

What happened to America's Main Streets?

Before World War II, Main Street was the community's primary commercial hub. Downtown buildings usually had several tenants -- typically a ground-floor retailer and, frequently, several upper-floor offices or apartments; together, these tenants provided enough rent for property owners to keep their buildings in good condition. The presence of the post office, library, banks and local government offices added to the steady flow of people downtown. Not only was Main Street the center of the community's commercial life, it was also an important part of its social life; people thronged the streets on Saturday nights to meet friends, see a movie and window-shop.

In the past 40 years, America's downtowns have changed drastically. The creation of the interstate highway system and subsequent growth of suburban communities transformed the ways in which Americans live, work and spend leisure time. With improved transportation routes, people found it easier to travel longer distances to work or shop. Roads that once connected neighborhoods to downtown now carried residents to outlying shopping strips and regional malls.

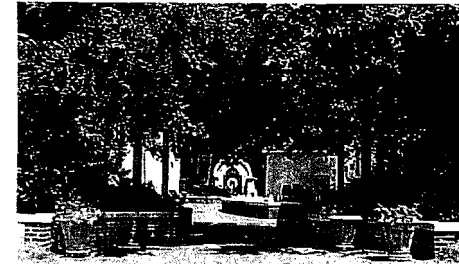
Throughout the nation, in town after town, the story repeated itself. Downtown businesses closed or moved to the mall, shoppers dwindled, property values and sales tax revenues dropped. Some downtowns sank under the weight of their own apathy. Neglected buildings, boarded-up storefronts and empty, trash-strewn streets gradually reinforced the public's perception that nothing was happening downtown, that nothing was worth saving there. People forgot how important their downtown and its historic commercial buildings were in reflecting their community's unique heritage.

In many communities downtown merchants and property owners, tried to halt this spiral of decline by imitating their competition -- the shopping mall. Their attempts to modernize downtown take the forms of pedestrian malls, covering traditional building fronts with aluminum slipcovers, and attaching huge, oversized signs on their buildings to attract attention. These well-meaning but usually ineffective methods did not stabilize downtown's decline, mostly because they did not address the fundamental problem -- that businesses did not change when the market did, and that people did not see the downtown as a destination for shopping any more. With the economic boom of the 1980s, Main Street also saw increased development occurring outside traditional areas, and the issue of "sprawl" with its uncontrolled growth and cookie cutter architecture that reflected neither a sense of place nor a sense of pride, an became an issue that most communities contend with today.

Facing these issues, over 1,600 communities have adopted the Main Street approach in the past 21 years to look again at Main Street, their heart of the community, to save its historic buildings, to revive its commercial core, to strengthen business, to control community-eroding sprawl, and keep a sense of place and community life in America.

Source: Main Street—National Trust for Historic Preservation

Main Street Program of Anderson, Inc.



*Dedicated to the
Promotion, Preservation,
and Revitalization of
Anderson's Downtown
Historic District.*

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Four Point Approach

Design

Enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging supportive new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, and long-term planning.

Organization

Building consensus and cooperation among the many groups and individuals who have a role in the revitalization process.

Promotion

Marketing the traditional commercial district's assets to potential investors, new businesses, local citizens, customers, and visitors.

Economic Restructuring

Strengthening the district's existing economic base while finding ways to expand it to meet new opportunities -- and challenges from outlying development.

The Main Street Program Is....

Comprehensive: A single project cannot revitalize a downtown or commercial neighborhood. An ongoing series of initiatives is vital to build community support and create lasting progress.

Incremental: Small projects make a big difference. They demonstrate that "things are happening" on Main Street and hone the skills and confidence the program will need to tackle more complex problems.

Action-oriented: Frequent, visible changes in the look and activities of the commercial district will reinforce the perception of positive change. Small, but dramatic improvements early in the process will remind the community that the revitalization effort is under way.

And Promotes...

Self-Help: Local leadership can initiate long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.

Public/private partnership: Every local Main Street program needs the support and expertise of both the public and private sectors. For an effective partnership, each must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the other.

Identification and capitalization of existing assets: Communities must recognize and make the best use of their unique offerings. Local assets provide the solid foundation for a successful Main Street initiative.

Quality: From storefront design to promotional campaigns to special events, quality must be the main goal.

Change: Changing community attitudes and habits is essential to bring about a commercial district renaissance. A carefully planned Main Street program will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.

It's Your Downtown. Join Us Today!

I'd like to join the Main Street Program of Anderson, Inc.

- Corporate Platinum... \$1,000
- Corporate Gold..... \$500
- Patron..... \$250
- Partner \$100
- Associate..... \$50
- Friend..... \$25

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The Main Street Program of Anderson, Inc. is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization, dedicated to the promotion, preservation, and revitalization of Anderson's Downtown Historic District.