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S.T.A.R.T. Economic Development Action Step Packet - Retail and Main Street Development

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Retail and Main Street Development

A S.T.A.R.T. Economic Development Action Step Packet

Produced by the Center for Public Affairs Research
College of Public Affairs and Community Service
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Retail and Main Street Development

The Mainstay of Main Street

Many communities want to enhance retail trade as one part of their economic development effort. While most retail businesses in a community serve local residents employed in such basic-sector businesses as manufacturing, agriculture, and health care, retailing is a significant source of employment in itself.

Retailing has traditionally been associated with Main Street, the heart of so many smaller and rural communities in Nebraska. Retail dollars represent income for community shopowners, and in some communities local sales taxes help to provide property tax relief. In addition people who come to town to shop also spend money in other ways (restaurants, entertainment, etc.). These are just a few of the reasons communities are often interested in improving and enhancing their retail business climates.

This action step packet provides an overview of various strategies and ideas which you may want to consider to improve your community’s retail sector. While the focus is on retail business, it should be kept in mind that business districts, whether they are on and around “Main Street” or on a strip on the edge of town, typically comprise both retail and service businesses. These service businesses include personal services (beauty shops, photography studios, weight loss centers), legal services, accounting services, and insurance, to name just a few. As you consider the strategies and actions discussed in this packet, keep in mind that the principles and ideas are equally applicable to service businesses. In fact, any effort to enhance a community’s trade base should focus on both retail and service businesses.

This packet contains a number of items. First, you’ll find an overview of ideas, approaches and steps which should be considered as you work to improve your retail sector. Following the overview material, you’ll find reprints of articles and other resource materials. Please keep in mind that these items are just a starting point— you will want to go beyond them as you develop your economic action plan.

How Can You Enhance Your Retail Base?

The actions available for enhancing your community’s retail base are almost endless. Among the more common steps communities take to increase retail business are the following:

• Working to retain some of the shopping dollars that are leaking out to metro areas, larger regional centers, and shopping centers.
• Reconfiguring the retail trade sector to more closely match the stated preferences of customers.

• Developing a more pleasant, interesting and entertaining place to shop; giving people a reason to come to your community to shop.

• Assisting retailers in better managing their business through analyzing markets and advertising and merchandising practices, offering accounting assistance, and training employees to provide quality service.

• Expanding purchases of nonlocal people (tourists, neighboring community residents) through appropriate advertising.

• Taking collective action through the formation of downtown revitalization and related retail organizations that can work on issues such as retail mix, shopping hours, business assistance needs, advertising, and physical environment.

At the back of this action step packet you will find some short articles and case studies on several of these actions. These resources will provide you with some insights about what these action steps might encompass. Review the articles and discuss the ideas with your action step task force.

Defining the Trade Area

Regardless of which strategies you may wish to pursue, you should be aware of the following trade area facts:

• The size of a community's market area depends upon two factors—the size of the community and the nearness and direction of competing communities.

• The proportion of the population patronizing a community varies inversely with its distance from that community (the farther away, the less likely they are to shop there).

• The proportion of the population patronizing a community varies directly with the variety of merchandise offered (the greater the variety, the more people shop there).

• The distance that customers are willing to travel to purchase a good or service varies with the type of good or service.

• The draw of any shopping area is influenced by the proximity of competing communities.

• Communities compete for customers in a number of ways, including prices, access to stores, variety of goods and services, store hours, clerks' attitudes, credit policies, delivery policies, employees' personal knowledge, and the shopping area's attractiveness and comfort.

• The presence of competitors within the same community can often increase rather than reduce sales, especially for comparison-shop-
ping goods and for goods and services with definite sub-markets (specific needs for different groups), such as clothing.

Understanding the Local Retail Base

While you and others probably have a number of good, retail-oriented projects to undertake, almost every community will need to compile information to put together a retail development strategy. This section discusses the most important issues you will need to consider as you develop this information. These are:

- What retail businesses currently exist in the area?
- Are the number of retail establishments and amounts of employment and payroll increasing, declining or stable?
- Are retail sales increasing, declining or stable?
- What is the size and shape of the local trade area?
- Where do residents shop, and for what types of goods and reasons?
- Which communities are competitors in terms of retail sales?

Documenting The Current Retail Base

One of the things you will want to work with is a complete listing of local retail establishments and their lines of products and services. This can be compiled from the business attitude survey mailing list, the local yellow pages, chamber of commerce information, and related sources. Match the list of products/services with the list of potential shopping items contained in the community attitude survey. Do there appear to be significant gaps between your retail base and the community’s needs?

Identifying Trends in the Retail Sector

Information to identify and analyze local retailing trends can be obtained from Tables 1, 2 and 3 (employment) of the S.T.A.R.T. Economic Development Community Analysis software; and Table 4 for counties with which you want to compare your retail trade performance. Retail sales information can be obtained from Table 9. (The software and instructions provided with your S.T.A.R.T. kit give you these data; the tables should have been printed and included in your Participant’s Handbook.) Recent issues of County Business Patterns and the Census of Retail Trade can be used to track changes in the number of retail trade establishments, as well as changes in their payroll. (These are published by U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census; mailing address is Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.) For larger counties, details will be available for specific retail business categories (e.g., automobile dealers, grocery stores, furniture stores, eating and drinking establishments). Copies of the appropriate data for your county can be obtained from the Nebraska State Data Center at UNO (800/227-4533).
Identifying the Local Trade Area

Communities sell goods and services to residents of the city and to people who live outside the community's borders. It is important to understand the size and shape of the community's trade area, the geographic area from which the community draws the majority of its retail trade customers. One source of data is the subscription list (including addresses) for the local newspaper (newspapers are important in shaping shopping decisions). The community attitude survey done for Day 2 can be another useful source of information, particularly if it encompassed areas beyond your community's borders.

Another tool that will allow you to identify your trade area is Reilly's Law of Retail Gravitation, which gives an estimate of the maximum distance customers can be expected to travel to shop in a certain community. This will tell you how far your trade area extends toward one or more neighboring cities. To use Reilly's Law, you will need information on the population of the cities you want to compare and the road distance between the cities. Use this information in the following formula:

\[
\text{Distance from smaller community (y)} = \frac{\text{Distance between City x and City y}}{1 + \sqrt{\frac{\text{Population of larger community (x)}}{\text{Population of smaller community (y)}}}}
\]

Using Reilly's Law to conduct a trade area capture analysis, and estimating draw factors, can provide you with even more useful information. More information on both of these techniques is contained in the resource materials included with this packet. The important thing to remember is that you need to know the general size and shape of your retail trade area and how it fits with neighboring communities, the number of customers in your retail trade area, and draw factors for important goods and services.

Where Do Residents Shop? and Why?

Information on where nearby or local residents shop and the reasons for their shopping patterns is fundamental to a number of action steps to improve local retailing. For example, you need to know whether retail leakage (dollars flowing out of the community) is a problem and how it should be addressed; which goods and services represent potential areas for business expansion or recruitment; and whether to change advertising strategies, hours of operation, and/or the downtown environment.

To make these decisions you'll need data from the shoppers themselves. The community attitude survey conducted for the Day 2 session provides much of this information. Special surveys tailored to your specific retail strategies may be required in the future, however. Among the important items the attitude survey probes are the proportion of local residents' purchases made outside of town, specific competitor towns where certain types of goods and services are purchased, likes and dislikes about business shopping hours, the availability of parking, the appearance of downtown and highway business and commercial areas, and the attitudes of both clerks and merchants.
Identifying New Retail Opportunities

A fundamental step of most communities' retail development strategy is to plug or reduce the leakage of shopping and service purchases out of the local area. Leakages result from many factors, including outdated or unresponsive marketing and merchandising and noncompetitive pricing. Or leakages may simply be a function of the fact that certain goods in demand are not locally available.

One component of your local retail strategy, then, should be to assess whether the community could support one or more of the following:

- Retail and service businesses not currently available.
- Additional businesses in retail and service categories already represented in the community but not able to meet all local demand.
- New product lines to add to existing businesses to meet unserved local demands.

Spotting Unserved Markets

A number of things can be done to assess whether there are unserved local retail goods and service markets. A first step would be to look at the community attitude survey questions on where local residents shop for specific goods and services. Are there items for which a significant proportion of local residents say they make their purchases in another town? One community in southeast Nebraska found that almost one-fourth of local residents were making regular fast-food purchases from a neighboring town 20 miles away. This information indicated an opportunity for a new fast food restaurant, and a local entrepreneur soon built one.

Another source of information on possible unserved markets can be found in the survey questions on specific community needs. Do residents consistently mention the need for a specific type of business?

Information from the community attitude survey should be teamed up with information from a threshold analysis, which is a method for examining the relationship between the number and types of businesses and the population levels in several communities or the state. If a community has fewer establishments for a specific type of retail business than the average for its population size, then there is a possible opportunity for adding business. Use of the threshold technique requires that you assume the comparison communities are similar, especially in terms of income, tastes and preference; extent of nearby competition; and size of businesses. Information on threshold analysis is contained in the resource materials accompanying this action step packet.

Once you know the retail trade areas where potential opportunities may exist for the development of new or additional business establishments or product lines, you will want to develop a plan for filling those niches. This may involve recruiting a new retail business to the community, finding a local entrepreneur to start a new retail business, or enticing an existing business to expand in order to supply the underserved market.

Three Types of Businesses

When a community reviews its retail trade base, there are three types of businesses to consider. The first is the "generative business," which produces...
sales by itself and attracts customers to the community. One example is the shopping center anchor (major department store) or a large variety store. The second type is the "shared business," which obtains its sales from the generative power of nearby businesses. A small specialty shop near a general merchandise store is one example. A third type is the "coincidental business," whose sales are not really related to other activities. Such businesses do not generate sales themselves nor from specific association with nearby shops. Examples are small ice cream shops and cafes in shopping malls. For a community to attain its retail potential, a balance among the three categories of retail shops must be developed.

Understanding What Customers Want

One strategy for enhancing local retail trade is to better meet customers' preferences for goods and services, shopping environment, and related issues. A thorough understanding of what customers want is integral to the development of such a strategy. Among the aspects which should be examined are customers' images of merchants and downtown, and merchants' images of themselves. You will also want to consider your competition and how retailers promote their businesses.

Local Merchants' Attitudes

The nature and importance of the relationship between the customer and the merchant has changed over the past years. The purchasing decision is now more than price and product; it includes service and customer relationships. Usually the local merchants say the most important reason people do business with them is quality of service. But to find out whether this is true, you need to ask:

- How do community members perceive the attitudes of merchants and clerks?
- Are merchants perceived by local residents to have better attitudes than clerks? If not, should that be a concern?
- Do merchants have the same perceptions of themselves as their customers do?
- What about the local chamber of commerce and/or development company—are they doing all they can to enhance the community?

One of the easiest ways to find out how local businesses are perceived by community residents is to ask the residents. You could conduct a detailed marketing survey, but the community attitude survey and the business attitude survey, which you reviewed in Day 2, provide you with much of the needed information.

Questions to review from the community survey are 1-4, 14, 15, 17, 20-26, and 29. On the business survey refer to questions 8-11, 13-18, 20-22, 24, and 28. You will notice that some questions are the same on both surveys and can be compared directly.

When reviewing the community attitude and business surveys, you may learn negative things that you didn't want to know. But in studying the information, you should not avoid potential conflict or controversy. Experience
shows that small-town merchants often have perceptions that differ from their customers'. For instance, they may see themselves as friendly, loving people who give a lot of service. However, customers may see them as uncaring people who charge high prices, never have what the customer wants, and who blame the customer for asking for something they don't have. If the customers (respondents to the survey) have a negative view of merchants' and clerks' attitudes, consider a training program to improve customer relations and promote better understanding between merchants and customers.

Downtown Image

It is important to remember that shopping is more than simply purchasing needed goods and services; it is also a recreational and social event. Part of the attractiveness of many malls is that they are pleasant places to be. Often overlooked by local merchants is the general appearance of individual buildings and the whole shopping area.

Jack McCall, of the University of Missouri Columbia's University Extension, writes, "What does a shopper find in many small towns?...Weeds growing in the cracks of sidewalks, depressed merchants, dirty stores and streets, and inventories that have grown familiar to customers through the years." You’ll need to look carefully to determine whether your community gives such an uncared-for impression.

Assess your community's retail area. Does the appearance of the commercial areas need to be improved? What about parking? Are these problems for both customers and businesses, or do the groups have different opinions?

You can learn what local residents think of your town's commercial areas by looking at the community attitude survey. Because the same questions were asked on the business survey, you can once again compare the responses of shoppers and business owners.

Convenience

Often customers leave the area to shop because of convenience. As more and more families have more than one member working and people commute outside the area to work, more businesses may not be open when people are ready to shop.

- Are your businesses open at convenient hours?
- Should they open one or more nights during the week?

Competition

Before undertaking a marketing plan, you should understand which communities you compete with. Often, there are surprises when you look at the results of the community attitude survey. You will find that for some goods or services your community has little or no competition, but for others the competition is considerable.

The community survey also asks how much money residents spend outside the community and whether they check for availability within the community first. You usually will find that most residents are loyal to the community if they have the opportunity, and you will want to use this to benefit both the customers and merchants.

Questions concerning competition are also asked of the businesses. Not only are merchants interested in maintaining local business, they are also in-
interested in attracting business from out of town. It is interesting to compare
which cities local merchants think provide competition and where residents
actually say they shop.

Competing with neighboring communities and malls requires more than
community loyalty and a shop-at-home campaign, and certainly more than
complaints about unfair competition.

*Improving the Shopping Environment*

Where you'll start in your improvement campaign depends on what condi­
tion your shopping environment is in. According to McCall:

> There are [many] ways of creating a desirable shopping environ­
> ment. Whether it is renovation, tree plantings or small parks, the
> primary thing to remember is that we are trying to make it a pleasant
> place for customers to be....Storekeepers might want to consider
> some new displays of merchandise. Your organization can decorate
> the windows of empty stores.

The basic idea, of course, is to recognize and solve the problems that make
your retail center unattractive.

*Promotion*

McCall suggests:

Individual advertising is important but promotion as a shopping
sector offers an opportunity for small town merchants to do several
important things. It is an important chance to change the image that
local residents may have....

- It is a chance for you to bring people from your community to
town.
- Promotions offer an opportunity to bring people from other
towns to your town.
- It is a chance to build good will among customers and poten­
tial customers.

What can you do?

1. When you plan promotions, think of ways to get people into
your shopping area. Focus on people rather than selling
merchandise or service.

2. Try to think of activities that will use the physical attributes
of your town to provide a pleasant experience for people.

3. Don't try to do everything for everybody all at the same
time. Aim your promotional efforts at specific groups.

Your business community can be more prosperous. We will never
be able to keep people from going to the city on shopping trips. After
all, that is recreation. But there is a great deal of business which can
and should be done locally.
Retail Organization

As in any successful venture, organization is a vital component of retail and downtown business revitalization. A coordinated effort is necessary with shopping malls and other regional retail centers. Downtown took a long time to get where it is, and it will take some time to regain its place in the community. Through strategic thinking and planning you have begun to reach consensus on goals and develop a unified approach to economic improvement. A strong organization is needed to carry it all forward. This section discusses the following areas related to retail organization:

- Forming a new organization, or working with an existing one.
- Designing activities.
- Arranging funding.

Organizational Development

One of the first things you will want to consider is whether to work through an existing organization, such as the chamber of commerce or commercial club, or whether to start a new organization. A new group doesn’t have a history of expectations (baggage), has the ability to target specific activities, and has the opportunity to possibly include new segments of the community. Existing organizations such as a chamber, however, have track records and member support. In some cases, it may be possible to develop a new retailing task force within the local chamber of commerce. If a new organization is developed, then every effort should be made to see that both interests cooperate and find ways to enhance each other.

A separate organization effort serves three important functions. It:

- Provides a clear focus for your goals.
- Allows development of a consistent program unhampered by changes in leadership in a larger or broader organization.
- Serves as a symbol for the program’s activities, especially the promotion of economic development projects.

No matter how it starts, a successful improvement effort requires wide community involvement and support. One way to establish a group is to have the mayor or other relevant leader officially appoint members who are interested in Main Street or retail improvement and who represent these key sectors of the community:

- Merchants association
- Business improvement boards
- Chamber of commerce or commercial clubs
- Banks or other lending institutions
- Local government officials
- Planning commission
- Interested citizens

These people should have a personal interest and financial stake in business district improvement; be *action people* in the community; and be willing to establish a network, linking the organization with other individuals and organizations.

The size of the group will depend on the size of the community, but it should be small enough to allow decision making yet large enough to include representatives of various groups.

*Activities*

The group needs a leader, ideas for promoting its activities, and a name. The name is important because you want to build recognition of the group and its activities. Some of the first activities of the organization should be:

- Develop a yearly work plan with goals, objectives, activities, and a realistic timetable. Many of these work plan components will be suggested by the ideas and strategies covered in earlier sections of this action step packet.
- Establish committees to handle specific activities.
- Develop a working partnership with all organizations that affect the future of the business district.

Every organization should have a philosophy or viewpoint that puts all of its activities into context. The following principles will help guide you:

- Remember that downtown revitalization is an incremental process, and there are no quick fixes. Step-by-step changes will lead to a stronger end result.
- Understand this is a self-help program; the most successful communities are ones with the desire and will to make the downtown and local retailing work again.
- Forge effective public-private partnerships.
- Capitalize on existing assets such as historic buildings, green spaces, and unique features.
- Emphasize quality in all aspects of the program, from design to business recruitment.
- Concentrate on changing attitudes by asking for people’s ideas and promoting successful projects.
- Be action oriented. Get small projects done quickly to spur enthusiasm. It shows the rest of the community that the business district is on the move.

Your retail and downtown revitalization organization can become an important vehicle for progress in the business district. One of its main commit-
tees is likely to be business enhancement. Because the members of this committee will have a financial interest of some kind in the revitalization effort, they should begin to look at ways to improve their own bottom lines as well as provide a better mix of goods and services for the consumer. One of the committee's activities may be to look at ways to lessen the purchase cost of wholesale goods by forming a joint purchasing agreement among merchants or with neighboring towns. Buying in larger quantities may lead to cost savings.

The community attitude survey covered store hours and customer service, and the business enhancement committee should look carefully at this information. If the demand is strong for longer hours, an effort should be made to include all retail merchants in a combined effort for longer hours. If a decision is made to stay open late one evening a week, every possible store should be open. This encourages people to come downtown to do all or most of their shopping at once. An often-heard complaint is that it is impossible to patronize the home merchant because the stores are all closed by the time people working out of town get home from work.

The business committee may also want to look into technical assistance programs for local business people. Several state and community colleges and universities offer a variety of programs specifically designed for the retail merchant. Training is also available for employees to develop their skills at customer service and other aspects of business.

**Funding**

Funding a retail and downtown revitalization effort can be achieved in various ways. For example:

- City and county general funds
- Community development block grants
- Portions of sales tax
- Portions of lodging tax
- Private donations
- Membership dues
- Special events
- Underwriting from foundations, corporations, banks and utilities
- Assistance from business improvement districts

**Downtown Design and Facilities**

Attractiveness of the downtown business center is important to overall retail success. While small-business people cannot always have the lowest prices and the best selection, they can compete with other shopping districts by providing shoppers with a comfortable and enjoyable place to purchase goods and services. By working together, businesses can begin to revitalize the community's core of shopping, cultural, and recreational life.

The major areas of design and facilities profiled in this action step packet include ease of access, parking, storefront design, landscaping, zoning/land.
use, and compatible design of new buildings. Pertinent articles and a list of resources are included in the back of this packet.

Ease of Access

As transportation routes develop, they do not always accommodate the community's business district in the best possible way; major highways may come only within several blocks of the downtown, or miss the town completely. If this is the situation in your community, there may be nothing you can do to change it. But there is something you can do to attract travelers off the main highway. Well-placed signs along the route will help visitors find the center of town. The signs should begin a few miles outside of town. They should be easy to read, clearly worded, and well designed. They should be in good repair and recently painted. If the road is in a proposal stage, community leaders should try to provide input to the state department on the routing of the highway through town.

If streets are in poor repair, particularly in the approach to town, a group should be assigned to look into the possibility for repair or resurfacing. In other cases, the approaches may simply be messy, junky or neglected. (Refer to the Community Image and Marketing action step packet for ideas for a windshield survey to identify problem areas.)

If your town has a major highway going through it, try to find ways to encourage people to stop on their way through. Traffic should flow off the main street and it should be easy for people to get off the highway and back on after they have spent some time in your community. Signs should be well placed to tell people clearly how to get back onto the highway.

Parking

Parking can become an excuse for not shopping downtown. Usually it is not the amount of parking that is the real issue, but its location. Parking should be adequate for shoppers and within easy walking distance of the stores it serves. In most cases 300 to 400 feet is a practical maximum. A successful downtown has its stores in a compact area so that customers can park once and walk to many stores. If customers have to move their cars, they are likely to go home and not re-park.

When making the central retailing area more attractive and more appealing, you should give a lot of attention to the paths between the main street and parking lots.

A common complaint is that employees park where customers should be parking. If this is a problem, perhaps the merchants could all pitch in together and purchase an empty lot, surfacing it when money becomes available, for their employees' parking lot. If lots are available, employers should strongly encourage employees to park there. If not, they should be encouraged to park such that spaces meant for shoppers are left free. Merchants can also get together and establish uniform opening hours and keep some of the parking closed prior to the opening hours.

If you do have parking regulations, they should be regarded as a public relations matter rather than as a law enforcement problem. For example, the business community can provide printed information to parking violators, thanking them for shopping downtown and explaining the long-term parking lots.
To get an idea of how people in your town feel about parking, refer to the community attitude survey.

Main Street Design

Main Street buildings are often covered with layers of once-trendy materials in the name of modernization. These renovations often obscure or destroy the beauty and integrity of the traditional designs. A successful design change will involve working with the original design; near-exact restoration is usually not feasible or necessary. Commercial architecture is usually made up of the basic segments of storefront, upper facade ("false front"), and cornice. The storefront displays consumer goods, the upper facade is of one or more additional stories. The cornice marks the top of the building and is often an indication of a particular period and style and may be the most visually interesting part of the building. It also protects the roof and facade material from water damage.

Before any restoration/renovation work begins, two inspection passes should be done: one looks at all the buildings on Main Street together, and the second looks at each building individually. Once a decision is made to proceed with Main Street work, an overall photographic inventory is needed. This inventory should include photographs of each side of each building, entire facades, and detailing. It should also include wide-angle or panoramic views of the entire Main Street area.

The goal of your Main Street improvements should be to have a unified and interesting street. Don't get anxious over the amount of work that needs to be done; changing the appearance of Main Street buildings does not have to take large amounts of money.

Compatible Design of New Buildings

Streetscapes of many downtown retail areas show lots left vacant by demolition or fire. These lots may provide the locations needed for expansion of existing businesses or new buildings. However, new infill building on vacant lots must be treated with special attention. A practical approach should be taken toward new design. A museum-quality reconstruction, intended to be a facsimile of a once existing building or a profusely decorated neighbor, is rarely feasible. A successful design is one that adds to the intrinsic character of the street.

There are six basic approaches to designing a building within an existing landscape:

- Indifferent: Responds in no way to the environment surrounding the building. There is no rapport, no exchange or sympathy with neighboring buildings. Unfortunately, much downtown infill construction is indifferent.

- Integration: Harmonizes the new design with those of its neighbors through the use of similar forms, size, detail, materials and color.

- Contrast: The opposite of integration. Contrast is not usually desirable because the existing streetscape is assumed to have some intrinsic values that should not be upstaged by a new building.
- Invisible: Buildings that are all glass have been described as highly invisible. It is felt by some that these are instead contrast design in the extreme.

- Analogous: Recreates certain aspects of the surrounding environment while introducing a modern touch elsewhere in the building.

- Complex: Combines several of the previous approaches at the same time. The result can be loss of a strong focus and design intent.

The best approach for your site will have to be decided by the builder and the architect. The Nebraska Historical Preservation Society has expertise and a high degree of interest in historical buildings and should be consulted as well.

Empty Buildings

Empty buildings also need attention. They often deteriorate and promote a run-down appearance. Part of a committee’s task should be to cut weeds, pick up trash, clean windows, and even repaint the building if necessary. Not only will these efforts help to expedite the sale or lease of the property, but they will also improve the appearance of the entire street.

Vacant upper levels of stores should be considered when looking at empty spaces. Try to locate commercial tenants for main level stores, and use the upper levels for businesses that don’t depend much on street traffic (such as attorneys’ or insurance offices). Another alternative is to place apartments in the upper floors. Often the older population is looked to as potential tenants, although stairs may be a decided barrier. Consider new households and young singles as potential tenants.

Refer to the articles enclosed with this packet for specific information on renovation, repair, and maintenance.

Landscaping

Landscaping adds to the attractiveness of the shopping environment. It breaks up the monotony of some storefronts and adds beauty to all of them.

The type of landscaping used will depend upon the scale of the buildings and location of areas appropriate for shrubs, bushes, trees, or flowers. A few tips should be remembered when considering plantings:

- Trees should be as clean as possible — no fruit, pods, or cotton to drop or fly.

- Plants should be hardy varieties — resistant to drought, salt, and exhaust fumes.

- If flowers are planted, make sure there is available water nearby.

- Trees should be higher than the top of the store windows so the windows are visible from the street.

When planning to landscape the entire street, it would be advisable to consult with the state forester, a local garden shop/nursery, a landscape architect, or another expert who can design an attractive and appropriate overall plan.
Laws and Controls Affecting the Business District

When making changes to your retail business district, you should investigate controls and laws affecting the area, especially before any major design renovations are begun. These include:

- Zoning classifications (look at the zoning map)
- Building codes/fire codes
- Rehabilitation codes
- Traffic and parking controls
- National Register status of historical buildings/business district
- Design review regulations
- Other local, state or federal legislation affecting business districts

Zoning laws may not be in effect in all municipalities, but their existence should be encouraged. Zoning laws act as an umbrella plan for new development, existing renovations, and infill. Without such laws, there is no control over what kinds of buildings are built and their locations. A haphazard development is the result.

It should also be remembered that changing conditions may require changing laws and controls, so they should be reviewed periodically.

Sign Designs

Many downtowns have a clutter and confusion of signs, making it difficult for shoppers to identify individual firms. "Ready-made" signs supplied by major firms and advertisers usually have little relationship to the unique nature of Main Street. In fact, the overriding image of many business districts is one of signs rather than buildings and streets.

When looking at the overall appearance of Main Street, signage is an important aspect to consider. New sign design should take into account any ordinances and also local historical highlights, tastes, and technological sophistication. Well-designed signs should incorporate the following characteristics:

- Legible (one-inch letters can be seen at 30 to 50 feet)
- Scaled to the size of the building
- Designed with the appropriate amount of information (descriptive of the business, but not jumbled)
- Identifying of the business
- Separate from the storefront
- Creative—for example, place advertising on awnings or banners
- Targeted to the audience (readable by people on the sidewalk)
- Compatible with neighboring buildings and signs
- Painted with two or three colors only
Devoted to 60 percent lettering, 40 percent background

There are numerous kinds of lighted signs: neon, lighted plastic, rows of lights, etc. If a business does a considerable amount of business after dark, then its sign should be lit. But if all signs are lit, none stands out.

If your community does not have a sign ordinance and you have a problem with poor signage, you may want to adopt such an ordinance. Remember that an ordinance will not necessarily promote good sign design, but it will eliminate some of the worst signs. To help promote good sign design, you may want to consider a combination of sign ordinances and a design review board. The board should be made up of citizens from a mixture of occupations but should include a planning or community development person, an architect or designer, representatives of downtown businesses, and other citizens. This approach can have a positive influence on good design and better signage downtown.

Conclusion

Enhancing retail trade and revitalizing Main Street are multifaceted, community-wide efforts to reaffirm beliefs in the vital importance of the local retail district. Many people will be involved in various aspects of the job, each of them bringing their unique experiences and abilities. It will be of the utmost importance to coordinate these volunteers and avoid duplication of efforts. With persistent effort you can reduce leakage and make your retail district a pleasant place to shop.
References

National Trust for Historic Preservation, Main Street Project. Galensburg, IL. 1978.


Taking the Basic Steps to Facilitate Downtown Revitalization

by ANTHONY J. COSHNER

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The downtown revitalization process is comprised of a complex series of events that all deal with the interdependence of people, processes and products. It is not easy, nor is it guaranteed to be a successful undertaking, so those who hope to succeed must temper their optimism with pragmatism, their dreams with reality and their speculation with reasoning. People involved in such a process must be prepared to objectively evaluate what their downtown has been and what it is presently before launching into a full-fledged effort that endeavors to propose what a downtown could or should be.

This initial phase of the revitalization process must combine an analysis of the "who"—the people who constitute the downtown— as well as the "what"—the downtown’s physical and economic profile. This article will limit itself to looking at this initial phase and focus on community and downtown self-analysis as well as the establishment of an agenda for downtown action. The role of public education and awareness will be overlayed onto each critical step.

The Who

The "who" of a downtown should be viewed in the broadest terms and be as inclusive as possible. In the final analysis, the individuals who comprise the private and public sector of a city or town are the people who will make any revitalization effort successful. The human resources that must be organized are no less important than the financial or physical ones. It is, therefore, mandatory to analyze these individuals and the potential roles they will play.

The more individuals, organizations and institutions that are enlisted to actively participate in the process, the greater the chance of success. This is especially true in small towns and cities where key citizens wear many hats and their participation in and endorsement of the revitalization project may have a strong influence on its ultimate success.

The establishment of an organizational framework, comprised of representatives of key groups and also important individuals, to undertake a downtown revitalization program is the first major item on the agenda. A steering committee or task force with broad-based representations should be formed.

In addition, a series of open, well-publicized, public meetings should be held throughout the process to generate interest and support, solicit input and, hopefully, eliminate the problems of having groups that feel left out. Public media coverage (newspaper, radio, television) is a must to help inform the public.

Public/Private Sector Cooperation

Towns and cities that have been able to initiate and carry on successful revitalization programs have been those that have combined the public and private sector components in a comprehensive, coordinated and mutually

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*The Community-Based Projects Program was first featured in the January/February, 1983, Small Town article, “The Powers of the Press: Communicating Preservation Concepts Through Local Newspapers.”*  

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supportive manner. Revitalization efforts that choose to ignore the importance of this combined undertaking are, most likely, headed towards failure. This comprehensive approach dictates an integration of critical public capital improvement projects with private sector investment and development. Thus, this steering committee must include individuals from both sectors who are capable of making things happen once the program has reached the implementation phase.

Research and Inventory

Self-analysis and the establishment of an agenda for action necessitates the gathering, analyzing and synthesizing of information concerning what the downtown presently is in physical, economic, political and social terms. For these studies, qualified professional facilitators and/or consultants should be hired to generate an objective data base as well as to assist in determining an appropriate revitalization strategy. Local citizens, however, must be made an integral part of these early phases so as to emphasize their "ownership" of the process and the product.

The research and inventory phase provides the foundation for establishing an understanding of the present condition of the downtown and provides an all-important basis for future objective policy formulation and decision making. Once the initial data base is gathered, an ongoing updating procedure should be established, implemented and maintained. Table 1 gives a brief outline of the major elements that should be researched.

The Public Survey

No amount of second person research and analysis, especially when it is conducted by someone outside the community, can presuppose public opinion or, more precisely, how a community's citizens actually perceive their town or city. Finding this out is a very critical element of developing a community profile that involves a determination of assets and liabilities.

A well-developed one-page (no more—for long, involved, too specific questionnaires turn off the average citizen) questionnaire can give a community revitalization process excellent information and bring into focus the real issues as perceived by the citizenry. Anonymity should be guaranteed but experience has shown that many people will agree to sign their name in order to be heard. Developing a method to insure gaining the largest possible distribution as well as percentage of return of the questionnaire is an important element involved in getting a broad-based perspective of the current situation.

Presentation and Public Awareness Education

Once the data gathering is complete, it must be presented in both written and graphic form as clearly as possible so that all who participate in the planning process can critically evaluate the data as a basis for future recommendations and decisions. One method useful for establishing an agenda for action is to direct the consultant to facilitate the objective analysis of the data and arrive at a set

Facade restorations are often a key element in revitalizing downtowns. Maintaining attractive, welcoming storefronts is important to devising a workable strategy for keeping downtown the exciting, vibrant heart of a small town.
of conclusions that address the weaknesses that must be overcome and the strengths that can be capitalized upon. Often the same element can be assessed as a present weakness and a future strength and thus can provide one of the key foci for the action agenda--identified potential.

Public media, especially the local newspaper with its hard copy format, should then be engaged in order to make the findings known to the greatest number of people. This ensures, at least for those citizens interested in participating in planning their community's future, the potential to be informed.

The Next Critical Steps

This article's focus of the front end steps of revitalization must be viewed as means to an end--as part of an ongoing, complex, series of steps--that result in an achievable set of projects. Because it is a recognized sequence, it is imperative that this analysis leads to goals and objectives that are generated by a process involving the steering committee, the general public and any consultants or facilitators. During the entire process, it is critical to hold a series of open work sessions so that the goals and objectives arrived at reflect the widest spectrum of wishes, tempered by a realistic assessment based on local financial resources, ability to implement, dependency on related projects, etc. This process, requiring many hours of discussions, politicing and just plain, hard decision making, will hopefully result in a strategy in which all local parties have a shared ownership which allows them to play a committed role in the implementation phase.

Downtown revitalization across this nation has had an erratic track record, for although many success stories exist, hundreds of towns and cities are still losing the battle with regional shopping centers and suburban sprawl. The communities that have succeeded took an honest, objective and pragmatic look at what they were and what they could realistically be, and then set out in a comprehensive manner to achieve their goals.

Self-analysis is difficult for it often tells us what we don't want to hear. But not embarking upon such a critical undertaking makes it certain that a community will settle upon an agenda that avoids the critical issues and questions for the sake of ease, time and fear of conflict and controversy. Public education and awareness serves to open the closet door and allows a community to address the hard issues.

The revitalization of our cities' downtowns is far too important to our country's future not to address issues and resolve conflict. We plan not for ourselves, but for our children. A community cannot shirk from its responsibilities to leave for those yet unborn a better place to live.

The following quote by Sybil Moholy-Nagy, whom I was privileged to study under at New York's Pratt Institute, should be understood by all who wish to bear the agony and enjoy the ecstasy of downtown revitalization and improving small town quality of life:

Cities, like men, are embodiments of the past and mirages of unfulfilled dreams. They thrive on economy and waste; on exploitation and charity, on the initiative of the ego and the solidarity of the group. They stagnate and ultimately die under imposed standardization, homogenized equality, and a minimum denominator of man-made environment. Most decisive of all, cities, like mankind, renew themselves unit by unit in a slow, time-bound metaphoric process.
Small city downtown improvement strategies

by Debra Nyberg

Downtown, Main Street. These words create an image of the focal point for a small community—the place for shopping, professional services, government offices, and for cultural, recreational and social activities.

Small cities are striving to keep their downtowns vital in the face of changing economies and trends. Experts examined this issue at a National League of Cities seminar entitled "Strategies and Steps for a Dynamic Downtown," held recently in Minneapolis at the start of the annual League of Minnesota Cities conference.

More than 100 local officials from throughout the country attended the seminar.

What makes a dynamic downtown? City officials need to look at all the ingredients for a vital healthy downtown, from strategic planning, financing and organizing, to design, promotion and consideration of retail trends.

Why should cities undertake strategic planning? While often planning is used to cope with unacceptable change, a more common experience for small cities is how to cope with no change, according to Robert Einsweiler, a University of Minnesota professor and strategic planning consultant who provided training for seminar participants.

A successful planning strategy involves assessing where the downtown is, setting a mission or goal for where the downtown is going, and establishing action commitments and an organization to manage the implementation of the entire process, he said.

When creating a mission for a downtown, the questions to answer include: Who makes up the downtown? Who are the customers? What functions should downtown perform? What should the downtown’s image be? And what makes a downtown distinctive? Local officials need to assess the threats and opportunities facing their downtowns.

The success of a small-city downtown project requires a partnership among merchants, the city and community members. A partnership effort in Neenah, Wisc., population 24,000, illustrates the potential for progress.

The nonprofit Future Neenah Development Corp. took the lead on downtown development for the city in 1983 after the oldest department store in the retail core closed. The Downtown Neenah Action Committee and the city added to the downtown efforts, according to Neenah Mayor Marigen Carpenter.

The efforts of the groups transformed Neenah’s Main Street from empty storefronts to a thriving, historic specialty retail center, she said. As part of this, the downtown merchants organized, and 90 percent elected to join in a cooperative agreement for centralized retail management, which sets forth rules for the upkeep, hours of operation and participation in joint promotional efforts.

Debra Nyberg is assistant editor for the League of Minnesota Cities and its magazine, Minnesota Cities.

Carpenter terms the downtown project a team approach. "None of the three players could have done it alone. But with the three of them working together, there doesn’t seem to be a limit to what they can do.

Changes in retail sales patterns have had a dramatic impact on small city downtowns, according to the seminar’s lunch speaker, Richard Mistle.

"If businesses are doing business the way they were 15 years ago, they are probably in deep trouble," said Mistle, an area business management agent with the University of Wisconsin Extension Service. Businesses must change if they want to keep up with today’s economy.

Too often, he said, small city merchants close their businesses for the afternoon of the nation’s best shopping day—Saturday—and remain closed all through the second best shopping day—Sunday. National figures show that 40 percent of all retail business is conducted after 5 p.m., when most small city merchants are closed.

People now shop on weekends and weeknights because of work patterns. Fifty-one percent of all U.S. households are two-income families and another 19 percent are headed by single working adults, meaning people have less time to shop, Mistle said.

Why do people shop where they do? Mistle cited price, selection, credit policy, convenience, service quality and comfort. Loyalty is not among the factors, he said, because "people are not loyal.”

Back in the 1950s, the downtown of a small city was "the only game in town" for shoppers, and this monopolized weak organizations that were ill-prepared when competition came in the form of shopping malls, said seminar speaker Linda Harper, a program associate with the National Main Street Center in Washington, D.C.

In order to encourage revitalization, communities should consider downtown efforts to be an ongoing process of comprehensive management, rather than an isolated project, Harper said. Cities should set accomplishable goals in a work plan, because once goals are reached, then there is a product to sell—a downtown with a theme and purpose. Small city revitalization efforts include renovation and design, or the image the city is trying to create. For this reason, a community needs to settle on design and theme before promoting its downtown, said Jack Williamson, director of Design Michigan.

Cities need to understand and find their own identity, one that is easy to promote, he said. The design chosen must fit with the function of the downtown itself, added Richard Macias, vice president and director of design for HOK Planning Group in St. Louis, Mo.

For example, Macias said the historic preservation approach to downtown design has been effective for many smaller cities, but only when it meets community needs and matches the downtown’s purpose. Otherwise, themes can be ineffective in restoring economic vitality.

Once a city has an identity, then it is time for promotion. "Promote your downtown like you would a product," was the message that Joan Mathison, executive vice president of the Hastings (Minn.) Chamber of Commerce, delivered to seminar participants.

The first step, she said, is to know your product by assessing the city’s strengths and weaknesses. "The biggest obstacle to overcome is to make local residents realize why people want to come to the community," she said.

She urged small cities to develop a single logo and a community theme. The theme for Hastings is "We’re Making History," which Mathison said fits Hastings because it is a historical city located in the fastest growing county in Minnesota.

Claudia Parliament, an extension economist with the University of Minnesota, urged seminar participants to study and determine from where their downtown shoppers are coming and whether or not downtown stores are adequately meeting local and non-local demand. If not, strategies should be implemented for meeting the demand.

Other seminar speakers included Steve Goodhue, the project director of the nonprofit Main Street Co., which leads downtown revitalization efforts in Spencer, Ia.; Dale Helmich, a community development specialist with the Southeastern Minnesota Development Corp., who has helped very small cities organize for downtown revitalization; and John T. Morse, Main Street Coordinator for the Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development.
We have looked at the evolution of the traditional Main Street facade and seen that changes have been, and will be, concentrated on the storefront. Generation after generation, storefronts change while the upper facade stays the same or deteriorates or is hidden behind a screen.

Because of its relatively permanent nature, the upper facade is primarily a maintenance/repair problem. The storefront, on the other hand, is a design problem.

If you wish to restore the original storefront, a little research may turn up historic photos of your building. A good place to start is at the local library, or by asking previous owners, or even by searching the building itself.

However, you need not necessarily recreate the exact historic appearance. The following are ideas to think about as you plan a change in your storefront. Each is founded in the traditional storefront; however, these ideas are not "historic" in nature. They are functional and aimed at making the storefront more attractive and accessible to shoppers.

1. **KEEPING THE STOREFRONT IN ITS PLACE**

   Every traditional Main Street facade has a well defined opening which the original storefront filled. It is the area bounded by a wall on either side, the sidewalk on the bottom, and the lower edge of the upper facade on top.

   Many problems with the facades today are a result of this fact: the storefront has been allowed to stray out of its natural place within the facade. It no longer looks contained; instead it appears pasted on. One senses that the storefront is "out of control" in that it dominates the facade as a whole.

   A general rule for future remodeling can be stated as follows: a storefront should be designed to fit inside the original opening and not extend beyond it.

2. **THE SLIGHTLY RECESSED STOREFRONT**

   To emphasize this feeling of containment, a storefront might be set back slightly (six inches to a foot) from the front.

   It is common to see a remodeled storefront recessed as a whole, but pushed far back (three to fifteen feet) into the facade.

   A setback of this distance begins to isolate the storefront from the activity of the street. The pedestrian is not so tempted to stop, look in the windows, and step inside.

3. **THE RECESSED ENTRY**

   The traditional storefront had a recessed entry at the front door.

   This configuration accomplished two important things. First, it kept the display windows right next to the sidewalk in full view of passers-by. Then, with the entry recess, it emphasized the door. The intimacy of the enclosed and sheltered doorway seemed to invite the pedestrian inside.

   This is a simple and logical storefront design. Regrettably, many storefronts do not retain this form today.
4. THE STOREFRONT WINDOWS

The traditional storefront was composed almost entirely of windows.

Although often ignored, the idea of a transparent storefront is as valid today as it was in the past. For this reason, it is recommended that future storefronts be designed with the largest possible window area.

5. STOREFRONT DECORATION

The design of the traditional storefront emphasized the display windows and entry door. Because of this, the storefront had only simple decoration. Shoppers were supposed to look through it rather than at it.

At odds with this traditional concept, many remodeled storefronts are heavily decorated. Loud colors, patterns, textures, and signs all grab for the customer's attention. They fight with one another and clash with the older portions of the facade. With all this decoration, a shopper barely notices the display windows.

Merchants are encouraged to adopt a new strategy for storefront design, based on the attraction of the goods and services inside. Less emphasis should be placed on decoration for decoration's sake and more on the potential of the window display. (See guidelines sheet—WINDOW DISPLAYS.)

6. CHOOSING MATERIALS

The choice of materials can be critical to the overall success of your storefront design. Again, take a cue from the traditional storefront, whose simple and unobtrusive materials emphasized display windows and the entry door.

Today, many remodeled storefronts exhibit materials which look out of place on Main Street, because of color, or texture, or their combination. Not only do they clash with traditional facades, but often they are not pleasing designs in their own right.

You should carefully consider the visual qualities of any given material when making a choice. Understand that there are subtle variations which may spell the difference between success and failure.

As significant as the materials themselves is the way in which they are used. It is common to see a remodeled facade which appears sloppy and disorganized because materials have been carelessly used. Haphazard combinations can destroy the appearance of an otherwise pleasing design.

This problem becomes particularly evident at the "edges," where the storefront touches the upper facade or adjacent building. If the original storefront opening has been covered (see KEEPING THE STOREFRONT IN ITS PLACE) and cannot be reopened, then close attention should be paid to these edges.

The joint between your storefront and other facades should have neat and controlled appearance. Remember that the visual impact of the design extends well beyond these limits.
Painting can be one of the most dramatic improvements you make to your building. But be sure you know what steps to take. The following procedures will help smooth the way for a successful paint job:

1. Determine what you need to do to prepare for painting. Check all the wood. Is it sound or rotting? Replace any rotting wood.

2. Plan your painting schedule. Some times of the year are better for painting than others. Good weather usually makes for a better paint job. Ask your local paint dealer for assistance.

3. Check the condition of your windows. Reglaze all broken windows (install new glass). Replace any damaged putty with a glazing compound, making sure that it goes all around the window. Wait two to three days for the compound to dry before painting.

4. Prepare the surface adequately. Be sure to remove all peeling or loose paint. A variety of tools can be used: a wire brush, a scraper, a blow torch or an electric heat gun. Use these last two devices carefully, with only enough heat to soften the paint so that it can be easily pushed away.

5. Consider using a primer for the first coat. On older buildings, a primer will help the final coat adhere. Mix a little of the finish coat paint in with the primer.

6. Determine the type of paint best suited for your building. Stone, brick, wood, concrete block, and metal require different paints and primers.

7. Which kind of paint will you use, oil or latex? There are advantages and disadvantages to both.

- More durable
- Some feel it helps to preserve wood and adheres better
- Harder clean-up
- Less durable
- Easier to apply
- Easier clean-up

One important thing to remember is that once you use latex, you must continue to use latex. It's very difficult to switch back to oil. If you have been using an oil base, it is best to continue with oil.

8. Be aware that there are three degrees of shine for paint: gloss, semi-gloss and flat or matte.

9. Remember that quality paint will last longer than cheaper paint. It will not fade or peel as quickly and usually gives better coverage.
PAINT COLOR

The color you paint your building, window trim, or door is a personal decision. It is an expression about yourself and your commercial establishment. However there are other people and things to think about. The following procedures can help you decide what colors to paint your building.

1. Be a good neighbor and look at your building in relation to the entire block or the entire downtown. The color of your building can affect the overall character of Main Street.

2. Think about the orientation of the sun and your building. The amount of sun can change the hue of the paint color. Take a paint chip to your building on both cloudy and sunny days. To be really sure, invest in a quart of the color you choose and actually apply it. The effect of colors differs from a small chip to an entire wall.

3. Decide if you'd like to return your building to its original paint colors. If you seek historical accuracy, carefully scrape a small area. There are often several layers of paint over an original color.

4. Different color schemes were popular at various times. In the mid 1800s, soft, neutral tints were encouraged. Toward the end of that century, darker, richer shades were promoted. Then, tastes changed again at the beginning of the 1900s to lighter, calmer colors.

5. It is important to realize that white paint was not so widely used during the Victorian period as it is today. White seems to be too glaring and does not blend in readily with the environment.

6. Traditionally, building trim was painted in a decorative manner, many times a contrasting shade lighter or darker than the main building color (which often was natural brick). This paint treatment defined the trim, but it was not so loud that the trim colors overpowered the building.

7. Aluminum frames have often replaced the traditional wood frames. The shine and metallic color of the aluminum does not complement historic buildings. If possible, paint these frames a more neutral color or purchase darker anodized aluminum frames.

8. Color should be used to tie all building parts together, elements like the cornice, windows, storefront, and doors. In order to do this, it is necessary to restrict the number of colors you use. Try to choose similar colors.

9. With these procedures in mind, express yourself in painting. This adds to the richness and variety of Main Street.
The decision to clean the surface of your building is partly a matter of taste. Cleaning can give it a new visual life, restoring the natural qualities of the brick or stone. There are however functional reasons for cleaning masonry. Dirty areas on brick or stone remain wet for a longer period of time. This dampness can promote chemical reactions which lead to deterioration. Harmful microorganisms can also thrive in the dirt, in time, damaging the building surface. Masonry cleaning can also lighten the load of building maintenance. An owner who cleans the paint from his or her building, opting for the natural color of brick or stone, eliminates the periodic chore of repainting.

But a word of caution—improper cleaning can result in further acceleration of masonry deterioration. This can, after several years, affect the structural stability of your building.

Cleaning masonry is a very technical subject upon which the National Trust for Historic Preservation has accumulated much material. Do not hesitate to ask the Main Street Project Manager for advice.

The following is a list of steps to think about if you want to clean your building:

1. Consult an expert who can help you investigate the surface of your building and determine the safest, most efficient method of cleaning.

2. To be on the safe side, pay for a test patch. Evaluate the effectiveness of the cleaning method. Some dirt or paint is difficult to remove.

3. Let the test patch weather for several months. Any problems with the cleaning method will show up. Residue from the cleaning should not be left on the brick.

4. After the test, examine your brick. Note if there are too many pock marks. Are the edges too rounded? Does the face of the brick rub off? Some brick may be too soft to clean.

5. Check alterations to the original building. Methods used to fill in old unused doors or to change windows may be unsightly. The infill brick may be a different color. Perhaps the building was first painted to conceal these differences and should be repainted.

6. Investigate the condition of the mortar between the brick. Poor pointing could let water (used in cleaning) into the building and could cause interior damage. An expert can help you decide whether to tuckpoint before or after cleaning. (Be sure that the appropriate mortar type is used, for the wrong choice can lead to visual and/or structural problems.)

7. After the test patch, look at the original color of the brick. Do you like it?

8. Make sure the company you choose has a good reputation. If possible, investigate examples of their previous work for yourself.

9. Look at the area surrounding your building. Shrubs, trees, or ground cover will need protection. Be sure that whoever does the cleaning agrees to cover both the plant material and earth around the plants. Use a water resistant material.
10. Think about the weather when you decide to clean your building. Avoid wet cleaning operations when a danger of frost may exist. Verify freeze dates with the U.S. Weather Bureau.

If you are doing more than one maintenance task on your building, plan out a work schedule. Some work should be done before cleaning. Other work is best left until after. For example, there will be a need to wash windows after the cleaning process.

11. Make sure that all entrances, windows, and window wells are adequately protected against water coming in during cleaning.

PROCESSES

There are several different methods used to clean buildings. Choosing one method over another should be based on:
- the amount of soil.
- the amount and type of paint to be removed.
- the original composition and current condition of the masonry.

It is most important to understand how your building material will interact (chemically and physically) with the cleaner. If you don't know, don't hesitate, ask for help. Be sure to take your time and learn about the various processes.

Chemical Cleaning

Finding the right chemical for the job is the biggest challenge. Every company seems to have a secret formula. One thing to remember is that chemical cleaners can be either alkaline or acidic.

Water Cleaning

Cleaning with water sounds easy and it can be the most economical way to clean a dirty building. But do watch for potential problems. For instance, ask about the mineral composition of your city's water supply. Some minerals could leave stains on your building; check with the cleaning company.

Some especially dirty areas may require a good deal of manual scrubbing and strong detergent. The increased work hours can raise the total cost of the job.

Be sure to use only bristle brushes, not metal. Metal can disturb the mortar and damage masonry.

Chemical Cleaning

Be sure to choose the right kind of chemical for your building. Acidic products should never be used on limestone or marble buildings.

The masonry is usually pre-wet to soften any dirt. Then the chemical is applied and allowed to remain on the building surface. Finally, it is rinsed off, usually with water. At rinse-off time, make sure all the chemical is washed off the building.

Abrasive Blasting

Sounds tough? It is! Fine particles, such as sand, are forced with air (sometimes water) through a nozzle. It is never recommended because it can damage or erode the building surface.
We have looked at the evolution of the traditional Main Street facade and seen that changes have been, and will be, concentrated on the storefront. Generation after generation, storefronts change while the upper facade stays the same or deteriorates or is hidden behind a screen.

Because of its relatively permanent nature, the upper facade is primarily a maintenance/repair problem. The storefront, on the other hand, is a design problem.

If you wish to restore the original storefront, a little research may turn up historic photos of your building. A good place to start is at the local library, or by asking previous owners, or even by searching the building itself.

However, you need not necessarily recreate the exact historic appearance. The following are ideas to think about as you plan a change in your storefront. Each is founded in the traditional storefront; however, these ideas are not "historic" in nature. They are functional and aimed at making the storefront more attractive and accessible to shoppers.

1. KEEPING THE STOREFRONT IN ITS PLACE

Every traditional Main Street facade has a well defined opening which the original storefront filled. It is the area bounded by a wall on either side, the sidewalk on the bottom, and the lower edge of the upper facade on top.

Many problems with the facades today are a result of this fact: the storefront has been allowed to stray out of its natural place within the facade. It no longer looks contained; instead it appears pasted on. One senses that the storefront is "out of control" in that it dominates the facade as a whole.

A general rule for future remodeling can be stated as follows: a storefront should be designed to fit inside the original opening and not extend beyond it.

2. THE SLIGHTLY RECESSED STOREFRONT

To emphasize this feeling of containment, a storefront might be set back slightly (six inches to a foot) from the front.

It is common to see a remodeled storefront recessed as a whole, but pushed far back (three to fifteen feet) into the facade.

A setback of this distance begins to isolate the storefront from the activity of the street. The pedestrian is not so tempted to stop, look in the windows, and step inside.

3. THE RECESSED ENTRY

The traditional storefront had a recessed entry at the front door.

This configuration accomplished two important things. First, it kept the display windows right next to the sidewalk in full view of passers-by. Then, with the entry recess, it emphasized the door. The intimacy of the enclosed and sheltered doorway seemed to invite the pedestrian inside.

This is a simple and logical storefront design. Regrettably, many storefronts do not retain this form today.
4. THE STOREFRONT WINDOWS

The traditional storefront was composed almost entirely of windows.

For very functional reasons, it was designed to be as transparent as possible. This allowed a maximum of natural light into the typically narrow, windowless store space and relieved the closed-in feeling. It also allowed the potential customer a full view into the store, both of the merchandise displays and the interior space.

With this minimal barrier between store and sidewalk, the two seemed to melt into one. The store space became part of the public street, readily accessible to shoppers.

Many owners shy away from large storefront windows because of potential glass breakage. But the use of tempered glass can substantially reduce this problem. Further, a large window that is unobtrusively divided (into two or three sections) is much less expensive to repair when one pane breaks.

Although often ignored, the idea of a transparent storefront is as valid today as it was in the past. For this reason, it is recommended that future storefronts be designed with the largest possible window area.

5. STOREFRONT DECORATION

The design of the traditional storefront emphasized the display windows and entry door. Because of this, the storefront had only simple decoration. Shoppers were supposed to look through it rather than at it.

At odds with this traditional concept, many remodeled storefronts are heavily decorated. Loud colors, patterns, textures, and signs all grab for the customer's attention. They fight with one another and clash with the older portions of the facade. With all this decoration, a shopper barely notices the display windows.

Merchants are encouraged to adopt a new strategy for storefront design, based on the attraction of the goods and services inside. Less emphasis should be placed on decoration for decoration's sake and more on the potential of the window display. (See guidelines sheet—WINDOW DISPLAYS.)

6. CHOOSING MATERIALS

The choice of materials can be critical to the overall success of your storefront design. Again, take a cue from the traditional storefront, whose simple and unobtrusive materials emphasized display windows and the entry door.

Today, many remodeled storefronts exhibit materials which look out of place on Main Street, because of color, or texture, or their combination. Not only do they clash with traditional facades, but often they are not pleasing designs in their own right.

You should carefully consider the visual qualities of any given material when making a choice. Understand that there are subtle variations which may spell the difference between success and failure.

As significant as the materials themselves is the way in which they are used. It is common to see a remodeled facade which appears sloppy and disorganized because materials have been carelessly used. Haphazard combinations can destroy the appearance of an otherwise pleasing design.

This problem becomes particularly evident at the "edges," where the storefront touches the upper facade or adjacent building. If the original storefront opening has been covered (see KEEPING THE STOREFRONT IN ITS PLACE) and cannot be reopened, then close attention should be paid to these edges.

The joint between your storefront and other facades should have a neat and controlled appearance. Remember that the visual impact of the design extends well beyond these limits.

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PAINTING YOUR BUILDING

Painting can be one of the most dramatic improvements you make to your building. But be sure you know what steps to take. The following procedures will help smooth the way for a successful paint job:

1. Determine what you need to do to prepare for painting. Check all the wood. Is it sound or rotting? Replace any rotting wood.

If you have a masonry building and want to repaint it instead of cleaning, check the mortar. If the building needs repointing, do it before painting.

2. Plan your painting schedule. Some times of the year are better for painting than others. Good weather usually makes for a better paint job. Ask your local paint dealer for assistance.

3. Check the condition of your windows. Reglaze all broken windows (install new glass). Replace any damaged putty with a glazing compound, making sure that it goes all around the window. Wait two to three days for the compound to dry before painting.

4. Prepare the surface adequately. Be sure to remove all peeling or loose paint. A variety of tools can be used: a wire brush, a scraper, a blow torch or an electric heat gun. Use these last two devices carefully, with only enough heat to soften the paint so that it can be easily pushed away.

5. Consider using a primer for the first coat. On older buildings, a primer will help the final coat adhere. Mix a little of the finish coat paint in with the primer.

6. Determine the type of paint best suited for your building. Stone, brick, wood, concrete block, and metal require different paints and primers.

7. Which kind of paint will you use, oil or latex? There are advantages and disadvantages to both.

- More durable
- Some feel it helps to preserve wood and adheres better
- Harder clean-up
- Less durable
- Easier to apply
- Easier clean-up

One important thing to remember is that once you use latex, you must continue to use latex. It’s very difficult to switch back to oil. If you have been using an oil base, it is best to continue with oil.

8. Be aware that there are three degrees of shine for paint: gloss, semi-gloss and flat or matte.

9. Remember that quality paint will last longer than cheaper paint. It will not fade or peel as quickly and usually gives better coverage.
The color you paint your building, window trim, or door is a personal decision. It is an expression about yourself and your commercial establishment. However, there are other people and things to think about. The following procedures can help you decide what colors to paint your building.

1. Be a good neighbor and look at your building in relation to the entire block or the entire downtown. The color of your building can affect the overall character of Main Street.

2. Think about the orientation of the sun and your building. The amount of sun can change the hue of the paint color. Take a paint chip to your building on both cloudy and sunny days. To be really sure, invest in a quart of the color you choose and actually apply it. The effect of colors differs from a small chip to an entire wall.

3. Decide if you'd like to return your building to its original paint colors. If you seek historical accuracy, carefully scrape a small area. There are often several layers of paint over an original color. Please note, over time the original color may have changed slightly. To get a better idea of the true color, wet the original surface. The base color will appear more accurately when moist.

4. Different color schemes were popular at various times. In the mid-1800s, soft, neutral tints were encouraged. Toward the end of that century, darker, richer shades were promoted. Then, tastes changed again at the beginning of the 1900s to lighter, calmer colors.

5. It is important to realize that white paint was not so widely used during the Victorian period as it is today. White seems to be too glaring and does not blend in readily with the environment.

6. Traditionally, building trim was painted in a decorative manner, many times a contrasting shade lighter or darker than the main building color (which often was natural brick). This paint treatment defined the trim, but it was not so loud that the trim colors overpowered the building.

7. Aluminum frames have often replaced the traditional wood frames. The shine and metallic color of the aluminum does not complement historic buildings. If possible, paint these frames a more neutral color or purchase darker anodized aluminum frames.

8. Color should be used to tie all building parts together, elements like the cornice, windows, storefront, and doors. In order to do this, it is necessary to restrict the number of colors you use. Try to choose similar colors.

9. With these procedures in mind, express yourself in painting. This adds to the richness and variety of Main Street.
MASONRY CLEANING

The decision to clean the surface of your building is partly a matter of taste. Cleaning can give it a new visual life, restoring the natural qualities of the brick or stone.

There are however functional reasons for cleaning masonry. Dirty areas on brick or stone remain wet for a longer period of time. This dampness can promote chemical reactions which lead to deterioration. Harmful microorganisms can also thrive in the dirt, in time, damaging the building surface. Masonry cleaning can also lighten the load of building maintenance. An owner who cleans the paint from his or her building, opting for the natural color of brick or stone, eliminates the periodic chore of repainting.

But a word of caution—improper cleaning can result in further acceleration of masonry deterioration. This can, after several years, affect the structural stability of your building.

Cleaning masonry is a very technical subject upon which the National Trust for Historic Preservation has accumulated much material. Do not hesitate to ask the Main Street Project Manager for advice.

The following is a list of steps to think about if you want to clean your building:

1. Consult an expert who can help you investigate the surface of your building and determine the safest, most efficient method of cleaning.

2. To be on the safe side, pay for a test patch. Evaluate the effectiveness of the cleaning method. Some dirt or paint is difficult to remove.

3. Let the test patch weather for several months. Any problems with the cleaning method will show up. Residue from the cleaning should not be left on the brick.

4. After the test, examine your brick. Note if there are too many pock marks. Are the edges too rounded? Does the face of the brick rub off? Some brick may be too soft to clean.

5. Check alterations to the original building. Methods used to fill in old unused doors or to change windows may be unsightly. The infill brick may be a different color. Perhaps the building was first painted to conceal these differences and should be repainted.

6. Investigate the condition of the mortar between the brick. Poor pointing could let water (used in cleaning) into the building and could cause interior damage. An expert can help you decide whether to tuckpoint before or after cleaning. (Be sure that the appropriate mortar type is used, for the wrong choice can lead to visual and/or structural problems.)

7. After the test patch, look at the original color of the brick. Do you like it?

8. Make certain the company you choose has a good reputation. If possible, investigate examples of their previous work for yourself.

9. Look at the area surrounding your building. Shrubs, trees, or ground cover will need protection. Be sure that whoever does the cleaning agrees to cover both the plant material and earth around the plants. Use a water resistant material.
10. Think about the weather when you decide to clean your building. Avoid wet cleaning operations when a danger of frost may exist. Verify freeze dates with the U.S. Weather Bureau.

If you are doing more than one maintenance task on your building, plan out a work schedule. Some work should be done before cleaning. Other work is best left until after. For example, there will be a need to wash windows after the cleaning process.

11. Make sure that all entrances, windows, and window wells are adequately protected against water coming in during cleaning.

It is most important to understand how your building material will interact (chemically and physically) with the cleaner. If you don’t know, don’t hesitate, ask for help. Be sure to take your time and learn about the various processes.

Water Cleaning

Cleaning with water sounds easy and it can be the most economical way to clean a dirty building. But do watch for potential problems. For instance, ask about the mineral composition of your city’s water supply. Some minerals could leave stains on your building; check with the cleaning company.

Some especially dirty areas may require a good deal of manual scrubbing and strong detergent. The increased work hours can raise the total cost of the job.

Be sure to use only bristle brushes, not metal. Metal can disturb the mortar and damage masonry.

Chemical Cleaning

Finding the right chemical for the job is the biggest challenge. Every company seems to have a secret formula. One thing to remember is that chemical cleaners can be either alkaline or acidic.

Be sure to choose the right kind of chemical for your building. Acidic products should never be used on limestone or marble buildings.

The masonry is usually pre-wet to soften any dirt. Then the chemical is applied and allowed to remain on the building surface. Finally, it is rinsed off, usually with water. At rinse-off time, make sure all the chemical is washed off the building.

Abrasive Blasting

Sounds tough? It is Fine particles, such as sand, are forced with air (sometimes water) through a nozzle. It is never recommended because it can damage or erode the building surface.

Processes

There are several different methods used to clean buildings. Choosing one method over another should be based on
- the amount of soil.
- the amount and type of paint to be removed.
- the original composition and current condition of the masonry.