CREATING PROSPERITY IN OLDER AND HISTORIC URBAN COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

New Services from the National Main Street Center

Despite demographic shifts bringing population and economic growth back to much of the urban landscape, growth and prosperity is uneven. Many older commercial centers and their neighborhoods face challenges in building a sustainable economic base. The National Main Street Center introduces a new set of community-driven economic development services to respond to the need to bring sustainable growth back to these traditional neighborhood centers. The services build on the Center’s 40 years of non-profit leadership in commercial district revitalization.

Offerings from the Center include both strategic and tactical services to meet the variety of conditions and needs of city and community leaders. Strategic services focus on a comprehensive, multi-phased approach to district revitalization based on decades of experience and a proven methodology. Tactical services provide specific components of a district revitalization plan for those communities needing implementation with select aspects of an existing plan.

Strategic Services

For those communities that would benefit from a comprehensive district revitalization methodology, the Main Street Approach has proven successful in communities across the country. In fact, more than 2,000 commercial districts have used this highly-regarded planning and implementation framework to strengthen their local economy. The Main Street Approach provides a common-sense, asset-based program to re-energize these aging districts that is grounded in an understanding of the underlying drivers of the local and regional economy. This framework helps communities identify their unique competitive advantage, leverage the power of residents and local stakeholders, and implement a series of short-and-long-term projects organized around Main Street’s comprehensive Four Points. (Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization.)

Every neighborhood has a unique set of place-based assets, anchors, and consumer base that can help define a healthy business district. These assets can be enhanced through a thorough understanding of the marketplace opportunities and then an implementation plan that leverages these assets. The Center provides this comprehensive approach in three phases:

- **Phase 1: Fast Track Assessment**
- **Phase 2: Framework Development**
- **Phase 3: Implementing Change**

THE NATIONAL MAIN STREET CENTER’S

UrbanMain program responds to the growing need for specialized services, professional development, networking and advocacy for the field of urban commercial district practitioners. We focus on enhancing quality of life, fostering new business growth, creating new economic opportunity, and pursuing equitable growth that minimizes displacement.
**PHASE 1: FAST TRACK ASSESSMENT**

The process of economic transformation requires considerable time and resources. In most cases, it will be beneficial to examine the assets and liabilities of a neighborhood commercial district to better understand the best path for a revitalization program. The Fast Track Assessment focuses on community vision and market understanding.

The Center looks at three critical factors:

- **Market Assessment.** It is vital to understand the market potential of the district, the competitive landscape, as well as attitudes about the district. The assessment uses data collection and analysis, business mix analysis, trade area analysis, surveys and interviews to make an overall market assessment.

- **Organizational Assessment.** The resources and capacity to create change in a commercial district underpins a successful comprehensive economic development program. The Center does a staff capacity analysis and identifies gaps, conducts partner interviews, provides a structural recommendation, and identifies funding options.

- **Community Assessment.** Sustainable revitalization programs require intentional and sustained community engagement. The Center helps focus and translate this community input through a variety of engagement techniques including a “market vision charrette” with key stakeholders, recommendations on operational models, partner identification, and a plan of action for steps beyond the assessment phase.

At the conclusion of Phase 1, the Center will provide an assessment dashboard, consisting of the findings from the market, organizational, and community assessments, as well as a series of recommended strategies to set the district up for success in Phase 2.
PHASE 2: FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

District transformation plans succeed when they are backed by organizational commitment, high capacity leadership, and sufficient resources. The second phase of the Center’s comprehensive approach uses the input from the assessment phase to refine and secure consensus around a series of district-specific transformation strategies, and helps to ensure organizations or cities are prepared to successfully carry them out. While the framework is distinct for each district based on unique assets and market potential, deliverables in Phase 2 are organized around the following work areas:

- **Organizational Development.** Leadership training on the Main Street Approach fundamentals for board, staff, and community volunteers.
- **Transformation Strategy Development.** Selecting the core strategies that will lead to success and aligning projects to advance those strategies.
- **Work Plan Development.** Revision to existing work plans or developing new work plans to ensure alignment with the core strategies for success.
- **Metric Development.** Creation of tailored qualitative and quantitative metrics to allow the teams to monitor progress and provide support for advocacy and fundraising efforts on behalf of the district.

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

As work shifts from planning to implementation, the Center provides on-going support and project-specific assistance to district managers. This is often in highly technical areas or where supplemental, short-term skills will improve roll-out results. Typical support from the Center for implementing change for the district include:

- **Partnership Development.** Identification of potential supporters, relationship-building, facilitated workshops to build consensus among partners.
- **Resource Development.** Planning work on funding needs, funding strategy, proposal development.
- **Tactical Project Development.** Tailored services from transit-oriented development to creating entrepreneurial ecosystems. (See the “Tactical Services” offering from the Center on the next page.)

“The world is changing faster than ever. There are two types of change—planned change and unplanned change. When you think about change, you can anticipate it, prepare for it and shape and direct it in a way that you like or you can just let it happen.”

Ed McMahon, Chairman of the National Main Street Center Board of Directors
Tactical Services

UrbanMain Tactical Services offer urban commercial district leaders with targeted support for initiatives or projects, or as a component of a multi-phased planning process. These are available as separate services that can be used individually or in combination.

- **Consensus Building Workshop**  Consensus building is a key step in engaging all community stakeholders and helps to generate excitement and buy-in for the district revitalization process. This workshop brings stakeholders together to generate creativity, catalyze integrated thinking, and build practical team consensus.

- **Planning for Transit-Oriented District Planning**  Transit-Oriented District Planning is the practice of creating dense, walkable, mixed-use commercial districts with ample access to multi-modal transit. These districts attract people, add vibrancy, and stimulate local economies. This service helps local leaders assess their districts for TOD, and provides hands-on strategy development and case studies for launching or enhancing transit-oriented development projects.

- **Clean and Safe Urban Districts**  This service assists local leaders in the development of programs and strategies to address safety concerns in their commercial districts. This engaging workshop will provide resources for incorporating clean and safe programs that improve conditions on the ground, and address community concerns.

- **Balancing Development and Displacement**  As disinvested commercial districts across the country see an influx of investment, local businesses and residents are at risk of being displaced. This service provides case studies and strategy development to local stakeholders to help ensure established local businesses are poised for long-term success, and that existing residents are engaged in—and beneficiaries of—the revitalization process in urban commercial districts.

- **Developing a Neighborhood Entrepreneurial Ecosystem**  Through techniques such as pop-up retail, food trucks, maker markets, and buy-down rental incentives, many Main Street programs have helped residents launch new entrepreneurial ventures. This service will share case studies, and will provide overall assessment, asset mapping, and strategy development for developing a supportive environment for entrepreneurship growth in a commercial district.

- **Championing a Culturally-Identified Business District**  The term “culturally-identified business district” is used to refer to commercial area with a high percentage of locally owned businesses and significant concentration of particular socio-ethnic group(s). This service helps Main Street organizations and district leaders understand how to equitably engage all district stakeholders while leveraging distinct cultural assets to grow and promote these districts.

Let us tell you more...

The National Main Street Center is America’s leading champion for the revitalization of neighborhood commercial districts. While the Center began its work in small towns, the Main Street Approach has been increasingly used by urban districts including Washington, D.C., Boston, Orlando, Baltimore, Chicago, and Albuquerque. The Center customizes its work to the specific needs of each community.

To discuss your district’s needs and explore what the Center may have to offer, please contact:

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