



Creating Jobs. Keeping Character.

Main Street *IS* Economic Development

Why revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts?

Did you know a community’s central business district can account for as much as 30 percent of a town’s jobs and 40 percent of its tax base? Think of your district as a whole entity and you will be amazed at the economic impact in private and public dollars, business and job creation and volunteer hours contributed. While the Downtown or Neighborhood Commercial District is an economic asset, it also a community’s crossroad – a place in our hearts and minds that evokes strong emotions and helps define our identity.

The Main Street Approach

“Every community and commercial district is different, with its own distinctive assets and sense of place. The Main Street Approach™ offers community-based revitalization initiatives with a practical, adaptable framework for downtown transformation that is easily tailored to local conditions. The Main Street Approach helps communities get started with revitalization and grows with them over time. Main Street Alabama is part of a nation-wide network working with Main Street America, the National Main Street Center.” (www.mainstreet.org/mainstreetamerica/theapproach)

Main Street Alabama requires Designated Main Street communities to report economic impact in their districts each month. Numbers are gathered regarding public and private investments on building renovations, new construction, public improvement projects, businesses opening and closing, jobs gained and lost as well as volunteer hours contributed to the district. The numbers in the blue box represent cumulative totals for ALL our designated communities since June of 2014. To see the impact numbers of individual communities, visit mainstreetalabama.org, click on communities and scroll to the bottom of the community page.

Focused Approach

Main Street Alabama uses a proven model that has produced impressive revitalization results in many other states: the Main Street Four-Point Approach®. This method leverages local assets to revitalize their districts, from cultural or architectural heritage to local enterprises and community pride. The four

points of the Main Street approach work together to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort.

In past years approaches to revitalization, from urban renewal to paint-up and fix-up projects, have failed because they focused on just one or two problems, rather than dealing with the full commercial district. The Main Street Program’s approach to district revitalization has succeeded in thousands of towns and cities throughout the nation. Main Street is a volunteer driven, boots on the ground, implementation-oriented



program that focuses on community assets and authentic history. Designated Main Street communities are required to have staff, a board and committees to implement the desired projects in the Four-Point Approach.

The Main Street Approach is a process through which the four points are integrated into a comprehensive program designed to build upon local opportunities and to build community self-reliance for district economic development. This involves not only attention to all four points of the Main Street Approach, but also careful adaptation of the Approach to each community’s specific needs. Main Street Alabama begins the journey of a newly designated community with an organizational kick off, followed closely with a Resource Team. This visit is comprehensive, and the team’s investigation, observations, recommendations and implementation strategies follow the Main Street Four-Point Approach to downtown revitalization: Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Vitality.

Organization: A strong organizational foundation is key for a sustainable Main Street revitalization effort. This can

take many forms, from a stand-alone non-profit organization, to a special assessment district, to a program housed in a municipality or existing community development entity. Regardless of the organizational type, the focus is on ensuring that all organizational resources (partners, funding, volunteers) are mobilized to effectively implement transformative strategies.

Promotion: Promoting Main Street takes many forms, the goal is to position the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and the hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics. This can be done through highlighting cultural traditions, celebrating architecture and history, encouraging local businesses to market cooperatively, offering coordinated specials and sales, and hosting special events aimed at changing perceptions of the district and communicating to residents, investors, businesses and property-owners that this place is special.

Design: A focus on Design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical elements of the district while capitalizing on the unique historic assets that set the commercial district apart. Main Streets enhance their appeal to residents and visitors alike with attention to public space through the creation of pedestrian friendly streets, inclusion of public art in unexpected areas, visual merchandising, adaptive reuse of older and historic buildings, more efficiently-designed buildings, transit-oriented development, and much more.

Economic Vitality: Revitalizing a downtown or neighborhood commercial district requires focusing on the underlying Economic Vitality of the district. This work is rooted in a commitment to making the most of a community's unique sense of place and existing historic assets, harnessing local economic opportunity and creating a supportive business environment for small business owners and the growing scores of entrepreneurs, innovators and localists alike. With the nation-wide growing interest in living downtown, supporting downtown housing is also a key element of building Economic Vitality.

Main Street Programs are more than having great events and making districts look better. At its core, Main Street is an **Economic Development** tool that:

- Enhances the tax base of a community
- Fosters entrepreneurship
- Builds community capacity
- Creates partnerships among key groups in a community
- Market definition tracks where the shoppers are coming from and helps define where to market the community. Trade area definition is where the most reliable customers come from.
- Economic Vitality is the "glue" that puts together the other points and can be the key partner group with peer economic development partners.

Alabama's Downtowns

In Alabama, our downtowns are the heart of our communities. They are the core of our architectural and cultural heritage; the places where people gather to celebrate, the place where communities big and small are reinventing the way Alabama does business.

Today, Alabamians are looking at our downtowns not simply as places for memories but also as places for bold economic opportunity. New restaurants are coming to small towns; long time businesses are discovering new ways to thrive; and creative downtown events are breathing new life into once empty streets. Our communities are rediscovering that the uniqueness of our historic downtowns offers a new frontier for innovation, creativity, collaboration and economic prosperity. Our state recognizes the importance of our downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts in preserving history, celebrating diversity and providing economic opportunity.

In a few short years, Main Street Alabama has expanded to include small towns, cities and urban commercial districts across the state into a network of volunteers, professionals and partners with these simple goals: to provide training, networking, and educational opportunities to galvanize community leaders, merchants and citizens with tools necessary to help turn their downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts into powerful economic development engines.

Main Street Alabama's approach inspires people young and old not only to give back to their community but also to come back to their hometowns – to live, to become entrepreneurs, to breathe new life into our downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts and, most importantly, to remember what is old can be new and thriving again. For more information about Main Street Alabama please visit our website at: mainstreetalabama.org or call 205.910.8819.

Upcoming Training Opportunities

October 24th: Curb'd creates immersive public experiences in the area of a parking space or other public space in a downtown or neighborhood commercial district. The goals of Curb'd are to support business districts by promoting walkability, connectivity, placemaking and to showcase design talent through quasi-temporary public installations. Parklets are a temporary use of a parking space within the public right of way that creates a more pedestrian-friendly environment and expands the social-life of the street.

Dec. 4th: WEBINAR – What is Branding? Decades ago branding was defined as a name, slogan, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these elements that identify products or services of a company. Today branding is a bit more complex, but even more important in today's world of marketing, it's the perception that a consumer has when they hear or think of your business name, service or product.

Resource Team Report: Montevallo

During the Resource Team visit we take time to observe and focus on assets in the community:



People. We look for the ability to look at one's self honestly, to look past the negatives and see a future for the district. We look for a good energy level, for those who live in and love their community and will support the efforts and roll up their sleeves and get to work to accomplish the dream.

Location and History. We look at the proximity to attractions, location and unique history of each community. Why did people settle there originally?

Businesses. We seek to understand the business mix of today while investigating the original economic reasons for settling in the community. Is there an anchor business or institution? We look at the market potential to build up the existing businesses, perhaps adding a new product line or a new business.

Promotion. What are the recreational offerings in the area? Historical or heritage events unique to the community? Image building activity or opportunity to change negative impressions? What activities are in place to help "ring the cash register" for the businesses in the district? Building on the traditional community events and activities already in place help form the foundation for enhanced marketing of the district.

Buildings. We look at the unique stock of buildings in the district and set out on exploring the potential that lies in the district. We know that even those buildings that are underutilized are full of opportunity and with the right mix of marketing, the right mix of businesses, investment in renovation buildings, some elbow grease – those buildings will see new life.

Market Analysis: Heflin

This Market Profile, prepared as part of a more comprehensive market study project and services being provided by Main Street Alabama, highlights and summarizes important demographic, lifestyle and retail data, characteristics and trends



in the marketplace. Heflin Main Street and community partners are taking a pro-active and catalytic approach to planning for the future prosperity of Heflin's traditional downtown business district.

Branding: Jasper

The branding provided by Main Street Alabama:

- To develop a brand system reflective of the energy and activity happening with Downtown Jasper as a place and Jasper Main Street as an organization.
- To use the identity brand system as a tool to capture community pride, encourage ongoing economic development, and cultivate the guest experience in downtown.
- To be respectful of the upcoming branding for Walker County.
- To expand the brand identity to environmental graphics that curate the visitor experience.
- To develop a marketing program around the brand that can be easily expanded and shared. ■



DOWNTOWN
Jasper
Alabama

To learn more,
visit:

mainstreetalabama.org