

MAIN STREET PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Oregon Main Street (OMS) is part of Heritage Programs in Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. OMS is designed to assist with the revitalization of traditional downtowns and historic commercial districts, promote economic development, and encourage historic preservation. The program uses an approach that advocates a return to community self-reliance, local empowerment, and the rebuilding of central business districts based on their assets, unique architecture, personal service, local ownership and entrepreneurship, and sense of community.

OMS coordinates resources and provides technical assistance based on the Main Street Approach® (Organization, Promotion, Economic Vitality, and Design) to communities that are working in historically relevant business district settings and that meet certain threshold criteria. Oregon Main Street requires all potential candidates to submit an application.

NATIONAL MAIN STREET HISTORY

Concerned about continuing threats to Main Streets' commercial architecture and aware of the need to stimulate economic activity in small-city downtowns, the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched a community demonstration project (1977-1980) that resulted in the creation of the Main Street Four-Point Approach® and establishment of the National Main Street Center (NMSC). NMSC was spun off into its own non-profit subsidiary of the National Trust in 2013 and undertook an intensive review of the Main Street model and a re-branding effort leading to the creation of the Main Street America™ brand.

Main Street America™ is a program of the National Main Street Center. What sets Main Street America™ apart is the powerful network: the unique combination of grassroots dedication to comprehensively improving quality of life at the local level; integral support and expertise provided by Coordinating Programs at the city, county, and state level; and leadership and direction from the NMSC. Main Street America™ is also a special mark of distinction. It is a seal, recognizing that participating programs, organizations, and communities are part of a national movement with a proven track record for celebrating community character, preserving local history, and generating impressive economic returns.

OREGON MAIN STREET HISTORY

Oregon Main Street (OMS) was established by the legislature in 2007 and opened up applications for communities to participate in 2008. Originally housed in Oregon Business Development Department (then known as Oregon Economic and Community Development), the program was jointly administered by OBDD and the State Historic Preservation Office through June 2011. Oregon Parks and Recreation Department accepted OMS into Heritage Programs when OBDD's focus switched to traded sector economic development beginning in July 2011.

Prior to the current OMS, the Oregon Downtown Development Association was the original iteration of the main street program in Oregon becoming the seventh state main street program in the country in 1981 and accepting the first five main street cities in 1983 (La Grande, The Dalles, Klamath Falls, Hillsboro, and Bend). In 1994, ODDA became Livable Oregon with downtown revitalization as one area of focus. Livable Oregon spun Oregon Downtown Development Association off as an independent non-profit again in 1999. ODDA eventually severed the relationship with the National Main Street Center in 2002 and focused on consulting and planning efforts. ODDA eventually dissolved in 2012 and gave their remaining financial assets to OMS.

MAIN STREET APPROACH®

The Main Street Approach® is centered around Transformation Strategies. A Transformation Strategy articulates a focused, deliberate path to revitalizing or strengthening a downtown or commercial district's economy. A program's work on Transformation Strategies should be organized around the Four Points: Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization. A revitalization program's work – and its Transformation Strategies – need to be informed by a solid understanding of local and regional market data, and sustained and inclusive community engagement. With a set of strategies in place, the organization will then assess what kinds of activities, resources, people-power across the Four Points will be necessary to bring the strategy to life. Progress will be measured by economic metrics and quality outcomes.

PROCESS

COMMUNITY VISIONING

Visioning should be a community driven process that brings stakeholders from all sectors together, inviting them to be proactive participants in the downtown revitalization process. This can provide a foundation for outlining the community's own identity, expectations, and ideals while confirming real and perceived perceptions, needs, and opportunities.

DOWNTOWN TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

Typically, communities will find two or three Transformation Strategies are needed to help reach a community's vision for downtown. A short term strategy could be to develop a public program like murals or engage local students for public projects. A long term strategy could be to develop new zoning codes which promote types of buildings such as tiny homes without requiring special permits. The work within any strategy would integrate the Four Points.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASURE

To succeed, a Main Street program must show visible results that can only come from completing projects. Short term and long term activities should add up to meaningful change. A Main Street program should be able to demonstrate wise use of resources, which translate to real change on the ground: new jobs added, new businesses open, and buildings being rehabilitated as examples of metrics of success. Any strategy should be thought of as a way to support the community's vision with meaningful, measurable outcomes.

MAIN STREET FOUR POINTS®

Transformation Strategies are implemented through comprehensive work in four broad areas, known as the Four Points.

Organization involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a Main Street revitalization program. A governing board and volunteers or specific project committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the volunteer-driven program. Volunteers are coordinated and supported by a paid executive director as well. This structure not only divides the workload and clearly delineates responsibilities, but also builds consensus and cooperation among the various stakeholders.

Promotion sells a positive image of the commercial district and encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play, and invest in the Main Street district. By marketing a district’s unique characteristics to residents, investors, business owners and visitors, an effective promotional strategy forges a positive image through advertising, media relations, retail promotional activity, special events and marketing campaigns carried out by local volunteers. These activities improve consumer and investor confidence in the district and encourage commercial activity and investment in the area by identifying and appealing to the district’s market niches.

Design means getting Main Street into top physical shape. Capitalizing on its best assets — such as historic buildings and pedestrian-oriented streets — is just part of the story. An inviting atmosphere, created through attractive window displays, well-managed parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, lights and landscaping, conveys a positive visual message about the commercial district and what it has to offer. Design activities also include instilling good maintenance practices, as well as enhancing the physical appearance of the district and creating new productive commercial or residential space by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging appropriate new construction, developing sensible design management systems, and long-term planning.

Economic Vitality strengthens a community’s existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base. The Main Street program helps sharpen the competitiveness of existing business owners, helps to foster entrepreneurial start-ups and expansions, and recruits compatible new businesses and new economic uses to build a commercial district to create jobs and to respond to today’s consumers’ needs. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability and sales tax revenue of the district.

EIGHT GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The National Main Street Center's experience in helping communities bring their downtowns back to life has shown time and time again that the Main Street Four Point Approach succeeds only when combined with the following eight principles:

Comprehensive: A single project cannot revitalize a downtown. 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” and hone the skills and confidence the program will need to tackle more complex problems.

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

Public/Private Partnerships: The support and expertise of both the public and private sector is necessary for an effective partnership.

Capitalizing on Existing Assets: A key goal is to help communities recognize and make the best use of their unique offerings. Local assets provide the solid foundation for a successful program.

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

Change: Changing community attitudes and habits is essential for success. A carefully planned Main Street program will shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.

Action-Oriented: Frequent, visible changes in the look and activities of the downtown will reinforce the perception of positive change. Small but dramatic improvements show that the revitalization effort is underway.