

**Minnesota Main Street Program
Fact Sheet
2009**

History of the National Main Street Program

In response to growing economic woes and threats to Main Street commercial architecture, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), in 1977 launched the pilot version of the national Main Street program. Since then, the program has become a proven small town and urban commercial corridor economic development program leveraging almost \$50 billion in public and private investment. The Main Street program is a comprehensive commercial revitalization strategy that helps communities preserve some of their most significant assets—their historic buildings. NTHP has developed the Main Street Four Point Approach™, tailored to local needs and opportunities:

- **Design:** Enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging compatible infill, and developing sensitive design management systems.
- **Organization:** Building consensus and cooperation among the many groups and individuals who have a role in the revitalization process.
- **Promotion:** Marketing the traditional commercial district's assets to customers, potential investors, new businesses, local citizens, and visitors.
- **Economic Restructuring:** Strengthening the district's existing economic base while finding ways to expand it to meet new opportunities.¹

For urban Main Street programs, there is a fifth Approach:

- **Public Safety:** Reducing crime and the perception of crime is a precondition for revitalizing neighborhood commercial districts.²

The Main Street Approach advocates “community self-reliance, local empowerment, and the rebuilding of traditional commercial districts based on their unique assets: distinctive architecture, a pedestrian-friendly environment, personal service, local ownership, and a sense of community.”³ The program measures success with indicators such as job creation, building permits, construction dollars, Convention and Visitors Bureau counts, and building renovation and new construction projects.

Minnesota Main Street Program Background

Statewide Main Street coordinating programs certify Main Street communities and assist cities and towns within the state in implementing the National Main Street Program. The statewide coordinating program provides participating local Main Street organizations with training, tools, information, and networking. Minnesota is currently one of only eight states in the nation without a statewide coordinating program, essentially leaving our communities to implement the program individually without the support of a coordinated network at the state and national levels.

In 1983, Minnesota joined 10 other states in the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Network. Through a competitive process, the Office of Environmental Resource Development (OERD), part of the Minnesota State Planning Agency, selected five pilot cities with a traditional downtown area and a population between 5,000 and 50,000. The state selected: Fergus Falls, Hastings, Hopkins, Morris,

¹ From National Main Street Center Fact Sheet, see: <http://www.mainstreet.org>.

² Seidman, Karl. “Revitalizing Commerce for American Cities: A Practitioner's Guide to Urban Main Street Programs.” Washington, DC: Fannie Mae Foundation, September, 2004. 6.

³ National Main Street Center website, see: <http://www.mainstreet.org>.

and Stillwater. Key accomplishments of the pilot cities in the two-year program included 66 rehabilitation projects, seven new construction projects, 61 new or expanded businesses, and 157 new downtown jobs.

Despite the successes of the pilot program, the state did not provide program funding between 1986 and 1990. In 1990, the Department of Trade and Economic Development (DTED), which incorporated OERD into its department in 1987, launched a Small Town Main Street program to assist towns with 10,000 people or less. The program provided access to National Main Streets consultants—however, the state provided no funding and only part-time staff. State funding for the Minnesota Main Street Program ended entirely in 1995 as priorities changed within DTED.

After the dissolution of Minnesota Main Street, program users were largely left to seek assistance from providers of individual components of the Main Street Four Point Approach, but with no access to a comprehensive service provider and network. The volunteer nonprofit Hometown Minnesota, Inc., provides networking opportunities and technical assistance, but it is not recognized by the National Main Street Center as a statewide coordinating program. Historic communities must now wade through scores of individual programs when seeking assistance. Understandably, users are overwhelmed in assessing which program is most effective and how to coordinate results from multiple providers of one or more pieces of the Four Point Approach™.

Reestablishing the Minnesota Main Street Program

Minnesota needs a statewide Main Street coordinating program to deliver this comprehensive economic development approach. With paid staff and a stable budget, the Minnesota Main Street Program will assist our communities in maintaining an economically competitive downtown. In 2007, the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, the statewide, historic preservation advocacy and education organization, convened a 30-member Task Force to study the reestablishment of a state Main Street program. Over a year of research was completed to understand the program's record in Minnesota and several community meetings were held to gauge support and gather feedback. With overwhelming support from dozens of communities and several legislators around the state, the Task Force recommended in November of 2008 to reestablish Minnesota Main Street as a program within the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota.

Next Steps

The Preservation Alliance has created Steering and Advisory Committees to guide the reestablishment of the Minnesota Main Street Program within the Alliance's organizational structure. Throughout 2009, the Steering Committee will finalize the program case statement to approach funders with the goal of capitalizing the program by 2010. The Committee will also work with the National Main Street Center to determine the criteria for accepting Main Street communities and the number that can be certified on an annual basis. Our goal is to hire a full-time Minnesota Main Street Program Director in early 2010 to begin certifying and servicing Main Street communities.

For More Information:

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