Rebuilding Main Street
Downtown Success Strategies Post-Covid

Maryland Municipal League
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Agenda
• Five common factors among resilient downtowns
• Your role as community leaders
• Strategies to rebuild Main Street post-Covid-19

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Pillars of downtown resilience
- Downtown is built on a complete ecosystem
- Successful partnerships enhance capacity
- Community-led and volunteer rich
- Commitment to place (Design & Preservation)
- Success is achieved incrementally

Creating an ecosystem
- Ecosystem represents an interconnected system connected to its physical environment;
- Multiple uses including locally-owned enterprises that serve the entire community;
- Goal: enhance foot traffic (both day & night)
Historical Context
• Vibrant downtowns pre suburbia/big-box/Amazon era
• At peak, retail only represented 17% of downtown biz

Retail (and food) still important
• Resilient downtowns have, on average, 8% of all retail establishments downtown;
• For smaller towns: minimum of 10 retail & 10 food establishments
• Minimum of 10 retail establishments open after 6 pm
• Restaurants drive traffic

Community institutions are part of a downtown ecosystem
• Government offices;
  – 8.5% more downtown businesses in county seats (when controlled for population)
• Post Office;
• Library;
• Financial institutions;
• Religious institutions;

Downtown Housing
• Goal: Increase DT population, DT housing units & DT per capita income
• Resilient communities: 5% of population resides downtown

DT ecosystem supports diversity and differentiation
The downtown is an affordable place for business incubation, experimentation and creativity.

Business training support
Marion Virginia
• Small business boot camp
• $5,000 grant for new downtown business in targeted sectors;
Ecosystem includes special events

Successful downtowns serve as the special events center for the community.

Bottom Line
There something for everyone downtown!

Pillars to Downtown Success

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Partnerships enhance capacity

- Success depends on partnerships and connections.
- Expanding resources increases sustainability of efforts.

You can’t do it alone

Includes likely and unlikely partners

Public sector role

A regulatory environment encouraging reinvestment in downtown exists among successful communities.
Successful downtowns are often treated differently in planning, zoning and other land-use regulations.

Quality of Place

Place matters as individuals increasingly choose their communities. Successful communities recognize that creating distinctive downtowns and attractive neighborhoods are a prerequisite to long-term community success.

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Quality of Place:

It is this... ...not that

It’s About Place Making!
The next generation is the first to identify more strongly with their communities than their employers.”

— REBECCA RYAN

What does our next generation want?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Large Cities</th>
<th>Small Towns</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walkable Streets</td>
<td>Scenic Beauty</td>
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<td>Gathering Places</td>
<td>Safe Streets</td>
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<td>Many Jobs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Place for Family</td>
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<td>Different Lifestyles</td>
<td>Good Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shops/Businesses</td>
<td>Sense of Community</td>
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<td>Arts/Culture</td>
<td>Low Traffic</td>
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Additional qualities of a successful place

- **Access and linkages**
  - All modes of transportation
  - Points of arrival & recognizable boundaries
- **Comfort and image**
  - Safety, design & interface of built environment with surroundings (25% of experience)
- **Uses and activities**
  - Activation of downtown
- **Sociability & openness**

Downtown serves as the soul of the community

Are public improvements appropriate?

Rediscovering a community’s soul

Niles, Michigan

- Great “Uncover” to remove aluminum covers over historic downtown facades; $825K project;

Historical differentiation

Successful downtowns retain the historical character of the community
**Historical differentiation**

- Character defining resources are identified, protected and enhanced;
- Historic resources are appropriately used;
- There is an imaginative reuse of “white elephants”

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**Dedicated Effort to Preserving Heritage**

Can You Tell What This Building Is Being Used As?

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**Diversity and differentiation**

Arts and culture are key elements of the strategy in successful downtowns.

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**Active Cultural Economic Development Approach**

Paducah, Kentucky

- Artist relocation program is a national model;
- Innovative financing through local partner Paducah Bank;
- Extends to other community projects

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Community-led Volunteer rich

**Community Engagement**
- Involvement must be early and continuous
- Build buy-in and ownership (many voices)
- Stakeholders become invested in “place”

**Community Engagement**
- Consider all segments of your community;
- Young adult engagement;
- **Authentic** youth voice

**Connect volunteers with professionals**

Successful downtowns have a professional place manager that connects volunteers and other community stakeholders

**Downtown organization enhances community capacity**
- A public/private/non-profit organization exists for the benefit of the downtown.
- A comprehensive approach to downtown management and improvement.

**Pillars to Downtown Success**

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‘**Enthusiastically, relentlessly & unapologetically incremental**’

-- PATRICE FREY
NMSC DIRECTOR
Develop a vision

Start with the petunias

• Short term projects can test concepts
• Create confidence and demonstrate change is occurring
• Visibility builds support
• Average age of National Main Street Winner: 17 yrs.

Post-covid Main Street

• Focus on fundamentals of your Main Street
  – Safety, Cleanliness, Friendly
• Lay the groundwork for recovery
  – Update plans
  – Market the quality of downtown
• Provide leadership on new approaches

Safety

Wooster OH
• New health & safety training program that allows D/T businesses who complete the training get a window decal to boost customer confidence

Exterior Commerce

Reconfigure Streetscape

• Social districts
  o Pending legislation in states
• Streateries
  o 2-3 days/week close Main Street
  o Not street fair – time when downtown businesses can move their goods/services outside
  o Make it cool and fun while being safe & physically distanced.
Exterior Commerce

Permitted merchandising on sidewalks
- External displays may be for interacting and then customer orders are filled inside
- Pick-up concierge service during street closures for customers

Technology

Harrisonburg, Virginia
- Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance: Bricks & Clicks technical assistance

New Bern, North Carolina
- Bear Towne Marketplace – common marketing platform for all D/T businesses

Capital

- Clearinghouse role for alternative investors, relief funds, etc.
- Percentage rent leases (property owners) or rent relief of publicly owned buildings DT
  - 25-50% anticipated 2020 sales levels (vs. 2019)
  - Some rental income is better than no rental income

Community-supported enterprises (CSE)

- Subsidized local delivery cooperative
- Grow new businesses: Donaldsonville, LA using DDA funds for downtown delivery service entrepreneurship competition:$10k from DDA/$5k from entrepreneur
- Community invest in local businesses:
  - CSE Guidebook: Walter & Ivan (ivand@msu.edu)

Your ideas?
Please type in chat

A small building sitting empty for one-year in a town can cost:
- $250,000 in lost sales
- $12,500 in lost sales tax revenue
- $15,000 in lost rents to the property owner
- $1,500 in lost property tax revenue
- $51,000 in lost loan demand to local banks for the building
- $750 in lost property management fees
- $24,750 in lost business profits and owner compensation
- $16,250 in lost employee payroll

-- Source: PlaceEconomics Inc.