work plans with the business association and support its activities with staff assistance, co-sponsorships, and the like. Practitioners can foster greater business interaction and communication by organizing regular networking and information events, held over breakfast or lunch or after work. These events help build trust and informal relationships among businesses, creating a foundation for future collective action.³⁴ Training workshops support peer-based learning when they provide time for participants to share experiences around common issues.

Changing Economic Uses

Because inner-city neighborhoods often have negative uses that forestall new investment and businesses, achieving the desired economic mix has three parts:

- Eliminating and preventing undesirable uses
- Recruiting the kinds of businesses you want to occupy vacant space
- Undertaking or shaping new development to attract desired uses

Where adverse uses or severely distressed property deters new economic activity, removing these community blights is an economic restructuring priority. Main Street programs also may seek to prevent new uses that hurt the district's image, conflict with its vision, or undermine other improvement efforts. The first way of eliminating an undesirable use or blighted building is to convince the existing property owner to take action. Community pressure, on the one hand, and an offer of technical and financial assistance, on the other, may convince owners to change tenants, sell to a new owner, or alter development plans. When the problem property is abandoned or the owner is unwilling to take action, the Main Street program must change site control to alter

³³ Capitol Hill Main Streets uses the Oklahoma City Community Action Agency's loan-packaging capacity and revolving loan fund to help local businesses secure financing. Boston Main Street districts rely on CDC business development staff and city staff at the Boston Empowerment Center to help firms secure capital.

³⁴ REDA uses a series of monthly events to build trust and informal relationships among businesses. Lunches feature a speaker on important city or regional issues, breakfasts are devoted to keeping businesses informed about revitalization efforts and soliciting their input, and the after-hours events are informal social activities.

the use, either by acquiring and developing the property itself or by attracting a new developer or user to purchase the property (as in the case of the Payne Reliever property). Practitioners also can intervene in the zoning and development permitting process to prevent proposed projects that will bring undesirable uses.³⁵ If they succeed in stopping an undesirable project, Main Street programs can then approach the property owner and offer to help create a new plan that meets both the owner's goals and the local vision.

Business recruitment is a basic economic restructuring activity. Formal business recruitment includes:

- Preparing a business recruitment package with demographic and income data, listings of available space, and information about the revitalization agenda and accomplishments
- Identifying stores that fit target niches and provide desired goods and services
- Contacting these stores to convince them to consider locating in the district

While some programs, including Boston's Brighton and Hyde Park Main Street districts, have attracted new businesses with this approach, others have found informal networking more effective. For East Side Neighborhood Development Company, Inc. (ESNDC) in St. Paul, Minn., successful prospects came from personal connections and word of mouth. To generate these informal leads, ESNDC encourages all staff members to look for good businesses to attract to Payne Avenue and to talk up the revitalization effort with their friends and contacts. Building improvement funds can help to recruit businesses by financing property renovations. Such improvements are often essential to attract new tenants to urban districts where many buildings are in poor condition and need reconfiguration to address modern retail and office uses.

Practitioners need to consider the appropriate role for chain stores and independent small businesses in their recruitment plans and to address the impact of brand name retailers on small businesses. Chain stores and independent retailers offer complementary benefits to commercial districts. Chain stores serve as anchors to attract shoppers to a district and increase customer traffic for independent businesses. A strong presence of locally owned stores, on the other hand, adds to a district's unique character and differentiates it from other shopping centers.³⁶ Special efforts are needed to get large-scale and chain store development to support independent small businesses. First, development projects and the overall district design should place chain stores and independent retailers in adjacent locations and make it easy for customers to move between the two so that independent retailers benefit from the customer traffic generated by chain stores.³⁷ Second, business technical assistance helps retailers adjust to and gain the benefits of chain stores located in their neighborhood. Linkage funds from large development projects can support this technical assistance, as was done at a Stop & Shop supermarket development in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood.

³⁵ ESNDC also prevented a property owner from leasing space to a pawnbroker by convincing the St. Paul City Council to amend the zoning ordinance to prohibit pawnshops near residential properties. Similarly, Mission Hill Main Streets successfully stopped a proposed Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant at a zoning variance hearing.

³⁶ Waxman made this point in his study of retailing in inner-city business districts.

³⁷ Hernandez made this recommendation in his 2001 study of CDC-sponsored real estate development projects.

Main Street practitioners can direct new development projects toward desired economic uses in two ways:

- By developing vacant land and underutilized buildings through the Main Street program
- By encouraging developers and existing property owners to develop property and by working with them to shape their projects

While developing property allows the Main Street program to control its use, it carries significant financial risk and requires special development expertise. ESNDC acquired, renovated, and leased two prominent historic properties in Payne Avenue’s core retail section to control the reuse of these key buildings. However, it took ESNDC a long time to find tenants who reflected its vision for the district. Because inner-city commercial real estate projects often face large funding gaps, urban Main Street programs that undertake development need to be able to come up with grants that can range from several hundred thousand to several million dollars.³⁸

Since many urban Main Street programs lack real estate development capacity,³⁹ they work with developers and existing property owners to stimulate new development and direct their development plans toward desired economic uses. Washington Gateway Main Street (WGMS) demonstrates how a Main Street program can shape private development outcomes. First, the program used board and staff relationships with developers to interest them in developing properties in the district while promoting the Gateway vision for the street. Second, they urged the Boston Redevelopment Authority to offer its many city-owned parcels for development as mixed-use projects consistent with the Main Street development vision. Throughout the planning and development process, WGMS pushed the city and private developers to include ground-floor retail space in development plans. As a result, the district gained 136,000 square feet of new retail space in six years. Main Street programs can also use grants and low-income loans from building improvement funds to encourage property owners to fit their development plans to the program’s preferred uses. Programs that give grants or loans can make their right to approve new tenants a condition of their grants or loans.

³⁸ Each ESNDC project required a \$600,000 subsidy because commercial rents were too low to cover development costs. ESNDC secured grants from the city of St. Paul and the regional Metropolitan Council for these projects and had a dedicated staff person who specialized in preparing the financial analysis, funding plans, and application packages.

³⁹ Main Street programs within organizations with development experience, such as CDCs, are an exception to this observation.

Summary

Goals

- ▶ Attract, develop, and maintain viable economic uses that expand the district’s customer base and advance the local revitalization vision.

Agenda

- ▶ Complete market analysis to determine feasible economic uses that match the local vision.
- ▶ Help small businesses get technical assistance and financing.
- ▶ Foster trust, a commitment to collective action, and peer-based learning among businesses.
- ▶ Eliminate negative uses that hinder revitalization, investment, and new economic activity.
- ▶ Attract and develop desired new economic uses.

Effective Practices

- ▶ Link economic restructuring strategy to the district’s role as a convenience or comparison retail center.
- ▶ Offer small business assistance in facade design, city permitting, and problem-solving.
- ▶ Develop a referral network and partnerships to link enterprises with specialized training, technical assistance, and capital sources.
- ▶ Intervene with property owners and developers and use the regulatory process to shape development outcomes and leasing decisions in harmony with the district vision.
- ▶ Link grants or loans to property owners with the right to review their leasing decisions.
- ▶ Combine formal recruitment packages and contacts with informal networking to recruit new businesses.

Until people feel safe, consumers will be reluctant to shop in a district, entrepreneurs will be unwilling to open new businesses, and property owners will defer investment for fear that property values will decline. That is why reducing crime and the perception of crime is a precondition for revitalizing most urban commercial districts. Since the four-point Main Street model does not explicitly address public safety,⁴⁰ urban practitioners must add crime and public safety initiatives to their agenda. This chapter explains four approaches that urban Main Street programs use to prevent crime and improve public safety:

- ▶ Building relationships and communication between the business community and the police department
- ▶ Educating businesses and other concerned parties about public safety issues and crime prevention techniques
- ▶ Applying crime prevention design principles to building and public space improvements
- ▶ Establishing supplemental security services

Communication and Relationship-Building

Improving communication and cooperation between the police department and the commercial district's business community is the first step against crime. Strong communication increases police officers' responsiveness to crime concerns, encourages merchants and residents to report crime incidents to the police, and lets the police department and Main Street program create and carry out new approaches to crime prevention and enforcement. To build good communication and working relationships with their local police, Main Street practitioners should:

- ▶ Hold regular joint meetings with the local police commanders and officers to discuss crime issues and how to address them⁴¹

⁴⁰ Some Main Street points, such as Design and Economic Restructuring, can be expanded to include public safety, but the standard program model does not directly address it and provides limited guidance on effective ways to deal with crime issues.

⁴¹ At ESND's monthly meetings of its Crime and Public Safety Committee, police officers and business owners share information about crime trends and concerns and discuss what to do about them. Initially, these meetings revealed that business owners were concerned about disorder and quality-of-life crimes, while the police focused on violent crimes and crimes in progress. Merchants rarely received a timely response to complaints because disorder crimes were a low priority for police response. This understanding led the committee to address disorder crimes with training, more direct business-police communication, and a summer patrol program. Businesses pay for police cell phones and monthly service charges and share the cost of summer patrols with the police department.

- Invite police officers to serve on the Main Street board and committees to foster greater understanding of revitalization plans and a stronger partnership
- Introduce businesses and police officers to each other and encourage business owners and employees to report crime matters to the police
- Establish direct communication between the district business community and police officers through cell phones, beepers, and other means⁴²

When it is difficult for business and property owners to attend regular meetings, Main Street staff can keep information moving by reporting owners' public safety concerns to police and by spreading police information about specific incidents, emerging crime patterns, and prevention methods.

Community Education

Public safety education increases community understanding of how to prevent crime and helps translate the progress that is made into perceptions of increased safety. Main Street practitioners should include these activities in their public safety education work:

- Learning about police operations, available resources, and effective responses to crime and disseminating this information to the commercial district
- Training property owners, tenants, employees, and residents to prevent crime
- Monitoring and promoting recognition of changes in crime activity and safety perceptions

East Side Neighborhood Development Company, Inc. (ESNDC) and the St. Paul (Minn.) Police Department carried out a comprehensive community public safety education program that demonstrates several effective practices. Main Street staff and crime and public safety committee members rode with local police officers; what they learned guided the formulation of their public safety strategy (Figure 9). Police officers then trained businesses and residents to defuse potentially hostile interactions and decide whether to intervene themselves or contact the police. In their third initiative, the "Make the Call Campaign," police and Main Street volunteers visited each business to encourage them to call the police to report problems. At this visit, each enterprise received a card to hang by the cash register with phone numbers and information about when to call each police unit. ESNDC and its partner business association used newsletters and its weekly page in a community newspaper to inform the community at large about emerging crime issues and public safety activities. Finally, ESNDC collected area crime statistics and conducted surveys to monitor the impact of its work both on reported crimes and on safety perceptions.

⁴² Payne Avenue Main Street distributes cell phones to allow businesses to contact police officers directly without using the central dispatch system. In some Boston districts, business owners contact police officers directly through pagers to report crimes. In Oklahoma City, police officers on the beat are in touch with business owners every day.

Figure 9.
**Payne Avenue Main Street
 Crime and Public Safety Program**

COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

- > Program holds monthly meetings of police, businesses, and Main Street staff.
- > Program encourages one-on-one communication with summer patrol officers.
- > Police officers carry cell phones to allow businesses to contact them directly.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

- > Staff and volunteers ride with police to learn about crime issues and police practices.
- > Public awareness campaign encourages businesses to report crime incidents.
- > Training shows businesses and residents how to handle problem interactions and quality-of-life incidents.
- > Program offers regular updates on crime issues and initiatives in newsletters and weekly newspaper section.
- > Program tracks crime rate and perceptions through police data and surveys.

CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH DESIGN

- > Program incorporates CPTED principles into design guidelines for Building Improvement Fund.
- > Program acquires and develops problem properties.
- > Program works with property owners to change practices and problem uses.
- > Program advocates for expanded city code enforcement.

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY SERVICES

- > Program helped to establish five-day summer patrols with beat police officers.
- > Business association helped fund expanded police services.

Design and Crime Prevention

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED),⁴³ an approach first advocated by C. Ray Jeffrey in 1971, offers Main Street practitioners ways of reducing the opportunities for crime in their neighborhood. CPTED assesses physical conditions and design features that may contribute to crime—for example, vacant lots that house criminal activities, poor lighting, poorly maintained or supervised spaces, and poor visibility into buildings. CPTED principles include

⁴³ Information about CPTED can be found on several Web sites, including www.ncpc.org, www.thecptedpage.wsu.edu, and www.arch.vt.edu.

improving visibility so there is less opportunity to conduct crime outside of public view and eliminating or improving the control and management of spaces that can become magnets for criminal activity. Main Street programs use CPTED methods when they:

- Complete a CPTED assessment and use it to set their public safety, design, and economic restructuring agendas
- Incorporate CPTED principles in design guidelines as well as in the education and technical assistance provided for building and facade improvements
- Use financial incentive programs to encourage property owners to carry out CPTED improvements, such as removing storefront grates that block visibility into stores
- Set priorities for real estate development and public improvement projects
- Advocate for better city enforcement of code violations that contribute to crime

Supplemental Security Services

One way to address crime is to beef up the commercial district's normal police patrols with additional security services. In commercial districts without beat officers, these services provide a visible presence on the street that helps prevent crime and improve public safety perceptions. Many business improvement districts hire their own staff to walk the streets, defuse potential problems, and alert police to criminal activity. An alternative approach is to use police officers, either by hiring off-duty police or by securing funds for police department beat patrols. ESND and the St. Paul Police Department used the latter approach to make it possible for police to respond to non-violent crimes, such as panhandling, drunkenness, and vandalism. A special patrol program established police foot patrols along Payne Avenue on a daily basis during summer months.⁴⁴ After jointly funding the patrols with the Payne-Arcade Business Association for three years, the Police Department assumed their full cost in 2002.

⁴⁴ Patrol shifts, which vary by the day of week, are from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. or 1 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Summary

Goal

- Increase actual and perceived public safety in the commercial district for pedestrians, businesses, other tenants, and property owners.

Agenda

- Establish effective communication and collaboration with the police department.
- Improve police recognition of and responsiveness to commercial district crime concerns.
- Increase community understanding of public safety issues, how to work with the police, and how to prevent and respond to crime.
- Eliminate physical and design conditions that create opportunities for crime.
- Document and publicize public safety improvements and reduced criminal activity.

Effective Practices

- Meet regularly with police to address crime issues and involve police officers as board and committee members.
- Create a way for businesses and police officers to communicate directly.
- Train property and business owners, employees, and residents in ways to prevent and respond to crimes.
- Complete Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment and apply principles to multiple activities.
- Use supplemental security services to address special public safety concerns.

Urban Main Street programs need city government on their side to do three things:

- Improve the quality and responsiveness of city services that shape the commercial district's safety, appearance, and accessibility
- Help businesses and developers navigate complex regulations and permitting processes that pose obstacles to new investment⁴⁵
- Secure city investment to realize the Main Street revitalization agenda

The last item is especially important for low- and moderate-income neighborhoods that need this capital to upgrade physical assets and spur new private investment. City funding can help to rebuild and repair deteriorated public infrastructure, stimulate building improvements, and fill finance gaps for projects that develop vacant and blighted properties.

Improving City Services

Police protection, maintenance of public infrastructure and buildings, sanitation, public transportation, and implementation of city planning and zoning regulations often need improvement. Main Street programs need to identify the agencies and staff responsible for services that are critical to their agenda, get to know key staff, and advocate for improved services. There are two formal ways to get city agency staff to participate in revitalization: (1) including city agency representatives on the Main Street board and committees and (2) holding regular meetings with city agency leadership. Beyond these efforts, Main Street managers should develop business friendships with key agency staff. A personal relationship with the Public Works Department dispatcher helped the Mission Hill (Boston) Main Street manager get trash picked up and streets cleaned. Main Street programs also need advocates who help advance the Main Street agenda within city agencies. Such advocates may be sympathetic city employees or Main Street volunteers and former staff within city government. Oklahoma City's Main Street programs benefited from a strong advocate within the city planning department who provided advice and helped secure city planning and financial support. Similarly, a Board member who worked at the Boston Redevelopment Authority helped Washington Gateway Main Street gain agency attention and stronger consideration of its design and development recommendations.

⁴⁵ This Main Street role is especially important to small and immigrant entrepreneurs who can't afford to hire attorneys or consultants to help them understand and comply with city regulations.

Advocating to solve a specific service problem starts with a realistic plan based on what the district needs and what the city department is capable of doing. Building community support for the proposal and pushing the city department(s) to implement it come next. When East Side Neighborhood Development Company, Inc. (ESNDC) in St. Paul, Minn., confronted crime problems on Payne Avenue, its knowledge of local public safety issues and police practices along with strong community support convinced the police department to adopt ESNDC's summer patrol plan. Similarly, the willingness of Washington Gateway Main Street to prepare a new design for bus shelters helped persuade transportation officials to reconsider their plans. Finally, political and community pressure is often needed to shift public agency positions. ESNDC used its relationship with the St. Paul City Council president to win continued funding of the summer patrol program, while Stockyards City (Oklahoma City) Main Street organized a letter-writing campaign to convince the city manager and police department to assign a new beat officer when businesses decided that the existing officer's leniency exacerbated crime problems.

When service delivery problems cut across departments, Main Street programs can convene agencies and mediate efforts to find a solution. The Riverview Economic Development Association (REDA) resolution of a persistent problem with street peddlers in St. Paul's District del Sol demonstrates the value of this convener role. After police enforcement of laws prohibiting vendors in public places failed when vendors moved onto private property, REDA convened several city agencies to discuss other solutions. The fact that zoning regulations could be used to remove peddlers from private property emerged from these meetings.

Navigating City Permitting

Practitioners can help local businesses and development projects steer through complex city regulations and approval processes in three ways. Main Street managers can provide information, referrals, and technical assistance after they understand city requirements and get to know the staffs that administer the regulations. This information and referral role is easy to expand with additional services that include:

- Maintaining a local library of city regulations
- Reviewing plans to identify likely conflicts with city regulations
- Arranging meetings in the business district with city staff
- Accompanying proponents to city permitting board and commission meetings

Technical assistance can be controversial if the Main Street program is perceived as imposing or enforcing burdensome regulations on small entrepreneurs.⁴⁶ That is why practitioners should (1) make sure their board of directors approves of their involvement in the permitting process and (2) give the business community a clear picture of the Main Street role, especially regarding code enforcement. A second Main Street function is to mediate conflicts that can stall required approvals. These conflicts may exist among organizations within the community or between the

⁴⁶ The Capitol Hill Main Street manager faced resistance from some businesses and board members when she worked to promote business compliance with city regulations.

project proponent (business or developer) and the city agency or community groups.⁴⁷ Finally, Main Street programs may choose to advocate for city approval of specific businesses and projects. Letters, testimony at public hearings, and lobbying of city staff and elected officials demonstrate strong neighborhood backing for the project, which may accelerate city review and approval. This advocacy role is most important for projects that advance critical parts of the Main Street agenda.

Pushing for City Investment

City financial support is essential to successful urban Main Street programs, especially for design and economic restructuring. Programs need to set investment priorities and persistently push for these very sought-after city funds. Stockyards City Main Street lobbied for several years to get a city capital appropriation to rebuild the district's streets and sidewalks. On the other hand, ESNDC concentrated on securing city funds for three priority building reuse projects and deferred seeking city investment for their streetscape plan.

Main Street practitioners use special tactics to win city investment. First, they develop influential political allies to gain multimillion dollar funding commitments for larger-scale or multiple projects. ESNDC used its strong relationship with the St. Paul City Council president to secure city grants to complete several real estate development projects when no formal city program for such funding existed. Similarly, the leadership and support of Boston's mayor was essential to completing street and transportation improvements to Washington Street, both to gain funding and to keep city and state agencies focused on moving the project forward. Second, Main Street practitioners need to find and creatively apply special funding opportunities. For example, District del Sol created several improvement goals and incentive funds to gain three successive grants under the St. Paul STAR program. Across St. Paul, ESNDC found a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to fund technical assistance and marketing work with grocery stores and restaurants. Third, important public infrastructure projects provide opportunities to advance local goals. Main Street practitioners need to help plan them and direct their design toward the local revitalization vision.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ One example of this mediation role: Mission Hill Main Streets worked for community consensus on new uses for the Boston Clutch Works site.

⁴⁸ Two examples: (1) ESNDC worked to ensure that the Payne Avenue intersection of a new road corridor was at grade to maintain pedestrian flow; (2) Stockyards City Main Street pushed for improved access to its commercial district when a new interstate highway interchange was planned.

Summary

Goal

- Coordinate actions and investments across multiple city agencies to support and advance the Main Street revitalization plan.

Agenda

- Improve key city services that affect the district's safety, physical environment, and accessibility.
- Help businesses and developers understand and secure city permits and project approvals.
- Gain city funding for program operations and key building and infrastructure projects.
- Shape the design of new capital improvements to reflect the district's design and development vision.

Effective Practices

- Formalize city participation by asking key agency staff to join the Main Street board and/or meeting regularly with agency leadership.
- Cultivate city agency staff advocates for the Main Street program.
- Propose and advocate for solutions to problems with city services.
- Provide information, referrals, and technical assistance to help small businesses and developers understand and address city regulatory requirements.
- Develop influential political allies to secure large-scale city funding.
- Help to plan key infrastructure projects to shape their design.

What to do first is the question. And what to do next is the second. Although the entire Main Street model (organizational development, design and physical improvements, promotion, and economic restructuring) is important, most programs set priorities that reflect local visions, obstacles, and opportunities. Setting priorities is also a response to limited funding and staff resources. Furthermore, urban districts may implement the four-point approach in phases, with different points receiving greater emphasis over time. The programs studied for this guide fall into four categories based on their primary agendas and activities. This chapter summarizes the four district types to help urban Main Street practitioners consider how setting implementation priorities and phasing activities can contribute to revitalization. The four program categories are:

- ▶ Development-oriented districts that focus on addressing large-scale vacancies and physical decline
- ▶ Retention-oriented districts that have few vacancies and emphasize keeping the district's character and economic base under the pressures of development and/or gentrification
- ▶ Promotion-oriented districts that work to rebuild and expand their customer base to support existing stores and a viable business mix
- ▶ Organization-oriented districts that need to build capacity and overcome past conflicts to lay the foundation for revitalization

Development-Oriented Districts

These districts concentrate on design and economic restructuring activities to achieve significant physical improvement and attract new tenants to reuse vacant buildings and sites. Deteriorated buildings and infrastructure, undesirable uses, and vacant properties are the most pressing problems and the most critical barriers to revitalization. Development-oriented districts work closely with existing property owners, attract new developers, and undertake development projects themselves to achieve their goals. They may also concentrate on streetscape and facade projects that complement property development. Marketing and promotion activities take a backseat to the development agenda, as may business assistance. The Payne Avenue (St. Paul, Minn.) and Washington Gateway (Boston) Main Street programs fit this category.

Retention-Oriented Districts

In these commercial areas, most buildings are occupied and there are few vacant land sites, but existing businesses are at risk. Competing development uses or increasing rents, or both, threaten to displace businesses. Alternatively, gentrification, ethnic change, or population loss may have cut

deeply into the customer base. Main Street programs in retention-oriented districts strive to keep the existing business base and district character with business development services and by urging property owners to retain tenants. They may offer business technical assistance and training, help entrepreneurs purchase their properties, and secure long-term leases for at-risk businesses. Marketing—to expand or rebuild the customer base for current businesses—may be a second priority. At Mission Hill (Boston) Main Street, a retention-oriented district, the manager devotes much of her time to helping existing businesses stand up to the pressures of increasing rents and development of surrounding medical and educational institutions.

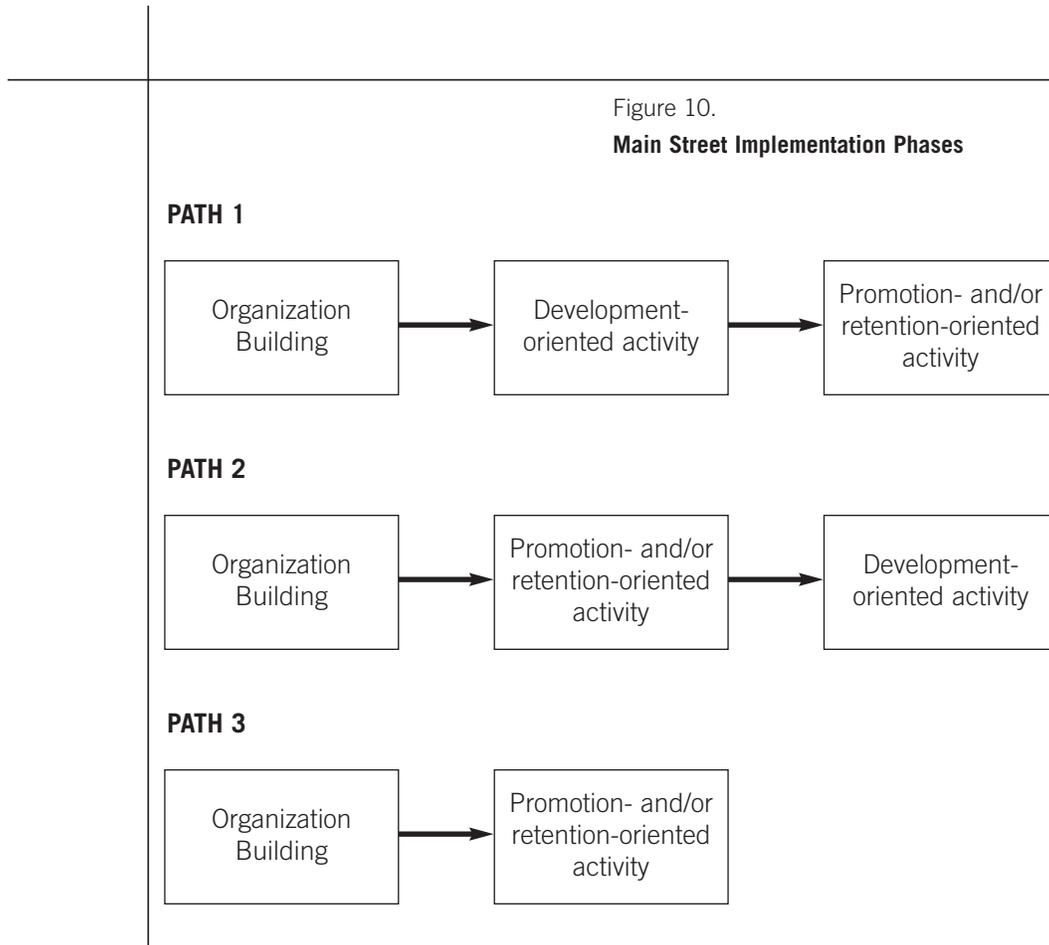
Promotion-Oriented Districts

Existing destinations and business clusters create an opportunity to strengthen the market identity and customer base in these districts. Despite a foundation of strong businesses, these commercial centers have declined because of new competition, demographic changes, altered perceptions of the neighborhood, and other factors. Consequently, the most immediate challenge is to reestablish and expand the commercial district's market. An initial focus on marketing also creates momentum to convince property owners, developers, and city government to invest in physical improvements and property reuse. Promotion-oriented districts focus on defining and strengthening the district's image, identifying potential customer segments, and launching marketing initiatives to enhance the district identity and generate more shopping. District del Sol (St. Paul, Minn.) is a promotion-oriented district.

Organization-Oriented Districts

Some districts—facing deep-seated disillusionment, unusual language and cultural barriers, or limited existing capacity—require greater than usual efforts to establish an effective organization. A history of community or interorganizational conflict or multiple community-based organizations that do not work together also calls for extensive community organizing and organization-building work. Organization building must not crowd out other program activities, because revitalization victories aid successful organizing. For these districts, however, organizational development is a hurdle to significant progress in other activities and, therefore, a priority. Egleston Square (Boston) Main Street and Capitol Hill (Oklahoma City) Main Street are examples of organization-oriented districts.

Main Street program priorities are likely to change as district conditions evolve. Since all districts need core organization capacity and community support to be effective, organization building comes first for all. However, some programs quickly achieve key organization goals and progress to broader program implementation. Main Street programs that are part of an existing organization with preexisting capacity and strong ties to the neighborhood business community can readily set up for effective revitalization. Based on the seven districts studied for this guide, three implementation paths appear most probable (Figure 10).



In the first path, organization building is followed by a development-oriented phase and then a promotion and retention phase. Development activities create a physically attractive area and expand the businesses and economic activities to make the district more appealing and marketable to consumers. After substantial progress on design and development improvements, the district can emphasize promotion and retaining vital economic uses. Stockyards City (Oklahoma City) Main Street is an example of this path. Payne Avenue and Washington Gateway appear likely to follow this path after they complete their development-oriented phase. A second path begins with a promotion or retention-oriented phase and then moves to a development-oriented stage. After the existing business and customer base is strengthened, it helps to attract larger-scale investment in physical improvements and new development. District del Sol appears likely to follow this path. A third path moves from organization building to either a promotion or retention phase without proceeding to a development-oriented phase. This might occur in developed districts that lack vacant buildings and land sites to support significant development-oriented activity. Mission Hill Main Street may follow this path.

Since Main Street practice largely emerged from work in small towns and suburban cities, urban programs need to fit the Main Street model to the challenges of inner-city commercial districts and to the special assets and conditions within their neighborhoods. Adaptation has four parts:

- ▶ Choosing the right organizational home and structure for the Main Street program
- ▶ Identifying the most important goals and activities within the Main Street framework
- ▶ Adding activities beyond the Main Street model
- ▶ Applying the most effective practices to address urban and neighborhood challenges

This guide looks at the ways that seven inner-city neighborhoods have successfully adapted the Main Street model. Other practitioners must decide what will work for their commercial districts and try approaches beyond those presented here.

The Heart of the Matter

The Main Street program is a community organizing process to create a broadly shared vision for the commercial district and to coordinate action by many different concerned parties to realize that vision.

By organizing their community around a strong vision, Main Street programs can shape development and city policies. If they intervene in the design, development, and regulatory process, they can extend their influence beyond their own projects and programs to private and public investment throughout their districts. They can also encourage the community to speak up for city policy changes, better services, and funding to advance revitalization.

Main Street programs also need the professional staff, expertise, and organizational capacity to design and carry out the programs, services, and projects that will convert the community vision into reality. Program founders, organizers, and funders need to create a strong team of board leaders, stable professional staff, and consultants that together provide expertise in marketing, small business development, commercial real estate development, fund-raising, and financial management and administration. While traditional Main Street programs often build this capacity with one professional staff person and a large volunteer base, most inner-city neighborhoods will require a larger staff and more consultants.

Further Research and Development

Despite consistent efforts, many Main Street organizations neither gain participation from all concerned parties nor recruit a staff and board that fully represent the community. New research-based ways of broadening participation and developing leadership from low-income, minority, and immigrant communities could address this problem. Also needed: research to help neighborhood commercial districts balance specialized business niches, which strengthen the district image and attract a core customer base, with service to diverse income, racial, and ethnic groups. Something else that urban practitioners need to know: how can neighborhood Main Street programs succeed without supportive city governments? This guide looks at programs in supportive cities, but many practitioners work where political alliances, local priorities, or ineffectiveness limits the availability and value of city assistance.

Policy Implications

Several public policy implications emerge from the experience of inner-city Main Street programs. First, commercial district revitalization should be an explicit policy goal within broader city and state agendas for smart growth, community development, and urban revitalization. Along with housing, employment, and social services, vital commercial districts contribute to healthy urban neighborhoods. However, strong business districts do not emerge automatically from improved housing and higher resident incomes; a separate focus and special capacities and funding are needed to establish and sustain them. Second, many existing city and state policies can be directed to support urban Main Street programs. Business Improvement District legislation and state Main Street offices can be expanded to support urban commercial districts, if they do not yet do so. State officials, mayors, and community development practitioners should review existing programs and statutes both to remove existing obstacles⁴⁹ and to make these tools more responsive to urban challenges. Furthermore, state and city leaders can target existing resources and programs, such as Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), small business lending programs, and infrastructure grants, to support local commercial district revitalization initiatives. For example, SBDCs could establish urban outreach units with multilingual staff to expand training and technical assistance for inner-city entrepreneurs. Finally, governments and national community development intermediaries need new policies directed toward (1) creating financing sources and mechanisms to develop inner-city commercial real estate and (2) supporting commercial district planning, organizing, and capacity building. Since reusing blighted and abandoned inner-city property costs more than what market rents will support in the early stages of revitalization, grants or tax incentives are needed to overcome this funding gap. In the second arena, the investments made to establish neighborhood capacity in affordable housing development should be extended to cover commercial district planning and revitalization. LISC's Neighborhood Main Street initiative is an important step in this direction but has yet to reach significant scale.

⁴⁹ Stockyards City Main Street had to amend state law to include cities with more than 50,000 population in Oklahoma's Main Street program.

This section of the report presents case studies for four of the seven inner-city Main Street programs that we studied to develop the recommendations in the first half of this guide. These case studies show how practitioners have applied experiences, lessons, and practices from other communities to revitalizing their commercial districts. The introduction describes the research methods and then tells which programs offer key Main Street lessons and innovations.

Research Methods

We studied seven neighborhood Main Street programs in three cities during spring/summer 2002. We chose cities and neighborhoods based on three criteria: (1) cities with a minimum population of 250,000 and more than one neighborhood employing the Main Street approach; (2) inner-city neighborhoods that had implemented the Main Street model for at least three years; and (3) diversity in geography and local program context. St. Paul, Minnesota; Oklahoma City; and Boston fit these criteria. Because the first two cities had two neighborhood Main Street programs, all four were included in the study. Three of Boston's 21 districts were selected. We reviewed background documents, made a two-day site visit that included a tour of the commercial district and interviews with concerned parties in the neighborhood and the city, and completed a detailed interview with the program manager. We had three primary research questions:

1. How did each neighborhood implement the Main Street approach, including the organizational structure, leadership, program activities, and funding?
2. What challenges and problems did they face in applying the Main Street model?
3. What parts of the existing Main Street model (organizational development, design and physical improvements, promotion, and economic restructuring) were implemented most readily and were most appropriate to the problems of the districts? What new activities and practices were added to address urban conditions and challenges?

Case Study Organization

Each chapter summarizes the case study research for a single district organized into the following seven sections:

- **Business District Context** describes each district's physical and economic conditions and the population of its surrounding neighborhood.
- **Origins of the Main Street Program** explains what motivated and led to the program's creation.
- **Organization and Funding** summarizes the program's organizational structure, budget and funding sources, leadership base, and key partnerships.

- ▶ **Program Activities** relates major activities, key approaches and practices, and program accomplishments.
- ▶ **Main Street Program Adaptation** discusses how the local district program changed the standard Main Street model and practice.
- ▶ **Lessons and Effective Practices** identifies what was learned from experience and key practices that worked well and contributed to the program's successes.
- ▶ **Conclusions and Reflections** presents final observations on the program's experience and its relevance to other Main Street programs.

District Lessons and Effective Practices

Each program faced distinct challenges and pursued its goals in different ways. The following summary identifies programs that offer useful lessons and demonstrate effective approaches for the four points of standard Main Street practice plus a fifth point, public safety.

Organization

Two Main Street programs built strong collaborations with other nonprofit entities:

- ▶ **District del Sol** shows how nonprofits can define and coordinate their complementary roles in neighborhood revitalization.
- ▶ **Payne Avenue** exemplifies a strong partnership between a community development corporation (CDC) and a business association.

Three districts stand out for their approaches to strengthening organizational capacity:

- ▶ **Payne Avenue, of the seven districts**, had the largest funding and staff for its commercial revitalization program.
- ▶ **Washington Gateway** was particularly effective in recruiting and deploying volunteers to implement its agenda.
- ▶ **Stockyards City** created a business improvement district to institutionalize program funding.

Design

Three Main Street districts offer valuable lessons in how to achieve extensive physical improvements:

- ▶ **District del Sol** used large projects and gateway sites to maximize visual impact and established three funds to provide incentives for different types of projects.
- ▶ **Payne Avenue** focused improvements in a core area and implemented many facade projects at one time by awarding grants competitively and managing construction.
- ▶ **Washington Gateway** devised a design vision, reviewed designs for new projects, and convinced public agencies and private developers to adopt its ideas.

Promotion

Two Main Street programs created a strong district image and expanded customer markets:

- ▶ **District del Sol** used a new name and image, design improvements, advertising, and a large festival to expand the regional and visitor market for its Latino goods and services.
- ▶ **Stockyards City** marketed its district as a center for western heritage and cowboy goods with two annual events, group advertising, and strong media coverage.

Economic Restructuring

Two Main Street programs managed the development process to shape economic uses:

- ▶ **Payne Avenue** developed vacant buildings and worked with property owners to eliminate undesirable uses and attract desirable new businesses.
- ▶ **Washington Gateway** reviewed proposed projects and advocated with developers to include ground-floor retail space and expanded underground parking.

Two Main Street districts created effective business retention and development initiatives:

- ▶ **Payne Avenue** hired bilingual staff and worked with Latino and Hmong business owners to attract them to the district and improve their business and marketing plans.
- ▶ **District del Sol** used outreach, monthly social and informational meetings, and training to build capacity and organize merchants around a collective agenda.

Public Safety

- ▶ **Payne Avenue** used community education, design guidelines, training, and supplemental police patrols to improve public safety.

Business District Context

District del Sol is located on St. Paul's West Side, a short distance across the Mississippi River from downtown St. Paul. It is constrained physically on three sides by the river and the steep river bluffs, which contribute to an asymmetrical street pattern and a nonlinear commercial district. Consequently, the 45 businesses and nonprofit offices in the district are concentrated at three commercial nodes (the Concord-George-State Street intersection, the Concord-Roberts Street intersection, and Wabashaw Street) that are separated by housing, parks, and underused buildings. The business community is primarily Latino in ownership and products, with many Mexican restaurants and stores specializing in Mexican and Latino food, clothing, gifts, and other products. These businesses include both well-established enterprises and start-ups. A majority of businesses own their properties. With a strong concentration of ethnic stores, the district serves as a regional destination for Hispanic shoppers and others seeking the specialized restaurants and shops (Figure 11).

Figure 11.

George and Concord Streets



District del Sol, part of the West Side neighborhood, had an ethnically and racially mixed population of 16,131 in 2000. While 58 percent of residents were white, Hispanics are almost one-third of the population, with Asians 8 percent and blacks 7 percent. During the 1990s, the West Side population increased by 6.1 percent, close to St. Paul's 5.5 percent growth rate, adding more than 2,000 Hispanic and 500 black residents. In recent years, as West Side housing prices have remained relatively affordable by St. Paul standards, demand for housing in the area has increased among middle-class homeowners.

The Origins of the Main Street Program

District del Sol's Main Street program was established in 1998 in response to a Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) request for proposals (RFP) to fund Main Street–based commercial revitalization programs at community development corporations (CDCs).⁵⁰ Twin City LISC created its own version of the national LISC Main Street program by adding public safety as a fifth Main Street point and providing four-year funding for a professional staff person, funds to hire consultants, and training and technical assistance by LISC staff. Riverview Economic Development Association (REDA) was one of two CDCs that received LISC funding under the RFP. REDA was founded in 1983 as a business association to address economic and physical decline in the Concord Street corridor. After converting to a CDC in the early 1990s to expand its access to funding, REDA undertook public art displays, facade improvements, and microenterprise training and assistance to develop new businesses.

When REDA applied for the LISC Main Street program, the business district suffered from poor physical conditions, public safety concerns, and a lack of common purpose among business owners. Blighted properties, widespread litter, and deteriorated public infrastructure made the area unattractive, discouraged shoppers and new businesses, and fostered an unsafe image of the district. Unruly behavior and assaults at bars, drug activity, and loitering contributed to these perceptions. Moreover, business owners were not working on these problems together but instead focused on their individual interests.

Organization and Funding

The District del Sol Main Street program functions within REDA with one dedicated full-time Main Street staff person. The REDA board of directors provides overall program governance, with the following four committees planning and overseeing distinct program activities: design and development, marketing, tenant recruitment, and Cinco de Mayo Festival. REDA altered LISC's recommended governance structure by dropping a separate program advisory committee, which duplicated the role of REDA's board, and dividing the economic restructuring committee's work between two committees. The design and development committee oversees large-scale development efforts, with tenant recruitment directed by a second, smaller group. A separate committee also was created to manage the large annual Cinco de Mayo festival.

Business owners are the primary leadership and volunteer base for the Main Street program, consistent with REDA's mission as a business-based economic development entity. The Main Street manager has worked hard to build this volunteer base through consistent one-on-one outreach to business owners. REDA also organizes three monthly business events: (1) a luncheon with speakers on major neighborhood, city, and regional issues; (2) a breakfast meeting at which business owners discuss common issues and concerns; and (3) an after-hours social gathering. These events have strengthened trust and relationships among businesses and increased their knowledge of city and regional resources.

REDA has worked closely with two neighborhood organizations, the Neighborhood Development Alliance (NeDA) and the West Side Citizens Organization (WSCO), to make the Main Street

⁵⁰ The formal name of the program was the Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program (CCRP).

program work. NeDA is a CDC that develops housing and delivers homeowner services; WSCO is the neighborhood's District Council, charged with generating citizen participation and input on city policies and development projects. REDA relies on WSCO to provide resident input and support for its projects, back city funding requests, and help with long-term planning efforts. NeDA, a co-applicant for LISC Main Street funding, helps REDA with grant writing and pushes to include District del Sol in significant city and regional initiatives. Executive directors of the three organizations meet monthly and have applied jointly for foundation grants.

REDA's annual operating budget for the Main Street program is \$170,000 (fiscal year 2002). Staff and fringe benefits account for just over half of this budget, with overhead and direct program costs (events, marketing, consulting services, and so forth) each representing close to 25 percent. Foundation grants and city grants, including the LISC Main Street grant, funded 91 percent of the operating budget. The program also received \$505,000 in city grants over three years to establish three funds to finance facade and building improvement projects. Thus, during the four-year LISC Main Street initiative, the District del Sol program received more than \$1 million in city and foundation funding.

Several approaches have been used to secure funding. First, REDA developed distinct building improvement funds and built on its early success in funding projects to get several rounds of city STAR money.⁵¹ Second, REDA has used the success and visibility of the Cinco de Mayo festival to attract corporate sponsorship for its projects. Third, it works with NeDA and WSCO to expand its capacity to get foundation grants. District del Sol is also part of a smart growth planning effort by the Metropolitan Council, which should allow REDA to secure additional grants for planning and district infrastructure improvements.

Program Activities

REDA has concentrated on creating a shared vision for the commercial area among business owners, improving the area's physical appearance, and defining and marketing a strong regional image for the district. During its first year, District del Sol hired Hay Dobbs Architects to help prepare an overall plan for the commercial district. The plan was formulated over six months through business focus groups, business and resident outreach, and three town meetings. The plan guided physical improvements through design guidelines, a streetscape plan, and choice of priority areas for new development, but it also generated momentum for the program by giving staff and businesses a shared blueprint for the district design and physical improvements. To implement the design plan, staff created three building improvement funds: a Commercial Improvement Grant Fund (CIGF) program to offer matching funds up to \$5,000 for smaller-scale facade improvements, a Gateway Program to fund facade improvements for businesses at the district's gateways, and a Building Incentive Program (BIP) that provides up to \$50,000 to fund larger-scale and high-impact projects. All funds offer loans that are forgiven over a five-year period as long as the business remains in the district. BIP also provides low-interest loans that must be repaid. Twenty-four projects received more than \$281,000 through these programs, resulting in \$4.5 million in investment.⁵² Capital for these funds came from the City of St. Paul's STAR program. Main Street staff

⁵¹ STAR is a city program that uses sales tax revenue to provide grants for economic development projects.

⁵² One project, the Girl Scout Council building (Figure 3), accounted for \$3.5 million.

members talk these programs up with businesses and property owners and work with them to create a design consistent with the overall district plan and design guidelines. For example, when the Girl Scout Council developed plans for a new building with a large parking lot in front and the building set far back from the street, REDA staff convinced the Girl Scouts to move the building to the front of the lot and put the parking in the back. In other cases, REDA has used LISC technical assistance funds to hire an architect to prepare facade designs for a property owner or business.

The neighborhood was not always known as District del Sol. It lacked a strong identity, so REDA set out to define a shared image and identity. In the first half of 1999, a public awareness campaign, “The West Side of What,” generated awareness of and interest in the revitalization effort. Next, business owners decided to hire a marketing consultant to help formulate a new district name and image. In early 2000, the district was renamed District del Sol, to reflect the Hispanic character of businesses but also to create an attractive, positive image. Banners were installed throughout the district with the new name and logo, group advertising under this name was placed in state tourism and St. Paul Convention and Visitor Bureau publications, and some individual businesses incorporated the name and logo in their facades and advertising. The marketing of District del Sol is also strongly connected to the annual Cinco de Mayo festival, a major regional celebration that draws more than 85,000 people to the neighborhood. Under the Main Street program, REDA improved the event’s organization, expanded its size and activities, and increased corporate sponsorship.

REDA has also worked to improve public safety and city services.

Although West Side crime rates have been low, the area was perceived as unsafe because parts of it looked bad, attracted homeless people, and provided a setting for loitering, drunkenness, and drug activity. REDA has worked to increase police awareness of and responsiveness to business concerns. During the first two years, REDA organized monthly meetings between businesses and the police to discuss crime issues, but the meetings were poorly attended. Instead, REDA now organizes meetings around specific business concerns, such as check and credit card fraud and crime prevention through building and store design. REDA helps the police keep businesses informed about issues and incidents, as when a gang shooting occurred, and serves as an advocate and mediator to resolve problems. For example, street peddlers were selling goods in the district, which hurt the district image and competed with businesses. When police enforcement proved ineffective because peddlers moved onto private property, REDA convened meetings with officials from several city departments and found that zoning regulations could be used to prevent street vendors from selling on private property.

During the past two years, REDA has worked harder to connect with city and regional initiatives. These efforts included getting the Hay Dobbs district plan incorporated into the St. Paul Comprehensive Plan, participating in community planning for the redesign and new development at the Concord-State-George intersection, getting District del Sol included in the Flats area tax increment financing (TIF) district, and participating in the Metropolitan Council’s regional smart growth planning. The REDA staff believes that the increased city and regional interest in the area stems from the District del Sol campaign, which strengthened political and civic leaders’ awareness of the district.

REDA still faces the challenge of reusing underused buildings at key intersections, especially Roberts Street and Concord Avenue, and attracting new infill development between the key business nodes. Because there are few vacant buildings and stores, building reuse and new development are needed to attract new stores to the district and to strengthen its pedestrian character and the linkages between the three commercial nodes. Property owners who do not want to reuse their buildings or who seek an unrealistic price are the major obstacle to further development. REDA focuses on property owners who do want to make improvements and plans to attract developers as improvements make the district a stronger destination.

REDA has brought several changes to the district through the Main Street program. First, it fostered a shared vision for the district and helped merchants work together to advance this vision. Merchants are now sharing information, collaborating on activities, and connecting to city resources and opportunities. Furthermore, the major community organizations are working in partnership to achieve common goals, primarily around revitalization of District del Sol. Second, it established a strong image for the district, strengthened the district as a regional destination, and brought it to the attention of political and civic leaders in a positive way. Third, it improved the district's appearance and safety (both real and perceived), making it more hospitable to shoppers, new businesses, and potential developers.

Main Street Program Adaptation

REDA altered the Main Street organization structure and adapted program activities to fit the unique needs of District del Sol. The organizational framework was modified in two ways: (1) REDA changed the four standard Main Street committees to reflect local district priorities; and (2) REDA formed a coalition with other community organizations to secure more funding and expand political support.

While standard Main Street approaches to design (developing design guidelines, improving building facades and streetscape elements) and district promotion (image building, promotional events, and district advertising) fit the district's needs and were readily implemented, three additions to standard Main Street activities addressed concerns with public safety, city services, and merchant involvement:

- ▶ Outreach to merchants and monthly business meetings to overcome cultural barriers and get businesses working together
- ▶ Ongoing work with the police department to address public safety issues, involve businesses in addressing crime, and increase police responsiveness to business concerns
- ▶ Advocacy to improve city services, resolve problems and issues, and see that District del Sol is included in key planning and development initiatives

Lessons and Effective Practices

District del Sol's work suggests several lessons about applying the Main Street approach in urban neighborhoods.

1. It is essential to strongly root the program in the community, developing an organizational structure and program focus that respond to business and resident concerns. REDA did this by putting a lot of effort into early planning, by keeping in close touch with businesses and neighborhood-based organizations, and by diverging from the standard Main Street model when necessary.
2. A second lesson is the value of having significant financial incentives to stimulate investment in building improvements and the importance of using these incentives to advance key goals, such as improving the district gateways and prominent buildings at key intersections. To get the job done, REDA gives grants in the \$25,000 to \$50,000 range, more than many facade programs.
3. A third lesson is the importance of extensive outreach and communication to build trust with businesses and keep them informed and involved. This work continues on a daily basis through one-to-one personal contact.

Beyond its strong merchant outreach and communication, REDA's work exemplifies several effective practices.

- Early preparation of a districtwide plan through a participatory planning process provided important direction and support for the program and was the first step toward creating the shared vision.
- Second, REDA's marketing and image-building campaign created a new district logo that fit the district's real character and assets and reinforced this image with physical improvements, group advertising, and a major regional event. These image-building efforts strengthened cohesion within the district while expanding recognition outside the district.
- A third effective practice has been REDA's work with organizations planning new facilities. By offering these organizations both design guidance and financial incentives, REDA has achieved important project changes and has improved the design and character of these buildings.

Conclusions and Reflections

REDA has successfully adapted the Main Street program to improve its business district. It has applied the four-point Main Street approach to local conditions and goals in a flexible way, changing the organizational framework to fit its needs but applying standard Main Street design and promotion tools, initially deemphasizing economic restructuring but greatly expanding business outreach and communications, and adding new emphasis on public safety and advocacy for city services and resources. District del Sol's experience also highlights the importance of creating a shared vision for the commercial district based on real assets and continually working to keep the community focused on and supportive of this vision. REDA organized both businesses and community organizations around the shared vision and advocated with city and regional agencies for better service delivery, funding, and public improvements to implement the local vision.

Business District Context

Payne Avenue is a linear commercial corridor that extends for a mile and a half between East 7th and Maryland. It is one of two major commercial streets (Arcade Street, four blocks east, is the second) that begin about a mile from downtown St. Paul and continue to the northern suburb of Maplewood. Payne Avenue has sidewalks throughout its length and its building stock is mostly older brick structures, many of which have street-level retail/commercial with office or residential uses above. Area housing includes a mixture of single-family homes, duplexes, and multifamily buildings, with a high-rise public housing development located just off Payne Avenue at Jenks. While the East Side Neighborhood Development Company, Inc. (ESNDC) has worked to improve the neighborhood's housing stock, much of the housing close to Payne Avenue is still in need of renovation.

Over the past 10 years, the neighborhood's population has grown and become more diverse. From 1990 to 2000, the East Side population grew from 26,692 to 31,519, an 18.1 percent increase versus 5.5 percent growth for St. Paul. The African-American population doubled, while the number of Caucasian residents declined. Neighborhood public school attendance data for 2000–2001 demonstrate the area's diverse population: 42 percent of students were Asian, 25 percent were white, 20 percent were African American, 11 percent were Hispanic, and 2 percent were Native American.

Main Street Program Origins

After several local factories closed in the 1980s, many residents left the area and less desirable businesses moved in. Because of these less desirable uses and the physical decline from years of deferred upkeep, the neighborhood was viewed as unsafe. Vagrancy, drunkenness, and fights connected to the Payne Reliever, a well-known strip club in the district, added to Payne Avenue's negative and unsafe image. ESNDC and the Payne Arcade Business Association (PABA) started the Partners Program in 1991 to reverse the commercial district's decline, but the emphasis on small facade improvements had little impact on Payne Avenue's larger problems.

The Payne Avenue Main Street program was established in 1998 in response to a Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) request for proposals (RFP) to fund Main Street–based commercial revitalization programs at community development corporations (CDCs).⁵³ Twin City LISC created its own version of the national LISC Main Street program, adding public safety as a fifth Main Street point and providing four-year funding for a professional staff person, funds to hire consultants, and training and technical assistance by LISC staff. Payne Avenue was one of two Main Street programs designated under the LISC RFP. ESNDC and PABA jointly applied for Main

⁵³ The formal name of the program was the Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program (CCRP).

Street funding to revitalize both Payne Avenue and Arcade Street. When LISC staff convinced the two organizations to concentrate on one corridor, they chose Payne Avenue.

Organization and Funding

The Payne Avenue Main Street program is part of ESNDNC's overall commercial development work through which one three-quarter-time staff member and three full-time staff members direct commercial development activities on Payne Avenue and Arcade Street. While 80 percent of ESNDNC's work is on Payne Avenue, some activities, such as public safety and the Building Improvement Fund, also apply to Arcade Street. Four committees formulate and oversee Main Street activities: design, crime and public safety, promotion, and the commercial development advisory committee (CDAC). Main Street staff and the committees report to both the ESNDNC and PABA boards, reflecting the two organizations' partnership.

ESNDNC's commercial development budget totaled \$703,000 in 2001, with \$342,000 for operating costs and \$361,000 funding capital improvement projects. ESNDNC secured diverse funding sources beyond the LISC grant to support its large commercial development budget. Government grants from the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA),⁵⁴ the St. Paul STAR program, the regional Metropolitan Council, and others, accounted for 65 percent of revenue. Corporate and foundation grants and ESNDNC developer fees each contributed 10 percent. The remaining 15 percent came from other, smaller sources and a carryover of prior-year revenue. Salaries and benefits totaled \$198,323, or 28 percent of the budget, with construction projects accounting for 51 percent. These projects included \$220,000 in grants and loans under the Building Investment Fund and Facade Improvement Program and improvements to two parking lots.

PABA augments program funding with its own revenue from membership dues and its charitable gaming operations.⁵⁵ PABA funds have been especially important in expanding police services, covering half of the cost for the summer patrol program. ESNDNC also uses grants from the city's STAR grant program⁵⁶ and community development block grants (CDBGs) to fund development projects. STAR grants were used to create two incentive funds to help finance building improvement projects. The Building Investment Fund (BIF) provides matching loans and grants up to \$50,000 for larger-scale building improvement projects that have the potential for a significant impact. The Facade Improvement Fund provides forgivable loans up to \$20,000.

The Payne Avenue Main Street program, under ESNDNC and PABA, has more capacity and financial resources than many other Main Street programs. ESNDNC's development experience allowed the Main Street program to undertake larger-scale projects, such as the Building Investment Fund and development of commercial properties. PABA's gaming revenue and ESNDNC's creativity in securing grants expanded funding for building improvements, business technical assistance, and other activities. Despite these resources, the Payne Avenue program still finds it difficult to fill funding gaps for development projects.

⁵⁴ The USDA grant funds the International Marketplace and staff technical assistance to food-related businesses.

⁵⁵ Minnesota law allows a nonprofit organization to raise revenue through charitable gaming.

⁵⁶ The STAR grant program uses a 0.5 percent sales tax to fund economic development projects.

Program Activities

After the Main Street designation, ESNDC brought together community members, city officials, and merchants to develop a consensus action plan. The planning process, completed within three months, included staff and board training on the basics of the Main Street approach, two community meetings, and weekly working sessions. A neighborhood streetscape vision and work plan were formulated and adopted by the ESNDC and PABA boards and the District 5 Planning Council (the city-recognized neighborhood body that reviews City Council issues). Since ESNDC and PABA wanted rapid tangible results to counter previous failed planning efforts, the action plan focused on organizing the community around projects that would generate short-term impact. ESNDC emphasized large-scale building upgrades to change the environment and demonstrate that substantial investments were being made in the district. Crime and public safety was a second early focus in the program's first summer. Early attention to physical decline and crime improved confidence in the district and allowed ESNDC to undertake larger development projects and expand business development and recruitment activities. Despite substantial progress on many fronts, the Main Street program has found it difficult to define a new image for Payne Avenue because of the district's rapid change and increasing diversity. The following sections summarize the major activities for Main Street committees.

Design Committee

ESNDC quickly completed several building improvement projects that enhanced the district's appearance, increased community involvement, and generated momentum. The design committee created design guidelines and established the Building Investment Fund to help finance improvement projects. Building improvement projects also receive city STAR grants and CDBG funds obtained by ESNDC. ESNDC awards grant and loan funds on a competitive basis, giving priority to highly visible and high-impact projects at key intersections. The shared district vision created by the planning process and access to large grants and loans have convinced a number of property owners to undertake major property upgrades. ESNDC staff members approach property owners to discuss the condition of their buildings and the ways in which new facades or other investments would contribute to the larger district plan and vision. ESNDC also uses financial incentives and free design help to persuade building owners to upgrade their facades. In return for financial assistance, property owners agree to let ESNDC review their selection of tenants for the next seven years.

ESNDC's help with design and construction also advanced high-impact building improvements. For each interested owner, ESNDC uses professional architects to prepare a recommended design that supports a cohesive vision for the district and motivates owners to upgrade their properties. ESNDC also hires one contractor to undertake a complete round of assisted projects at one time. This generates greater visual impact and attracts better contractors for the improvements. Moreover, merchants benefit from ESNDC's construction management experience. Through these efforts, the Main Street program has generated \$2.5 million in new investment for 20 building improvement projects.

Crime and Public Safety

Crime rates have dropped dramatically on Payne Avenue and public safety perceptions have improved since the Main Street program began.

ESNDC and PABA worked with police to establish an effective community policing program. The strong relationship with the police department took shape step by step. ESNDC staff members studied police practices to understand their needs and constraints, even riding with police officers during their patrols. Police officers also spent time listening to and learning about the district's crime issues and actively participating in the crime and public safety committee. The idea of establishing police foot patrols along Payne Avenue during peak summer months emerged from this work. With money from PABA, the committee paid half the cost of these patrols. PABA also pays for cell phones that allow businesses to bypass the central police dispatch system and quickly alert summer patrol officers to problems.

The Payne Avenue Main Street program and the police department have done a lot of public safety education. First, police officers taught businesses and residents how to defuse potentially hostile interactions and how to decide whether to intervene themselves or contact the police. Second, in a "Make the Call" community education initiative, police officers and volunteers visited merchants to encourage them to report problems to the police. During the visit, each business received a bright card with police unit phone numbers to keep by the cash register. Third, the Main Street program held workshops on public safety issues, such as using building and public space design to prevent crime. ESNDC and PABA also keep the community informed about emerging crime issues and public safety activities through newsletters and a weekly page in the community newspaper. Finally, ESNDC has tracked area crime statistics and conducted surveys to monitor the impact of its work.

Marketing and Promotion

Initial efforts to create an "Old Town" image for the historic core of Payne Avenue were unsuccessful. Nine antique shops did not provide a sufficient business base and destination to support the image. Moreover, the district's changing demographics led to an international business mix that did not fit the Old Town image. However, the "Old Town" idea did get a fair trial via three events to promote antique shopping: a one-time-only February Antique Snowball Stroll (1,000 shoppers participated), an Old Town Antique Fair (held in three separate years), and a Neighborhood Garage Sale (held once for 1,500 customers). Further efforts to create and market a new image have been deferred until more development projects are completed.

Despite these setbacks, there have been some marketing successes. Development and building improvement projects have promoted the district by demonstrating its physical changes and business opportunities. The International Marketplace, a multiethnic summer market held in a central parking lot, has been a successful event that recognizes and celebrates the community's ethnic and racial diversity. ESNDC has also helped 30 businesses to develop marketing plans and improve their merchandising, window displays, and store layout.

Community Development Advisory Committee (CDAC)

ESNDC's economic restructuring activities have brought dramatic change to the district through real estate development, business technical assistance, and (working with property owners) elimination of undesirable businesses. Under CDAC direction, ESNDC purchased, developed, and marketed two buildings to attract new uses and tenants to the district. Both projects were acquired without commercial tenants in place and required many months of recruitment work to locate tenants.⁵⁷ The G.A. Johnson Building (Figure 12) was renovated for upper-floor apartments and a ground-floor restaurant. To sustain the impact of this project, ESNDC secured funds to renovate the adjacent parking lot and sidewalks and included the owner of the adjacent property in the corporation that owns the G.A. Johnson Building, giving him a role in protecting the property from vandalism and minimizing vacancies. A second ESDNC development project, the Old Swedish Bank Building, is a historic Beaux Arts structure in the center of the district. The initial plan to sell the building to a private developer⁵⁸ fell through because the property's appraised value was too low to support the bank loan that the developer needed. ESNDC is now working with two parties to purchase and rehabilitate the building.

Figure 12.
G.A. Johnson Building



Doing something about undesirable uses has been a second economic restructuring priority. When the Payne Reliever strip club was offered for sale, ESNDC jumped at the chance to find a developer who was interested in eliminating this business. ESNDC attracted a new owner and helped him plan to convert the property into Embers, a local chain restaurant, and a bingo parlor (Figure 7). ESNDC and PABA also helped to get subsidies needed to make the project feasible. At a second building, ESNDC secured a zoning change to prevent the owner from leasing to a pawnshop. Staff members then worked with the property owner to move his furniture business to an

⁵⁷ Most new businesses were found via word of mouth and personal networks. ESNDC encourages all staff members to look for good businesses to attract to the district.

⁵⁸ The developer planned to lease the upper floors to a mortgage company and the ground floor to a bakery.

alternate location on Payne Avenue and redevelop the building into an ethnic marketplace (Plaza Latina), ground floor café, and upper-story offices for ESND. For other properties, ESND has promoted new uses to reflect the Main Street vision, including converting an abandoned gas station into a Hmong chiropractor clinic and replacing a cleaning supply company with a Hmong grocery and Latino grocery.

ESND provides technical assistance to strengthen new and existing businesses, especially emerging Hmong and Latino entrepreneurs. Technical assistance addresses business planning, marketing plans to serve varied ethnic groups (e.g., helping a florist recognize and cater to the Hmong market), and one-on-one help to food-related businesses through a USDA grant. To offer effective outreach and help to ethnic businesses, ESND hired staff from each community.

Through these activities, the Payne Avenue Main Street program has significantly changed the commercial district over four years. The efforts have generated \$14 million in new investment (74 percent from private sources) for 35 projects that have improved the district's physical condition, image, and business mix.⁵⁹ Buildings in the core area are in much better condition. The district is also far safer and cleaner, and several undesirable uses are gone. These changes have greatly improved the district's overall image, attracted new businesses to Payne Avenue, and stimulated investment interest among some developers.

Main Street Program Adaptation

While ESND and PABA used the Main Street framework as a guide, they altered its structure to fit within their organizations and changed activities in three ways to address key urban challenges. The major organizational changes included adding a crime and public safety committee (per the Twin Cities LISC program model) and relying on the ESND and PABA boards to handle fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and community involvement in lieu of creating a separate organization committee. Payne Avenue Main Street also organized around large-scale projects and tapped the capacity of the existing organizations to create a comprehensive community organizing team. The three programmatic changes were:

- A comprehensive public safety initiative to reduce crime was implemented.
- Key properties were developed to make highly visible improvements, build momentum, and control uses in important buildings. Although this focus on large projects departs from the Main Street emphasis on incremental improvements, it was vital to tackling the scale of blighted properties and removing undesirable uses.
- The program worked with multiethnic entrepreneurs to foster a multicultural business district. This work, a common challenge in urban commercial districts, requires more extensive business outreach and greater staff capacity than the standard Main Street model.

⁵⁹ Data come from an evaluation of the LISC Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program completed by Judith Tennebaum and Janna King in March 2002.

Lessons and Effective Practices

The Payne Avenue Main Street program is successful in large part because of the significant staff and funding that ESNDC secured to implement program activities and undertake development projects. This success demonstrates the importance of large-scale public and civic funding to create the local capacity, investment incentives, and gap financing needed to generate substantial improvements. A second lesson is that an existing organization with development capacity and strong community and political relationships has a big advantage over a new stand-alone organization in implementing an urban Main Street program.

While the Payne Avenue Main Street program used many productive approaches, four practices were particularly effective.

- First, the swift and comprehensive initial planning process and ongoing communication with concerned parties created strong approval of and alignment with a shared revitalization plan. With a clear vision and strategy based on community input and regular communication, ESNDC and PABA built the broad-based involvement and new investment needed to achieve rapid revitalization progress.
- Second, ESNDC invited other organizations to join it in planning and implementing solutions. Its collaboration with the police department exemplifies this effective practice of developing strong partnerships.
- A third successful approach was moving in several ways in a core area to quickly generate extensive building improvements: helping with design, awarding large improvement grants through a competitive process, grouping multiple renovations into one construction contract, and developing its own properties.
- Fourth, ESNDC worked closely with property owners and businesses to shape development outcomes and the business mix. Personal relationships with property owners, financial and technical assistance, business recruitment, and altering of city zoning rules were all used to change property uses and shape tenant selection in line with the vision for Payne Avenue.

Conclusions and Reflections

ESNDC and PABA effectively adapted the Main Street model to fit neighborhood conditions and improve their commercial corridor. While benefiting from standard Main Street design tools, they added new activities in public safety, advocacy for city services and resources, and greatly expanded business outreach and communication. Moreover, they made economic restructuring an early priority and quickly undertook several development projects to further their economic development goals. Because of the Main Street program, neighborhood entities drew up a comprehensive revitalization agenda and went after the private, city, foundation, and federal funds to carry it out.

The Payne Avenue experience highlights the value of creating a shared vision based on real assets and continually working to keep the community focused on and supportive of this vision. It also demonstrates how strong partnerships with city agencies can improve services and expand funding for key projects. Advocating for supportive city government action is an important role for urban Main Street programs. Policing is central to this work, but it extends to planning, licensing,

and permitting departments, as well as city agencies that can help to fund commercial development projects.

The Payne Avenue Main Street program has made enormous progress in improving the commercial district and generating new investment by developers and businesses. However, ESND and PABA expect three to four years of additional work before their revitalization goals are realized. Their greatest challenges remain securing sufficient funding to fill the financial gaps in development projects and creating a new image for the district that reflects its recent changes and emerging character.

Business District Context

Stockyards City, three miles west of downtown Oklahoma City, emerged in the early twentieth century to serve the employees and customers of the livestock market (Oklahoma National Stockyards Company) and two meatpacking plants. After the meatpacking plants closed in the late 1960s, the commercial district lost much of its customer base and declined as businesses closed and little new investment occurred. Since the district depended on the farm sector for customers, it also suffered from declining agriculture prices and land values in the 1980s. However, several established businesses and UMB Oklahoma Bank remained in the district, serving as economic anchors and providing the impetus for improvement efforts.

Stockyards City is built around a four-block core at the intersection of Agnew and Exchange streets. The core consists of continuous one- and two-story buildings built to the sidewalk edge. There is an “old-western” character to the core district, reflected in building facades and the western wear and ranch supply stores. Just beyond the core, development is industrial and auto-oriented, with buildings set back behind parking lots. The Oklahoma National Stockyards, abutting the core district to the west, includes cattle pens, a cattle auction house, and other buildings (Figure 13). Low-income neighborhoods surround the district to its east and south.

Figure 13.

Stockyards City Buildings on Exchange Street



The population of the surrounding residential neighborhoods grew by 4.2 percent from 1990 to 2000, much more slowly than Oklahoma City's 13.8 percent increase. Growth among Hispanics, African Americans, and Asians offset losses among white and Native American residents. Nonetheless, 70 percent of the area's 62,303 residents were white in 2000. African Americans, Native Americans, and Asians were 6 percent, 5 percent, and 2 percent of the population, respectively, while one-fifth of residents were Hispanic.

Main Street Program Origins

Stockyards City was designated a Main Street district in 1992 under the Oklahoma state Main Street program through the combined efforts of several business and property owners and city officials. By the early 1990s, Stockyards City had deteriorated buildings, streets and sidewalks in disrepair, and numerous ground-floor vacancies. The area was viewed as unsafe and relied heavily on stockyard patrons for its customers. While the Stockyards City Council (SCC), a business association, promoted the district with special events, it lacked a budget and staff and had little impact, especially in reversing the area's physical decline. In search of a more effective strategy, the SCC raised \$8,000 in 1990 to have the National Main Street Center (NMSC) assess the district's appropriateness for the Main Street program. After a positive NMSC report, the SCC approached Oklahoma's Main Street program for designation and sought Oklahoma City government support. The city assigned a planner to help with the state application and pledged \$50,000 in annual funding for the first three years. In 1992, after enactment of a law needed to include cities with more than 50,000 residents in the state Main Street program, Stockyards City was designated the first urban Oklahoma Main Street district.

Organization and Funding

Stockyards City Main Street (SCMS) is an independent 501(c)(3) corporation with an affiliated business improvement district (BID). A fifteen-person board of directors oversees the program and uses the four standard Main Street committees. Temporary committees are established from time to time to oversee special projects. Two full-time employees, a manager and assistant manager, are responsible for fund-raising, administration, and directing program implementation. More than 70 businesses and property owners are dues-paying members and volunteer for committees and projects, but a small core provided the organization's leadership and much of the private financial support during its initial years. UMB Bank was an important source of leadership; its president and several employees were active in the program and a bank employee became the second SCMS manager. Residents of the surrounding neighborhoods are not involved in the program.

The Stockyards City Business Improvement District (BID), a key part of the organization, was created in 2001 to institutionalize program funding after the city ended its annual \$50,000 grant support. After city staff suggested that SCMS create a BID and met with the organization to explain how it worked, several business and property owners convinced 69 percent of the property owners to sign the petition to create a BID and secured city council approval.

The SCMS fiscal year 2003 operating budget of \$146,171 covers three major expenses: staff and benefit costs, \$84,079 (58 percent of the budget); administrative and overhead costs, \$18,261 (12 percent); and direct program expenses for special events, street cleaning, banners, and so forth, \$43,831 (30 percent). SCMS relies on diverse funding sources:

- ▶ \$88,500 from BID assessments on 75 properties
- ▶ \$20,000 each from membership dues and merchandise sales⁶⁰
- ▶ \$8,000 from sponsorships for the Cowboy Christmas event
- ▶ \$11,5000 from a city grant
- ▶ \$4,600 from the sale of street pavers

An additional \$30,000 raised by office staff and volunteers for the Stockyards Stampede is held in an account separate from the annual budget for expenses related to the event.

SCMS has faced challenges in sustaining its volunteer base and diversifying funding. While SCMS benefited from strong leadership from a core of business and property owners in its early years, heavy reliance on this small group slowed the development of a larger volunteer base and made it difficult to sustain interest and involvement over the organization's 10-year life. Consequently, SCMS activities slowed down during the late 1990s. Withdrawal of city funding motivated SCMS to reach out to businesses and property owners, justify its existence, and gain direct financial support for the program. After creating the BID and hiring a new manager, the program became more active, particularly expanding its marketing and promotion efforts. Several long-time board members resigned to open up new leadership opportunities and encourage other businesses to become more active. The BID created a new, stable revenue source to diversify program funding.⁶¹

Program Activities

SCMS has implemented activities across all four Main Street points, with particular emphasis and success in building and street improvements and strong promotion efforts to attract more regional shoppers and tourists. After receiving state designation, the board hired Chris Wilson, who had worked in two other Main Street programs, as manager and created an agenda around the four-point approach. After holding a community meeting to involve all interested parties in setting program goals, each committee created a work plan to achieve these goals. Building and sidewalk improvements were the first priority. SCMS advanced building renovation projects by creating a small fund for matching storefront grants,⁶² conducting workshops on building design, offering free design help through the Oklahoma Main Streets program, and encouraging individual property owners to make improvements. From 1993 to 1995, 10 renovation projects were completed. While some projects benefited from design or grant assistance, they were largely driven by business or property owners who designed and funded the projects themselves. There was shared understanding of the need to maintain a western style and restore historic building features, but

⁶⁰ SCMS sells T-shirts, caps, and other merchandise at its own offices, at events, and through Langston's, a large western wear store in the district.

⁶¹ The city ordinance established the BID for a ten-year period.

⁶² Money from Southwestern Bell was used to create the \$5,000 fund, which provided grants up to \$500.

no design guidelines were put in place. Renovations at prominent properties, such as Langston's western wear store (Figure 14), motivated other owners to improve their buildings. During this period, SCMS discovered that the district's existing industrial zoning posed an obstacle to attracting new retail and service businesses and did not protect the district's character. SCMS proposed a new zoning district for the four-block core area and worked with the planning department to prepare regulations for the new district. These efforts led to a 1996 Oklahoma City ordinance that created the Stockyards City Development District as a mixed-use retail and commercial district with new allowable uses and development and design regulations. The Stockyards City Urban Design Committee was created to approve the design of new development projects, exterior building improvements, demolition, and public improvements.

Figure 14.

Langston's



Street and sidewalk reconstruction was completed in 1997 after a five-year effort. For this project, SCMS held a design charrette to generate its own ideas for a new streetscape and then asked the city to fund and construct the new design. Business and property owners used their personal relationships with the mayor and city councilors to lobby for funding, which took several years to secure via the transfer of money left over from another public works project. When the street improvements were finished, SCMS sought to create a visual focal point for the district,⁶³ settling on a sculpture that celebrated the district's western heritage to be installed at the central intersection. The sculpture, *Headin' to Market*, was completed and unveiled in October 2000, after several years devoted to raising funds, selecting an artist and design, and securing permission from UMB Bank, on whose property the structure was installed (Figure 15). Half the funds were raised by local donations, with the other half to come from state bond proceeds.⁶⁴

⁶³ A historic design was embedded in the new central intersection to serve this purpose, but it did not succeed because the design was hard to see from the street level.

⁶⁴ A legal challenge delayed the bond funds and SCMS secured a bank loan, guaranteed by several businesspeople, to bridge the bond funds and allow the project to be completed. Bond funding is still uncertain; an alternative plan may be required to repay the bridge loan.

Figure 15.

Headin' to Market

The Main Street program has strengthened Stockyards City as a regional shopping and tourist destination through events, advertising, and public relations that use a western heritage theme to promote the district. This theme, built upon the district's businesses, is consistently reinforced in the SCMS steer-head gate logo, its special events and brochures, and the public sculpture. Each year, SCMS has sponsored two large events to attract people to the district. In 1993, it held its first Stockyard Stampede, which included bull riding and a big show with country and western music. The cost of this big event almost bankrupted the organization, so subsequent events have placed less emphasis on using big-name entertainers to attract visitors. Over the past several years, SCMS has concentrated on the Cowboy Christmas in December (with a cowboy Santa and parade) and the May Stockyard Stampede (with bull rides and country music). These events draw several thousand people from the metropolitan area, build awareness and a customer base for the district, and strengthen its image as a center for western heritage and businesses. SCMS organizes cooperative merchant advertising to advertise the two events and to promote the district in visitor and tourist guides. SCMS also worked with the Oklahoma City Transportation Department to install 16 signs at major intersections to help direct people to the district. Finally, the current SCMS manager worked with the regional chamber and a marketing association to identify key media contacts and then invited them to visit the district and learn more about the Main Street program. These personal relationships and the reporters' firsthand knowledge of the program have increased media coverage.

Economic restructuring and public safety have been secondary activities for SCMS. Its key economic restructuring role is providing information and brokering resources for existing entrepreneurs and for businesses seeking to locate in the district. SCMS has marketed state and city technical assistance and financing programs to local businesses, helping several firms to secure technical assistance, facade grants, or loans from the state Main Street office and Oklahoma City's Enterprise Community programs. While no formal business recruitment plan exists, SCMS helps firms seeking to locate in Stockyards City find suitable space by maintaining an inventory of

vacant properties and by referrals to property owners. In some cases, SCMS has been more active in shaping economic uses; it worked with Oklahoma City to attract the International Rodeo Association to Stockyards City and is seeking to relocate a mission for the homeless that merchants believe hurts the district's image and discourages customers.

The Main Street program's public safety work focuses on improving the responsiveness of local police to business concerns about such public nuisances as loitering, panhandling, and public drunkenness. During the past year, businesses concluded that the district's assigned beat officer exacerbated problems by being too lenient with offenders. SCMS organized a letter-writing campaign and worked with the city manager and police department to get a new beat officer assigned in May 2002. Regular communication with the new officer is easy; his desk is in the SCMS office. SCMS also passes on business issues and complaints to the police department and follows up on them.

Over 10 years, SCMS has helped to transform Stockyards City into a more attractive and vibrant commercial district and has established it as a regional shopping destination. Building and infrastructure improvements have created an attractive core district. State figures track \$3.9 million in private building improvements and \$1.4 million in public infrastructure investment from 1993 to 2002. Physical improvements and an improved image also helped to attract new businesses.⁶⁵ Marketing and promotion efforts expanded the district's customer base beyond farmers and ranchers to include people from the metropolitan area and tourists.⁶⁶ Finally, SCMS expanded the business community's capacity to fund and coordinate district improvement and marketing efforts by building the Main Street organization, creating a BID, and fostering strong relationships with the city and state governments and regional economic development entities.

Despite these successes, Stockyards City still faces several challenges. While ground-floor space is largely occupied, there are many upper-story vacancies. As yet there is no strategy to attract appropriate uses and generate the investment to renovate the space for these uses. The district is an island within the surrounding poor residential neighborhoods and its revitalization has not benefited its neighbors. Further deterioration and disinvestment in these neighborhoods is a potential threat to Stockyards City's long-term health.

⁶⁵ The exact number of new businesses is uncertain. State figures cite 61 net business openings, relocations, and expansions, but do not break out business openings. One board member estimated that there are about 20 new businesses compared with 1992.

⁶⁶ One business owner indicated that his customers in the early 1990s were mostly associated with business at the Oklahoma National Stockyards but are now primarily tourists and residents of the five-county region.

Main Street Program Adaptation

Standard Main Street approaches have worked well in Stockyards City, which, with its small core area, tight-knit business community, and traditional role in serving the farm sector, is reminiscent of a small town. Organizational development drew on local business leadership and financial support. Modest education, design assistance, and incentives generated widespread building improvements. Promotion and marketing efforts built on strong historic assets and a visitor market to expand the district's customer base, a common strategy of small-town programs. Yet despite the strong fit of the standard Main Street model, Stockyards City still faced urban challenges: addressing crime and homelessness, building a large volunteer base, and advocating to improve city services and secure city funding. To meet these challenges, SCMS changed the standard Main Street model in several ways:

- ▶ SCMS advocated for better police service, serving as a liaison between businesses and the police department, and working closely with the beat police officer.
- ▶ SCMS worked to relocate a homeless shelter and established a special committee to handle the issue.
- ▶ SCMS devoted significant staff and board time to working with city government and building relationships with city officials.
- ▶ SCMS relied more heavily on staff than on volunteers to plan and implement activities and created a BID to institutionalize funding.
- ▶ Stockyards City also applied the Main Street organization model in a flexible way. It worked outside the organization committee to address membership and funding issues when stronger board and business community leadership was needed. Ad hoc committees were created to manage some projects, and the organization committee directed special events in some years.

Lessons and Effective Practices

Stockyards City's experience provides three lessons on applying the Main Street approach in city neighborhoods.

1. One lesson is the importance of city government to revitalization efforts and the extensive work required to gain city government support. This work includes advocating for the district, building relationships with city political leaders and staff at several departments, and persistently pursuing city action on small and large matters.
2. A second lesson is that a BID can be a viable funding mechanism for inner-city business districts under the right circumstances. These conditions include a record of success to demonstrate the return from new BID assessments, strong leadership from prominent property owners to convince other property owners to participate, and a supportive city government.
3. Third, Stockyards City demonstrates that urban neighborhoods can attract a regional and visitor market when unique destinations exist and the district is well-promoted.

Several effective tools and practices have contributed to SCMS accomplishments. SCMS has worked hard to build strong relationships with city and state government officials, drawing on board members' personal relationships and on direct outreach by the Main Street manager. It has capitalized on these relationships to advocate vigorously for the district. SCMS has promoted the district in a number of effective, coordinated ways:

- Holding two annual events built around the district's western heritage
- Cultivating media coverage
- Placing group advertising in tourist and visitor publications
- Publishing high-quality information brochures (a walking tour and business directory) to attract and orient visitors
- Incorporating a consistent logo and theme in marketing materials, events, and merchandise

Finally, SCMS established a BID to institutionalize private funding for the program and reduce its dependence on city grants.

Conclusions and Reflections

Stockyards City Main Streets has successfully used the Main Street model to revitalize its commercial district, relying largely on traditional Main Street activities and assets often found in small towns. Nonetheless, its urban context has posed challenges that require it to rely heavily on staff and devote significant time and effort to advocating and building relationships with city government. SCMS also faces homelessness and public safety issues, but these have been secondary matters.

Despite the district's small-town character, Stockyards City's experience yields important lessons and effective practices for other inner-city commercial districts. It demonstrates the key role of Main Street organizations in securing critical city government attention, resources, and support. Stockyards City Main Street also marketed and promoted the district effectively, using district assets to build a strong image and coordinating a number of promotional approaches to expand its customer base. Other inner-city neighborhoods have their own assets, not the Stockyards City set, but they too can coordinate promotion under a common message and cultivate the media as part of promotion. Finally, inner-city districts may want to seriously consider establishing a BID to institutionalize funding for a Main Street or other commercial district program when key property owners and city government will support BID formation.

Business District and Neighborhood Context

The Washington Gateway Main Street District is a 1.4-mile section of Washington Street that runs through Boston's South End and Lower Roxbury neighborhoods. Seventy percent of the district is in a National Historic District with the largest intact Victorian neighborhood in the United States. Washington Street is also one of the nation's largest urban renewal areas, with many city-owned sites that were redeveloped in the past few years after remaining vacant for several decades. The district includes more than 100 small businesses, some public and institutional uses, and extensive housing. In addition to many low-rise historic row houses, Washington Street includes many mid-rise and high-rise low-income housing developments (Figure 16). Six neighborhood associations represent parts of the South End perpendicular to Washington Street.

Figure 16.

Cathedral Public Housing



The Washington Gateway district has a population diverse in race, ethnicity, and income. According to a recent market study, the district's trade-area population is 31 percent white, 39 percent black, 20 percent Asian, and 16 percent Hispanic.⁶⁷ Households in the trade area are split fairly evenly among four income groups:⁶⁸ below \$15,000, \$15,000 to \$35,000, \$35,000 to \$75,000, and over \$75,000. This mix is changing, however, as new development projects attract more middle- and upper-income residents to the area. In the 1990s, the area population grew only slightly, with the estimated number of 1998 residents only 1 percent above the 1990 census count of 31,999.

The Origins of the Main Street Program

In 1987 the elevated Orange Line subway that ran along Washington Street was dismantled. Long delays in determining a permanent replacement for the Orange Line left the district poorly served by public transportation and with blighted streets and sidewalks (since these improvements were tied to new transportation). Along with the many vacant city-owned parcels and deteriorated public housing, these conditions hindered reinvestment and new development. In 1995, frustrated by the lack of progress in replacing the transit line and improving the street, neighborhood association leaders approached Boston's mayor to request more attention to Washington Street's condition. Mayor Menino responded by appointing the Washington Street Task Force to come up with revitalization strategies. This task force included neighborhood residents, community activists, business owners, and city government officials. When the Task Force completed its report in 1997, the Washington Gateway Main Street (WGMS) program was established to help implement Task Force recommendations and received designation as a Main Street District under the Boston Main Street program. Washington Gateway's mission statement and work plan are drawn from the Task Force Action Plan.

Organization and Funding

Since its inception, WGMS has involved a large and active volunteer base that allows it to operate effectively with a limited staff and budget. WGMS is a 501 (c)(3) corporation with a nine-person board of directors and four committees that closely parallel the Main Street model: promotions, volunteers, design, and economic restructuring. However, the Design Committee includes four active subcommittees that work on art projects, traffic and parking, ad hoc projects, and business assistance (jointly with the economic restructuring committee). A full-time Main Street manager oversees the program, working with 35 to 40 committee members and 100 to 150 additional volunteers who help with events and special projects. While the leaders and volunteers are about 85 percent residents, business involvement has increased in the past few years as more firms have located in the district and both old and new businesses have witnessed the program's impact. Resident volunteers are primarily white and from the middle- and higher-income segments of the community. WGMS has found it difficult to recruit active volunteers from residents and tenant associations in the district's many low-income housing developments, although it works with these associations on specific events and activities.

⁶⁷ These ratios are similar to 2000 Census data for the seven census tracts that border the district, which were 37 percent white, 35 percent black, 12.5 percent Asian, 19.9 percent Hispanic.

⁶⁸ Exact percentages are 29.5 percent below \$15,000, 20.6 percent in the \$15,000 to \$35,000 range, 25.9 percent in the \$35,000 to \$75,000 range, and 23.9 percent over \$75,000.

The Washington Gateway Main Street 2001 budget totaled \$76,362, with staff and overhead costs representing 82 percent of expenses and technical assistance accounting for the remaining 18 percent. Gifts and grants from city agencies, businesses, and individuals are the primary WGMS funding source, providing 80 percent of 2001 revenue. Rent and utilities always have been donated to the program; the Boston Housing Authority and Cathedral Tenants Association donated them for the first two years, and a local property owner has contributed them ever since. Washington Gateway also generates revenue through a major annual fund-raiser and through support from private developers, residents, and the area's neighborhood associations. Beyond these operating funds, WGMS received \$100,000 from the Boston Main Street program for facade improvement grants. Large-scale capital projects, including street and sidewalk reconstruction, have been funded by city and state agencies.

WGMS has cultivated strong relationships with neighborhood associations, local nonprofit organizations, and the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) to advance its agenda. Relationships with neighborhood associations, facilitated by overlapping membership between the associations and WGMS, help foster neighborhood consensus on proposed development projects and advocacy with city and state agencies. The WGMS board president works at BRA, a city agency that controls urban renewal sites and reviews proposed development projects. Her job includes ensuring that the Main Street program's design guidelines and community views are considered in the BRA review of development projects. WGMS also worked with Project Place to get four years of funding for Project Place clients to keep the district clean. This partnership countered local stereotypes about homeless persons while allowing them to connect with the community. Unfortunately, it was discontinued after the four-year funding from Mellon Bank ended.⁶⁹

Program Activities

WGMS has undertaken a comprehensive agenda to rebuild Washington Street into a grand mixed-use street with vibrant pedestrian activity and ground-floor retail stores to serve the neighborhood's diverse customers. It first developed a strong vision statement and revitalization goals from the Washington Street Task Force report and then recruited committee members and formulated a specific agenda and action plan. In the first years, when transportation and street improvements were several years off and development interest was weak, the program focused on making the street clean and safe, building relationships with businesses, running promotional events, advocating with the city and state for street and transit improvements, and working to remove roll-down grates. During this period, WGMS also publicized its activities and sought to attract high-quality development to the street.

When development interest increased, the program asserted itself as a reviewer of development proposals and worked with developers and city agencies to ensure that the proposed projects fit the program's vision for Washington Street. Through its design work, promotion, and strong advocacy with developers and city agencies, WGMS has changed the development climate, accelerated public improvements, and shaped the design and uses in many new development projects. In the process, it has helped transform a largely vacant and blighted corridor into a more attractive, vibrant, and densely developed mixed-use street.

⁶⁹ Mellon Bank, the program's corporate buddy, committed funding for four years.

Design Committee

WGMS's largest and most active committee, the design committee has three main activities:

- ▶ Reviewing the design of all proposed development projects
- ▶ Advocating for transit and street improvements and solutions to parking concerns
- ▶ Overseeing improvement initiatives, such as facade grants, public art projects, and historical markers

Through its design committee, WGMS has reviewed proposed developments to direct each project's design toward the program's vision for the district. The committee, led by a local architect and professor, reviews all projects for compliance with its design guidelines and meets with developers to discuss how to improve the project design and foster a vital mixed-use district. The committee looks for ground-floor retail space, large front windows and prominent residential entrances, a 70-foot height limit, interior ventilation to accommodate potential restaurants, underground parking, and lighting to illuminate the street. Design committee review is extensive, often involving weekly meetings over several months to raise and resolve issues. In this process, staff and committee members solicit input from neighborhood associations affected by the project and help work out their concerns about the project. Once a proposed project is consistent with the Main Street program's design and use goals, WGMS assists and supports the developer in gaining city permits and approvals. BRA officials advise developers to meet with the WGMS manager as they plan projects, which helps WGMS convince developers to incorporate its design guidelines in the initial building design.

Via the traffic and parking subcommittee, WGMS worked to accelerate and shape the new Silver Line transit service and street reconstruction. WGMS representatives regularly attended meetings about the Silver Line improvements with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and Boston Transportation Department (BTD); they pushed to keep the process moving and to shape the streetscape design. For example, when WGMS did not approve of the design for new bus shelters, representatives convinced the MBTA to allow them to prepare an alternative design. A special committee worked with the MBTA to design new shelters to complement the district's historic aesthetic, and MBTA adopted the design. WGMS is also preparing historical information to be placed on kiosks at each stop. Street reconstruction was completed in summer 2002 in time for the start of the new Silver Line service, a rapid ground-level bus line.

The design committee has also worked on facade improvement grants, art and beautification projects, and parking issues. WGMS helps business and property owners upgrade their facades, providing encouragement, design assistance, and matching grants. Other improvement efforts include planning and raising funds for public art projects at key district sites, flower planting, and park refurbishing. The traffic and parking subcommittee develops solutions for problems with parking and traffic flow on Washington Street. Its brightest idea was encouraging new developments to include more underground parking than was needed by the project's occupants. Excess parking is sold to other neighborhood residents, which relieves parking scarcity and reduces resident opposition to metered parking for businesses. About 300 of the 856 parking spaces created in new developments are intended for sale to residents in the surrounding area.

Economic Restructuring Committee

The WGMS economic restructuring committee works to attract new development and helps existing businesses stay in the district and cater to the district's diverse consumers. Program staff members contacted local developers and asked them what types of projects they would consider on Washington Street. The manager spurred developers' interest by showing them potential sites and new businesses and planned projects in the area and by telling them about the Main Street program's revitalization vision and plans. At the same time, the economic restructuring committee encouraged the BRA to offer its parcels for development and to set allowable uses that were consistent with the Main Street vision and developers' ideas. As a result, several BRA-owned parcels have been transferred and developed by for-profit and nonprofit developers. Projects on city-owned sites have sparked private development interest in Washington Street (Figure 17) and have generated many new projects and development proposals over the past four years.

The Main Street manager also helps existing businesses address business, real estate, and permitting issues. As residential gentrification and high commercial rents threaten to displace merchants who serve low- and moderate-income households, this work seeks to maintain a diverse business mix that caters to the area's varied population. WGMS encouraged two banks to stay in the district

Figure 17.

Washington Street Development Activity



and was very active in retaining Don Quijote Market, a 20-year-old grocery store that serves the district's low-income and Hispanic residents. The WGMS manager helped the owner secure a long-term lease with the Boston Housing Authority and then referred him to the Boston Local Development Corporation, which provided technical assistance and financing to expand the store. WGMS also provided a facade grant for the expansion. Since many new stores cater to middle- and high-income residents, the manager encourages them to offer something for other community residents. For example, she convinced a new grocery store to offer products sought by the nearby public housing residents along with its gourmet foods and persuaded a new high-end restaurant to offer nutrition classes at a local grammar school. Beyond fostering a diverse business mix,

WGMS supports the inclusion of middle-income and affordable housing in all new residential projects. While city policy requires all new developments to include at least 10 percent affordable units, the Main Street manager estimates that approximately one-third of new residential units are affordable. These efforts reflect the WGMS commitment to a revitalized Washington Street that is diverse and accessible to many cultural, age, and income groups.

Promotions Committee

The promotions committee sponsors community events, organizes retail promotions, and generates media coverage and public awareness of the program. Events that bring the community together and foster an improved image for Washington Street include:

- Discover Washington Street, a holiday shopping event
- National Night Out, a police event cosponsored by WGMS to bring community residents and businesses together to celebrate the community
- Old Washington Street, a preservation event to tell Bostonians about Washington Street, new businesses, and development plans; this event featured images that compared the old historic district with planned developments

Retail promotions are held around new business openings and holiday shopping (in conjunction with the Boston Main Street program's citywide Boston Unwrapped campaign). In one retail promotion, the manager combined five new businesses that appeal to similar customers into one ribbon-cutting event and promoted it through a postcard mailing to residents and a local newspaper ad. WGMS often organizes group merchant advertising linked to these promotional events to draw shoppers to Washington Street. WGMS has been particularly effective in using media coverage to promote the district and the Main Street program. Press advisories and releases, issued to about a dozen news outlets for all events, projects, and major program activities, generate considerable coverage.

Volunteer Committee

Through a separate committee, WGMS recruits and manages its large volunteer base. The manager works with committee members and neighborhood associations to recruit volunteers and meets prospective volunteers. WGMS tracks volunteers with a computer contact database and sends regular e-mails to inform them about meetings and events, solicit their involvement, and alert them to important issues and public meetings. Regular events are held to thank and acknowledge volunteers for their contributions to the program. Volunteers play an important role in Main Street projects and in effecting change in the district, which motivates them to stay involved. WGMS's successful recruitment and retention of volunteers have greatly contributed to its accomplishments.

While public safety is not a major program activity, WGMS works with the police department and crime watch groups to help address crime issues. When appropriate, WGMS organizes meetings between businesses and the local police department. The manager reports crime issues to the police and encourages businesses to report them. WGMS also has promoted a positive relationship with the police department by participating in police-sponsored events, e.g., National Night Out, and organizing a ribbon cutting for a new police station.

WGMS has made a significant contribution to rebuilding Washington Street, attracting and accelerating new development and shaping its character. During the past four and one-half years, \$400 million in new development has been attracted to Washington Street. These projects built 1,571 new or renovated housing units, created 136,000 square feet of new retail space, brought 30 new businesses into the commercial district, and added 856 parking spaces. During summer 2002 the district was filled with activity as the street improvements were being completed and new residential and mixed-use development projects were under construction. New restaurants and businesses were opening, and pedestrians and shoppers filled the street. The new development projects advance the Washington Street Task Force and Main Street program's vision of a mixed-use district with a major, vibrant, and attractive pedestrian-oriented avenue. After five years, the Main Street organization is strong and has a large volunteer base to undertake future activities.

Main Street Program Adaptation

WGMS made five important changes to the Main Street model in applying it to the Washington Gateway district.

First, through the Washington Street Task Force, it used a so-called "visioning" process to create its revitalization agenda. That agenda called for addressing the urban context by securing mayoral interest and involvement; having broad resident, business, civic, and city representation; and taking time to gain support from all segments of a diverse community. This extensive process allowed WGMS to begin implementation with community-supported goals, an agenda, and directives for action.

Second, WGMS changed the typical Main Street committee structure by using its board in place of the organization committee and creating a committee devoted exclusively to recruiting, retaining, and managing volunteers. However, the absence of a separate organization committee has underemphasized long-term planning and fund-raising.

A third, and perhaps most significant, adaptation is the heavy reliance on redevelopment projects to change the district's design and uses, which differs from the incremental approach of most Main Street programs. Working with the BRA and developers to attract and undertake projects on vacant parcels generated substantial change in a short time. This strategy, however, is not easily transferable to districts where city-owned land, favorable market conditions, and a pool of potential developers do not exist.

Fourth, Washington Gateway Main Street devoted significant time to advocacy and relationship building with a number of city and state agencies both to shape the district's infrastructure and to shape development outcomes.

Finally, the program's attention to serving multiple ethnic and income markets speaks to the demographic diversity of urban neighborhoods and is one response to gentrification. WGMS's approach included retaining business that serve important customer segments, working with merchants to alter their products and services to serve diverse groups, and encouraging businesses to hire neighborhood residents and give back to the neighborhood through community service projects.

Lessons and Effective Practices

WGMS demonstrates the value of a shared revitalization vision and the potential to direct development outcomes toward this vision when large segments of the community are organized to advocate for it.

1. The broad consensus on a new commercial corridor developed by the Washington Street Task Force gave the Main Street program a clear implementation agenda and helped mobilize community support for this agenda.
2. A second lesson is the importance of mayoral support in reaching revitalization goals. Mayor Menino established the Task Force and supported the Main Street program's work to implement its recommendations. Mayoral support gave the WGMS agenda strong standing with developers and city agencies and attracted publicity and interest to the district.

Washington Gateway Main Street employed four effective practices that other neighborhood Main Street programs can use:

- Aggressively shaping plans for city-owned land and reviewing and influencing the design and uses in proposed development projects and the design of new infrastructure
- Managing and sustaining a large, active volunteer base through frequent communication, using them to solve problems and effect change, and recognizing their hard work
- Building strong working relationships with city agencies and neighborhood organizations on the staff level and through the presence of WGMS leaders in local organizations and as city agency staff
- Maintaining a high profile for the Main Street program through fund-raising and promotional events and ongoing media coverage

Conclusions and Reflections

Washington Gateway Main Street has effectively applied and adapted the Main Street program to improve its business district. It applied standard Main Street design and promotion tools and exemplifies the Main Street model's emphasis on a volunteer-driven organization. WGMS also changed the standard framework to fit its needs by expanding the economic restructuring agenda to emphasize attracting and shaping new large-scale development, adding advocacy for city services and resources, building coalitions with other community-based organizations, and encouraging businesses to serve diverse community markets and needs.

Washington Gateway's experience highlights the value of developing an extensive and cohesive vision early in the revitalization process and generating major community support for and participation in implementing the vision. Through this vision, active management of the development process, and strong relationships with city agencies, Washington Gateway Main Street has expedited redevelopment and shaped it to reflect its vision for a vibrant, attractive, and economically diverse district.

Case study research was based on five information sources: (1) internal program documents and materials, (2) formal reports related to the program, (3) a tour of the business district, (4) a detailed interview with the Main Street manager, and (5) interviews with concerned parties from the district and the city. The reference section details the formal reports and concerned-party interviews used to conduct the research and prepare the case study summaries.

Boston

Citywide Interviews with Concerned Parties

- ▶ Peg Barringer, OKM Associates, consultant to Boston Main Street Program and district
- ▶ Joshua Bloom, National Main Street Center
- ▶ Alix Cantave, Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- ▶ Emily Haber, Karen Kegler, and Janice Kenney, Boston Main Street Program

Washington Gateway Main Street

Formal Reports and Documents

- ▶ Washington Gateway Main Street Application, 1997
- ▶ Washington Street Task Force, *A New Washington Street: Boston's Main Street for a New Century*, Task Force Final Report and Recommendations, 1997

Interviews

- ▶ Freddie Blanco, business owner, Don Quijote Market
- ▶ Tristan Blake, executive director, South End Health Center; property owner
- ▶ Laura Brennan, business owner, Café Umbra Restaurant
- ▶ Marie Esposito, Project Place development director
- ▶ Herb Fremin, architect; Washington Gateway board member and design committee chairperson
- ▶ Sheila Grove, Washington Gateway Main Street program manager
- ▶ Randi Lathrop, Washington Gateway Main Street board president; previous president of the Blackstone Neighborhood Association; Boston Redevelopment Authority employee
- ▶ Monsignor Murphy, Holy Cross Cathedral; institutional partner and developer of Rollins Place
- ▶ Karen and David Parker, Boston Restoration Incorporated, property owners and developers

- Bob Wells, resident; design committee member
- Ellen Witt, Washington Gateway Main Street board member

Oklahoma City

Citywide Interviews with Concerned Parties

- Steve Rhodes, Oklahoma City Planning Department
- Mathew Weaver, Jim Rogers, Oklahoma Main Street program

Stockyards City Main Street Program

Formal Reports and Documents

- Stockyards City State Main Street Program Application, 1992
- Oklahoma City Municipal Code, Article IV, Chapter 59, Section 59-4960, Stockyard City Development District

Interviews

- Barney Brown, business owner and property owner; former board member
- LeRoy DeShields, business owner and property owner; board member
- Sergeant Ty Lindsey, Oklahoma City Police Department, beat police officer
- Kim McCoy, Main Street program manager
- Geri Montgomery, former Main Street manager
- Ann Shettles, bank executive; board member
- Dick Stubbs, Cattleman's Café, business owner and property owner; board member

St. Paul, Minnesota

Citywide Interviews with Concerned Parties

- Mike Lafave, Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation

District del Sol Main Street Program

Formal Reports and Documents

- Hay Dobbs P.A., *Riverview Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program*, 1999
- Riverview Economic Development Association, *Building a Foundation for Growth, 2000–2001 Annual Report*
- Judith Tennebaum, Tennebaum Consulting, and Janna King, Economic Development Services, *Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program Phase 1 Evaluation*, 2002

Interviews

- Doug Copeland, District del Sol Main Street program manager
- Sara English, business owner, Herradura Boutique; marketing committee member
- Maria Flores, business owner, Novedades Lupita; marketing committee member
- Fred Frias, business owner, Boca Chica Restaurant
- Jim Gilbert, Edina Realty; resident; property owner; tenant recruitment committee member
- Julie Eigenfeld, executive director, Riverview Economic Development Association
- Martha Faust, St. Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development
- Steve Faust, West Side District Council lead organizer
- Karen Reid, Neighborhood Development Alliance; board member; development/design committee member
- Paul Schnell, St. Paul Police Department
- Rick Sosa, Cherokee State Bank; REDA board member
- Andrea Specht, St. Paul Girl Scout Council; development/design committee member
- Kirk Van Blaircom, business owner, Pyramid Sign; marketing committee member

Payne Avenue Main Street Program*Formal Reports and Documents*

- Judith Tennebaum, Tennebaum Consulting, and Janna King, Economic Development Services, *Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program Phase 1 Evaluation*

Interviews

- Pete Admundson, property and business owner, Borgstrom's Pharmacy; Payne Avenue Business Association
- Mike Anderson, executive director, East Side Neighborhood Development Company
- Mark Cowalczuk, business owner, jewelry store on Arcade Avenue; Payne Avenue Business Association president
- Murph Dawkins, resident, East Side Neighborhood Development Company board; District 5 Planning Council
- Sarah Fehr, East Side Arts Council president
- Jim Johnson, financial manager, East Side Neighborhood Development Company
- Jim Kielkoph, East Side Neighborhood Development Company board president
- Senior Commander Tim Leslie, St. Paul Police Department
- Rich Malloy, planner/economic development manager, St. Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development; previous financial manager, East Side Neighborhood Development Company

- ▶ Maureen Mariano, property and business owner, Schweitz Saloon; Payne Avenue Business Association treasurer
- ▶ Rob Merrill, Summer Patrol Program, St. Paul Police Department, and previously district commander of the East Side
- ▶ Katya Ricketts, Main Street program manager, Main Street program, East Side Neighborhood Development Company
- ▶ Marilyn Trevino, resident

References

Dane, Suzanne G., ed. 1988. *New Directions for Urban Main Streets*. Washington, D.C.: National Main Street Center, National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Dane, Suzanne G. 1997. *Main Street Success Stories*, Washington, D.C.: National Main Street Center, National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Hernandez, Manuel. 2001. *The Impact of Commercial Development on Inner City Revitalization: An Analysis of Projects in Boston*. Master's thesis. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Urban Studies and Planning. July.

Houston, Lawrence O. Jr. 1997. *BIDS: Business Improvement Districts*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute and International Downtown Association.

Mitchell, Jerry. 2001. Business Improvement Districts and the New Revitalization of Downtown. *Economic Development Quarterly* 15(2), May.

Seidman, Karl F. 2001. Wanted: Solutions for America Final Research Report: Boston Main Streets Program. Report prepared for the Pew Partnership, Cambridge, Mass.

Smith, Kennedy, Kate Joncas, and Bill Parrish. 1991. *Revitalizing Downtown*. Washington, D.C.: National Main Street Center, National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Waxman, Andy. 2000. Why Improve Neighborhoods? Shifting the Goals of Inner City Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization. *Projections MIT Student Journal of Planning: Remaking Crisis Cities*, Spring.

Resources for Urban Main Street Programs

National Main Street Center

National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 588-6219
Fax: (202) 588-6050
E-mail: mainst@nthp.org
Web address: www.mainstreet.org

Contacts:

- Kennedy Smith, director
- Doug Loescher, deputy director

The National Main Street Center is the primary national support organization for Main Street programs. Its services include:

- Bookstore/catalog of publications, videos, and handbooks to support Main Street programs, including resources on such related topics such as commercial real estate development, retailing, and market analysis
- Annual survey of Main Street trends and compilation of reinvestment statistics
- Annual National Town Meeting on Main Street (conference for practitioners)
- Training conferences and workshops
- Awards programs
- Contact information for state and city-level program coordinators (on their Web sites); these coordinators are a valuable source of technical assistance and training

Neighborhood Main Street Initiative

Local Initiative Support Corporation

733 3rd Avenue, 8th Floor

New York, NY, 10017

Phone: (202) 588-6219

Fax: (202) 588-6050

Web address: <http://www.liscnet.org/resources>

Contacts:

- Sheila Daniels, senior program officer, sdaniels@liscnet.org, (212) 455-9803
- Alan Levy, AICP, program officer, alevy@liscnet.org, (212) 455-1614

The Neighborhood Main Street Initiative (NMSI) is an economic development program of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) supporting commercial district revitalization programs undertaken by community development corporations (CDCs) based on the “Four Point” Main Street approach. NMSI provides technical assistance, training, networking opportunities, and informational materials to local LISC offices and CDCs, including:

- Technical assistance to help establish a single or multineighborhood commercial corridor revitalization program
- Training workshops on the Main Street approach, strategic visioning, and work plan development
- Help with hiring a program manager
- Assessment/SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of local programs

International Downtown Association

1250 H Street, NW, 10th Floor

Washington, DC 20005

Phone: (202) 393-6801

Fax: (202) 393-6869

Web address: <http://www.ida-downtown.org>

International Downtown Association (IDA) is a membership association of organizations involved in revitalizing and managing downtown business districts. Many of its members are business improvement districts. Its services include:

- Newsletter
- Annual and training conference
- Training workshops
- Bookstore/publications catalog
- Awards program

National Urban Main Street Forum

Notes from idea exchange sessions, speaker presentations, and other information from the first national Urban Main Street Forum, held in Boston, Massachusetts from June 24-26, 2002, are available at the Web site: www.nmsi.org/forum/.

Downtown Research and Development Center

28 West 25th Street, 8th Floor

New York, NY 10010

Phone: (212) 228-0246

Fax: (212) 228-0376

Web address: www.DowntownDevelopment.com

E-mail: info@DowntownDevelopment.com

The Downtown Research and Development Center is a source for newsletters, some free planning tools, and books about issues, trends, and effective practices for commercial district revitalization. The Center's two newsletters, *Downtown Idea Exchange* and *Downtown Promotion Report*, track news, techniques, and projects from around the country.

Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington

This nonprofit center devoted to promoting excellence in local government has a Web site with extensive background information about local economic development approaches. The section on downtown development at <http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Econ/ed-cbd.aspx> includes useful resource materials, including sample design guidelines, program examples, and information about theme-based downtowns.

Center for Community Economic Development

610 Langdon Street, 3rd Floor

Madison, WI 53703

Phone: (608) 265-8136

Fax: (608) 263-4999

Web address: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/>

This is a center within the University of Wisconsin Extension Service committed to applying and transferring multidisciplinary knowledge to help people understand community change and identify opportunities. It has a large collection of Web-based resources related to commercial district revitalization, including an extensive guide to downtown and business market analysis at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/dma>.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Several Web sites provide information about Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) theory and practices, including research and practitioners' tools. Two helpful sites are:

- ▶ www.ncpc.org (National Crime Prevention Council, which offers a publication entitled *Designing Safer Communities: A CPTED Handbook*)
- ▶ <http://www.thecptedpage.wsu.edu> (a clearinghouse on CPTED hosted by the Washington State University Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture)

Boston Main Streets Program

Office of Business Development
26 Court Street, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02108
Phone: (617) 635-0115
Fax: (617) 635-0282
E-mail: MainStreets@ci.boston.ma.us
Web address: <http://www.cityofboston.gov/mainstreets>

Contact:

- ▶ Emily Haber, director, (617) 635-0293

As the oldest and largest citywide Main Street program, the Boston Main Streets Program is a valuable source of lessons and experience in applying the Main Street approach to inner-city commercial districts. The Web site has news and background information about the program and Web links and contact information for the 20 neighborhood programs.

About the Author

Karl F. Seidman is senior lecturer in the department of Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He also is an economic development consultant with expertise in commercial district revitalization, economic development plans and strategies, and the design, management and evaluation of economic development finance programs.

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