



Reinvestment Since June 2014



Advocacy in Action

Main Street Alabama started the year with a strong focus on advocacy, ensuring the voices of our communities are heard at every level of government. In January, we hosted our State Day on the Hill in Montgomery, followed by participation in Main Street America's annual Day on the Hill in Washington, D.C. in February. These events provided opportunities to champion the continued growth and success of Main Street programs.

At the state level, staff, board members, and local directors met with legislators at the State House to share the impact of downtown revitalization across Alabama. A special moment included time on the House floor, where Lt. Gov. Will Ainsworth addressed the group and reinforced the importance of Main Street districts. Main Street Alabama also sponsored the Republican and Democratic Caucus Luncheons, giving a dedicated platform to connect with legislators. With more than 270 jobs created, 32,000 volunteer hours contributed, and over \$100 million invested in public and private partnerships in 2025 alone, the value of our work was clear.

In Washington, D.C., State Coordinator Mary Helmer Wirth and Board Chair Jeremy Arthur connected with Alabama's congressional delegation; Senator Tommy Tuberville, Senator Katie Britt, Representatives Robert Aderholt, Mike Rogers, Dale Strong, Shomari Figures, Barry Moore and Terri Sewell to advocate for federal support. These efforts help strengthen small businesses, create jobs, preserve historic character, and drive investment in communities of all sizes.

Advocacy is essential to the success of the Main Street movement. At the local level, it ensures community voices shape downtown priorities. At the state level, it helps secure funding and partnerships that enable communities to thrive. At the national level, it reinforces the importance of continued investment in programs that support economic development and historic preservation.



Main Street Alabama remains committed to building these relationships and sharing success stories. We look forward to welcoming members of our congressional delegation back to Alabama this August to experience firsthand the progress happening across the state.



2026 Summit of Excellence

Opelika Hosts Main Street Alabama Board Meeting

Main Street Alabama kicked off 2026 with its first Board Meeting of the year in the vibrant designated community of Opelika on February 4. We extend a special thank you to City Council President George Allen and Opelika Main Street Executive Director Kelsey Sullivan for their warm welcome and hospitality.

The day began with a Leadership Compass exercise, allowing board members to explore their individual leadership styles and how they can best contribute to the organization’s mission. Productive conversations followed, covering committee updates, upcoming trainings, and exciting initiatives planned for the year ahead.



This meeting also marked a warm welcome for our newest Board members and the 2026 Main Street director liaison:

- Candace Johnson, CTP, TMP – Director of Tourism and Community Engagement at the University of Alabama, bringing expertise in strategic planning, training, and fostering community-business partnerships.
- Paul Pinyan – Executive Director of the Alabama Farmers Federation, with extensive leadership and advocacy experience across the state.

- Dr. Joél Billingsly – Associate Professor at the University of South Alabama, specializing in instructional design, technology, and creating engaged learning communities.
- Angie Pierce – VP of Operations for Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, with over 25 years of experience in the tourism industry.
- Tena King – City Services Director for the City of Gadsden, accomplished small business owner, and active leader in regional organizations.
- DeAnna Hand – Executive Director of Lafayette Main Street, serving as the annual Main Street director liaison.

“We're excited to continue our work in Alabama's Main Street communities this year, building on a strong group of dedicated people who care deeply about strengthening the state's unique downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts,” said Mary Helmer Wirth, Main Street Alabama President & State Coordinator.

With energized leadership and a year full of initiatives ahead, 2026 is already off to a promising start.

Strengthening Leadership at Quarterly Training in Gadsden

On March 25, 2026, Main Street Alabama hosted its Quarterly Training in Gadsden at the Pitman Theater, bringing together community leaders, board members, and partners for an engaging day focused on leadership, strategy, and sustainability.

The training featured Main Street America's Leading for Longevity workshop, led by Jonathan Stone, Program Officer at Main Street America. With more than 20 years of experience in design, economic vitality, and nonprofit leadership, Jonathan guided participants through interactive sessions designed to strengthen strategic capacity, build long-term sustainability, and enhance partnership effectiveness. Attendees engaged in peer learning, hands-on exercises, and left with practical tools, including a personalized 90-day implementation plan for their programs.



In addition, Executive Directors of designated Main Street programs participated in a focused Canva training session led by Kelsey Sullivan, Executive Director of Opelika Main Street. Kelsey shared Canva basics, tips, and tricks to help leaders create compelling graphics and materials for their communities.

Participants left the day energized, equipped with actionable strategies, and ready to lead their programs toward stronger, more resilient downtowns and business districts across Alabama.

Mary's Minute

The first quarter has been a busy and energizing one for Main Street Alabama. We kicked it off with a staff retreat focused on our newly adopted five-year strategic plan, guiding our work through the end of 2030. I am excited about the ambitious path ahead and confident in our ability to carry it out. It has been especially fun to dive into implementation, tracking, and scheduling—yes, I am a nerd, but I find that part of our work entertaining!

Our new Sweet Home Towns Podcast has quickly become a monthly highlight for me. Through these conversations, we are learning from people who are deeply passionate about Main Street, while sharing their insights, challenges, and successes for all to learn from. I hope you take a few minutes and give it a listen.

Our Main Street Directors joined us in Montgomery for our annual Day on the Hill. They did an outstanding job communicating about the work happening in their communities and advocating on behalf of Main Street. We are fortunate to work alongside directors and their boards who are willing to share their passion for Main Street and the impact it has had on their communities.

Our first Main Street Alabama board meeting of the year welcomed new board members, who brought additional energy and perspective to an already engaged board! Many thanks to Kelsey for hosting us in Opelika and providing such a welcoming setting.

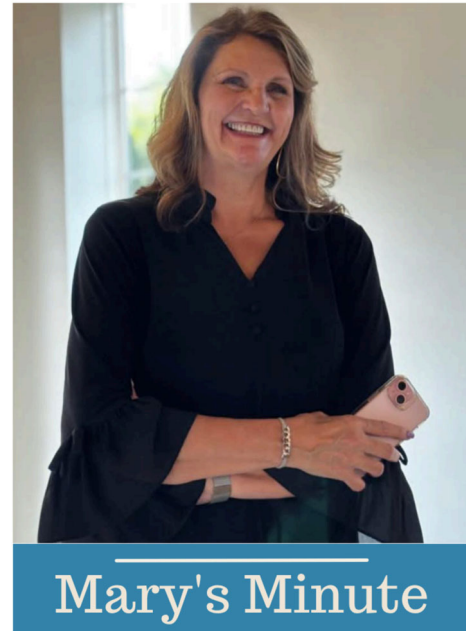
This quarter also included two Four-Point training courses, the continuation of the new director's onboarding process, and a quarterly training held just last week in Gadsden. Kay was a wonderful host, and engagement in both the Designated and Network programs remains strong.

On a more personal note, I was able to squeeze in a bit of time with my sisters during their quick getaway to Alabama. Together, we enjoyed visiting five Main Street districts: Jasper, Gadsden, Fort Payne, South Huntsville, and Madison—it was so fun to showcase just a small part of the job I am blessed to have with my family.

I'll close this minute with a paragraph from our strategic plan written by the brilliant Tripp Muldrow:

Main Street Alabama has proven that revitalization is not a single act; it is a rhythm—a pulse that runs through every corner of our state. Places once defined by their age are now defined by their ambition. From small towns to growing cities, Main Street Alabama is shaping a new story for this state: one where historic commercial districts are not artifacts of the past, but catalysts for the future.

Mary Helmer Wirth
President/State Coordinator



Support Main Street

Main Street Alabama is transforming communities throughout our state, and you are invited to be part of this exciting movement. When you invest, you're not just supporting local businesses; you are helping preserve the charm of our historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts, creating vibrant spaces where we can all connect, work, and thrive together. Take this opportunity to explore how your investment can truly make a lasting difference in our state. It's your chance to be part of something special. If you have any questions regarding investment opportunities, please reach out to jennifer@mainstreetalabama.org.

[Learn More About Investing](#)

Tune In To Sweet Home Towns Podcast



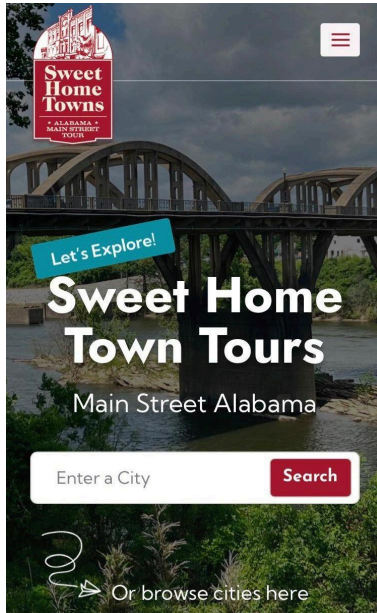
Alabama's downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts are full of energy, innovation, and heart, and the Sweet Home Towns Podcast is where those stories come alive.

From historic preservation to community-led initiatives, our episodes highlight the people making a real difference in their hometowns. Recent guests include Mary Means, founder of Main Street America, Kathy LaPlante, VP of Coordinating Programs at Main Street America, and local leaders like Courtney Bennett, Mike Putman, and Roy Stoves. The podcast shares inspiring stories

about community innovation, historic preservation, and the people making a difference in their hometowns. You'll hear from leaders, entrepreneurs, volunteers, and visionaries who are helping shape Alabama's most lively communities.

The podcast is available on several platforms, such as Audible, iHeartRadio, Apple, and on our **YouTube channel**. Just search for Sweet Home Towns Podcast! Tune in and join the conversation. Every Alabama town has a story worth sharing, and we're telling them all.

Sweet Home Town Tours



Main Street Alabama has a new resource for discovering the unique character and charm of Alabama's towns and cities with the website, **SweetHomeTowns.com**.

We work with local Main Street Programs to revitalize their districts by preserving historic places, supporting local businesses, and encouraging cultural experiences that make each Main Street special. With Sweet HomeTowns Tours, you can explore Alabama's rich heritage, enjoy real Southern food, and experience the warm hospitality our state is known for.

If you love history, great food, or just want a beautiful place to visit, we have tips and recommendations to help you plan a memorable trip.

Come celebrate the stories, traditions, and lively spirit of Alabama's communities.

Visit **SweetHomeTowns.com** today to start planning your next adventure.

Welcome Our New Network Communities



Main Street Alabama is excited to welcome our newest Network Communities who joined in February: Altoona, Citronelle, New Brockton, Northport, and Wilton. These communities are taking the first step toward revitalizing their historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts, and we are thrilled to support them on this journey.

The Main Street Network is an introductory level for communities that care about their downtowns and want to learn more about the Main Street Approach®. Network Communities receive guidance from Main Street Alabama on organizing a public-private partnership, sharing their vision for an improved district, and starting important conversations about revitalization.

Joining the Network is the crucial first step in the process. Capacity building in the Network program will help prepare communities to apply for designation. Designation is highly competitive and requires completing many steps to demonstrate readiness. By becoming a Network Community, towns and cities begin building the foundation for future success and gain access to expert guidance, training, and support.

Communities interested in joining the Network may apply in February or August by completing a brief online application at **www.mainstreetalabama.org**. This is the perfect opportunity for any community ready to explore downtown revitalization and take its first step toward a stronger, thriving Main Street.

Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming Trainings

Excellence on Main Street Summit

- When: August 19 – 21, 2026
- Where: Enterprise, AL
- Registration: Details coming soon
- About: This annual three-day conference is designed for downtown and commercial district revitalization professionals. Sessions cover economic development, marketing, placemaking, and more. Open to all, with discounts for designated and network communities.

Quarterly Training – In Person

- When: October 22, 10 AM – 4 PM
- Where: Downtown Demopolis
- Topic & Registration: TBA

Quarterly Training – Webinar

- When: December 2, time TBA
- Where: Online
- Cost: FREE
- Topic & Registration: TBA

Stay tuned for updates and registration links for each event. These trainings are perfect for board members, program leaders, and community partners looking to strengthen skills, build networks, and advance downtown revitalization.



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