



## How to Get Started: Using the Main Street Approach

If your community plans to start a Main Street program to revive your commercial district or reinvigorate a struggling or previously failed revitalization attempt, consider the steps listed below. Using these recommendations will help you begin to generate the local support necessary to establish a successful Main Street revitalization initiative.

### Begin by building support

#### Form a broad-based working group:

- Ask colleagues in your community about starting a revitalization initiative. Canvass all 'stakeholders' who have an interest in the future of your downtown or commercial district, including merchants, business owners, property owners, and residents.
- Contact the mayor and other local government officials, such as the municipal planning department, economic development officials, and other organizations such as the chamber of commerce, historical society, or merchants association.
- Form a working group or task force of these interested individuals and community leaders to explore launching an initiative.
- The wider the group of people you gather, the easier it is to build support and spread the word. All of these entities stand to benefit from a revitalized district and have a vested interest in supporting your effort, both programmatically and financially, so you need to bring them to the table now.

#### Look at your district with fresh eyes:

- Look at your downtown or commercial district as if you are a first-time visitor.
- Take photos and make notes.
- What stands out?
- What is unique?
- What are its strengths?
- What needs improvement?

#### Find easy ways to get a lot of people involved as early as possible:

- Hold a community meeting
- Gather interested community members to discuss the idea. Call CT Main Street Center for advice and possible attendance at the meeting. CT Main Street can provide a PowerPoint presentation and case studies of successful initiatives. Use photographs to



illustrate what needs to be done. Ask for feedback from participants and invite them to join the effort. Always gather contact information and follow up later.

### **Network with successful programs**

- Invite the executive director or board president from another Main Street community to talk about their accomplishments with your working group or community. Ask them to answer questions about how the program works. Their enthusiasm, stories, and pictures will make a strong argument for a preservation-based revitalization program.
- Facilitate discussions among your stakeholders and those already involved with other Main Street programs. This type of dialog is invaluable, especially for members of the working group. Get mayors, business owners, and economic development staff talking.

### **Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.**

- Ask the local newspaper(s) to run a story about the commercial district revitalization initiative.
- Position a member of the working group as a guest on the local radio station to explain how the community can start a program.
- Make sure your stakeholders know about any upcoming article or interview.

### **Are you ready to join CT Main Street Center?**

CT Main Street Center has identified criteria for selection as a member community, which are indicators of success in this program. These criteria are:

- A distinct, well-integrated and well-defined district that is (or has the ability to be) pedestrian-oriented
- Broad-based community support for revitalization of the district, with strong local leadership (public and private sector)
- Track record of community engagement and some successes
- Policies and practices that encourage appropriate building restoration, renovation and adaptive reuse – including the desire for residential development on upper floors
- Supportive and active municipal government

***Contact CT Main Street Center to find out if you are ready to join this program, and to discuss the benefits of joining as a Member Community***