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# THE MAIN STREET APPROACH

## A ROADMAP FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

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.

REGISTER TODAY!



Join us for three days of learning, connecting, and celebrating at Main Street Now 2025 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 7 - 9.

SECURE YOUR SPOT!



Stevenson, Washington © Alicia Gallo

## THE FUNDAMENTALS

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. Each Transformation Strategy is implemented through activities in the four broad areas of work represented by the **Four Points: Economic Vitality. Design.**

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**Transformation Strategies** – generated through meaningful community engagement and informed by an analysis of the district’s market position – help to guide a revitalization program’s work. An effective Transformation Strategy serves a particular customer segment, responds to an underserved market demand, or creates a differentiated destination.

Some “ready-to-use” strategies – called [Catalyst Strategies](#) – fall into two broad categories: those that are focused on a specific customer segment and those that are focused on an industry, product, or service segment.

### Examples include:

• [Medians and Residents](#)

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

**ECONOMIC VITALITY** focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies. [Learn more >](#)

**DESIGN** supports a community’s transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart. [Learn more >](#)

**PROMOTION** positions the



revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district. [Learn more >](#)

# DIVE DEEPER INTO THE FOUR POINTS

## BROWSE VIDEO SERIES AND RESOURCES



VIDEO



VIDEO

## FOUNDATIONS: DESIGN

## FOUNDATIONS:

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This comprehensive resource area in the Knowledge Hub examines how design, promotion, economic vitality, and organization can guide your community transformation efforts and provides resources on how to utilize the Main Street Approach and tailor to your local needs.

**CHECK IT OUT**



Wytheville, Virginia © Downtown Wytheville Inc.

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**SECURE YOUR SPOT!**

# **Main Street & The Four Point Approach**

The Main Street Four Point Approach is a community-driven, comprehensive methodology used to revitalize older, traditional business districts throughout the United States. It is a common-sense way to address the variety of issues and problems that face traditional business districts. The underlying premise of the Main Street approach is to encourage economic development within the context of historic preservation in ways appropriate to today's marketplace. The Main Street Approach advocates a return to community self-reliance, local empowerment, and the rebuilding of traditional commercial districts based on their unique assets: distinctive architecture, a pedestrian-friendly environment, personal service, local ownership, and a sense of community.

The Main Street Four Point Approach is a comprehensive strategy that is tailored to meet local needs and opportunities. It encompasses work in four distinct areas — Design, Economic Restructuring, Promotion, and Organization — that are combined to address all of the commercial district's needs. The philosophy and the Eight Guiding Principals behind this methodology make it an effective tool for community-based, grassroots revitalization efforts. The Main Street approach has been successful in communities of all sizes, both rural and urban. Find out if the Approach is right for you community.

The Main Street approach is incremental; it is not designed to produce immediate change. Because they often fail to address the underlying causes of commercial district decline, expensive improvements, such as pedestrian malls or sports arenas, do not always generate the desired economic results. In order to succeed, a long-term revitalization effort requires careful attention to every aspect of downtown — a process that takes time and requires leadership and local capacity building.

## **The Four Points**

The Four Points the National Trust Main Street Center offers a comprehensive commercial district revitalization strategy that has been widely successful in towns and cities nationwide. Described below are the four points of the Main Street approach which work together to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort.

**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 standing committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the volunteer-driven program. Volunteers are coordinated and supported by a paid program 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, 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.

**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, parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, street 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 in the commercial district, enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging appropriate new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, and long-term planning.

**Economic Restructuring** 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 and recruits compatible new businesses and new economic uses to build a commercial district that responds to today's consumers' needs. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability of the district. Coincidentally, the four points of the Main Street approach correspond with the four forces of real estate value, which are social, political, physical, and economic.

# Main Street Four Points

The Main Street Approach is an economic development strategy developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980. It incorporates a **Four-Point Approach** to economic revitalization consisting of *Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Vitality*.

## Organization

Organization focuses on building collaboration among a broad range of public and private sector groups, organizations, and constituencies. This point plays a key role in keeping the board, committees, and staff functioning by **attracting people and money** to the Main Street program. To succeed, this point must take responsibility for managing these financial and logistical aspects of the non-profit organization:

- Raising money for projects and administration from donations and sponsorships.
- Overseeing volunteer activities by recruiting and supervising people and rewarding good work.
- Promoting the program to stakeholders and the public.
- Managing finances by developing good accounting procedures.
- Create a mailing list that includes business and property owners, local interest groups, officials, and supporters.
- Create and regularly update job descriptions for both staff and volunteers.
- Develop a long-term fundraising plan.

## Promotion

Promotion deals with marketing the district's assets to residents, visitors, investors and others through special events, retail promotion, and activities that improve the way the district is perceived. The point has the job of **promoting the district as the center of commerce, culture, and community life** for residents and visitors alike. To be effective, this point must move beyond cookie-cutter historic commercial district promotion ideas.

Specifically:

- Understanding the changing market by identifying both potential shoppers and the competition.
- Identifying district assets, such as people, buildings, heritage and institutions.
- Defining Main Street's market niche and its unique position in the marketplace.
- Creating new image campaigns, retail promotions, and special events to bring people to the district.
- Evaluate promotional events including information on number of attendees and impact in reaching goals.
- Conduct outreach/media relations activities including press releases, print media columns, press liaison, feature articles, radio, and television segments.



# Main Street Four Points

## Design

Design involves improving the physical environment by renovating buildings, constructing compatible new buildings, improving signs and merchandise displays, creating attractive and usable public spaces, and ensuring that planning and zoning regulations support revitalization. **Design plays a key role in shaping the physical image of Main Street as a place attractive to shoppers, investors, business owners, and visitors.** To succeed, this point must persuade business owners, building owners, and civic leaders to adopt a specific approach for physical improvements to buildings, businesses and public improvements.

- Educating others about good design, and enhancing the image of each business as well the district.
- Providing good design advice, and encouraging quality improvements to private properties and public spaces.
- Planning Main Street's development by guiding future growth and shaping regulations.
- Motivating others to make changes by creating incentives and targeting key projects.
- Working with State Historic Preservation Office to list the district on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Create a design review process with custom design guidelines.
- Develop district identification and way-finding signage.
- Photograph the district extensively - before, during, and after rehabilitation work.

## Economic Vitality

EV concentrates on strengthening the district's existing economic base while finding ways to expand its economy and introduce compatible new uses. The EV point has the job **of identifying new market opportunities for the traditional commercial district, finding new uses for historic commercial buildings, and stimulating investment in property.** To succeed, this point must develop a thorough understanding of the community's economic condition and opportunities for incremental market growth by:

- Building entrepreneurial economies.
- Strengthening business including strengthening existing businesses and recruiting new ones.
- Infrastructure reuse by finding new economic uses for traditional Main Street buildings.
- Development of financial incentives and capital for business development and retail operations layout.
- Ascertaining progress by monitoring the economic performance of the district.
- Complete and maintain an inventory of buildings and businesses.
- Develop a small, local business recruitment packet and procedures.

## **Main Street America (Main Website)**

[www.mainstreet.org](http://www.mainstreet.org)

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