



## **Summary Report from the Start Up Team Visit to Bucksport**

**October 2009**

Presented to the Bucksport Economic Development Department  
Dave Milan, Town of Bucksport

*Maine Downtown Center team members:*

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**Healthy, thriving downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts are  
assets to communities endeavoring to sustain or grow their local  
economy and create or retain jobs.**

## INTRODUCTION

The Maine Downtown Center (MDC) is a program of the Maine Development Foundation (MDF). MDF believes that vibrant downtowns can be an economic engine of growth; can serve as an attractant to young people, creative economic ventures, retirees and diverse populations; and can mitigate costly sprawling land use development patterns. The MDC helps communities throughout the state revitalize their downtown economy, preserve and enhance appearance, and boost the image of their traditional business districts using a range of services and assistance.

We utilize the successful **Main Street Four-Point Approach**® developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center as its foundation for assistance. This approach emphasizes economic development within the context of historic preservation and is based on principles of self-determination and direct community participation. The Main Street Approach focuses on four key areas of revitalization which are worked simultaneously:

- **Organization.** Involving all constituencies having an interest in downtown revitalization and management of both human and financial resources. Organization helps everyone work towards the same goals and maximizes involvement of public and private leaders within the community;
- **Design.** Implementing projects that improve the appearance and functionality of downtown buildings and physical environment. Design enhances a district's appearance and pedestrian amenities while preserving its historic features;
- **Promotion.** Creating programs that market your downtown to potential and existing customers, producing special events and festivals, and promulgating a positive image of downtown. Promotion brings people back downtown by helping to attract visitors, shoppers, and investors; and
- **Economic Restructuring.** Studying your community's economy and market opportunities and using the information to develop programs that strengthen and expand existing businesses and aid in recruiting new businesses to downtown. Economic restructuring stimulates business development and helps strengthen the district's economic base.

The comprehensive approach has long been proven an effective methodology for revitalizing traditional, pedestrian-oriented commercial districts in your downtown. In essence, the Main Street Four-Point Approach® stresses grassroots involvement in the revitalization process where the community works beyond just the downtown stakeholders, to develop a compelling vision for your downtown.

Each Main Street program is locally driven, responds to locally identified priorities, and is locally funded. The Maine Downtown Center is committed to be a partner in this essential revitalization process for the long term.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE MAINE DOWNTOWN NETWORK**

As part of a three-tier approach to downtown revitalization in Maine, the MDC has launched the **Maine Downtown Network**, an affiliate to our successful Main Street Maine program and Downtown Institute. The Maine Downtown Network (MDN) program provides a range of services and assistance to meet a variety of community commitment and readiness levels with technical support through its staff and other experienced consultants.

The MDN is for communities just starting a downtown revitalization effort and/or for those hoping to achieve Main Street Maine status. MDN services help communities build an appropriate organizational and funding base for a comprehensive downtown or neighborhood commercial district revitalization program. Participation as a MDN community does not guarantee selection as a future designated Main Street Maine community, although it will help communities strengthen their revitalization efforts.

### **MDN communities are required to:**

1. Understand, commit to and follow the Main Street Four-Point Approach® to downtown revitalization (Organization, Design, Promotion and Economic Restructuring) established by the National Trust Main Street Center and promoted by the Maine Downtown Center.
2. Maintain and report on quantitative measures of success, specifically volunteer hours and re-investment statistics and share these with the MDC Program Manager at least twice annually or as requested.
3. Develop and/or maintain a volunteer board, including representatives of downtown business entities, the greater community and local government, to oversee the continuing development of the local downtown revitalization program for the terms of this agreement.
4. Engage staff, committee and/or board members and volunteers in ongoing training offered by the Maine Downtown Center. Travel expenses for such training shall be paid by the Local Program, unless otherwise provided by the MDC. Discounted registration will be made available to MDN Local Program participants to attend Downtown Institute sessions and the annual Maine Downtown Conference.
5. Share lessons learned from their experience as a MDN Local Program and share documents and products with the MDC and other communities in instances where sharing will not compromise the work of the Local Program.
6. The Local Program will illustrate the acknowledgement of the receipt of the MDC's services by crediting its participation, and as a beneficiary of, the MDN program through the appropriate methods (i.e., website, printed acknowledgement in public notices, press releases, project signs, publications, verbal recognition at public meeting, etc.)
7. Pay an annual participation fee based on population.

**The MDC will provide these additional services to MDN communities:**

1. Designate a MDC Program Manager to act as liaison with the MDN Local Program and to facilitate communications between the Local Program, the Maine Downtown Center, other Maine communities and the National Trust Main Street Center where appropriate.
2. Organize and conduct an initial Start-Up Visit whereby the MDC Program Manager and members of the MDC Advisory Board, Senior Advisors and selected consultants will visit the MDN Local Program to conduct an informal needs assessment and offer initial observations to help organize the Downtown program.
3. Organize and conduct a Year One Organizational Visit to assist the MDN Local Program in developing a start-up checklist, work plan creation and fund raising strategies.
4. Organize and conduct a Year Two Organizational Visit identifying progress and provide suggestions for moving forward.
5. Conduct training for board members and/or committee members, MDN Local Program Managers (where appropriate), and community volunteers, providing intensive and comprehensive training on the content and methodology of the Main Street Program at the local level.
6. Provide resource and consultant information to the MDN Local Program in topic areas specifically related to organization, design, promotion and economic restructuring.
7. Assist in the selection of a Downtown Manager, if appropriate, and provide orientation and training at the MDC office.
8. Provide for the MDN Local Program's membership in the National Trust Main Street Center for two years during the term of the agreement.
9. In general, facilitate learning among Maine Downtown Network and Maine Street Maine communities and the general public.
10. Post success stories and testimonials from the MDN Local Program on the MDC website and share links to the National Trust Main Street Center and other state coordinating programs.

In summary, the Maine Downtown Network is what you make of it. Tap into the energy! Consider yourself part of a growing family of historically rich, civic minded, volunteer-driven cities and towns in Maine – with passionate people committed to protecting and enhancing their special sense of place and courageous enough to invest the energy necessary to convert their vision of a vibrant downtown to reality. Now let's get to work!

## THE START UP VISIT

In July 2009, a group of enthusiastic downtown supporters representing both the public and private sectors met during lunch with the Maine Downtown Center's team. Our discussion focused on past efforts, current activities and future visions. The walking tour took the group riverside and into key businesses and buildings on Main Street. We returned to share immediate observations and discuss next steps as a Maine Downtown Network community. This report captures comments, ideas and suggestions from the team for consideration as you begin to work toward the Main Street model for downtown revitalization, incorporating the four points discussed previously.



*Photo by Roxanne Eflin, Program Manager, Maine Downtown Center*

### **ORGANIZATION OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR BUCKSPORT**

Effective downtown revitalization efforts require the energy, leadership, vision and passion of an organized, engaged and diverse group of downtown supporters. Bucksport is fortunate to have such leadership downtown, led in part by Dave Milan, the Town's Economic Development Director, and the downtown committee of the Bucksport Economic Development Committee, created by Town Council in 1996 after participating in a Redevelopment Strategy process. The BEDC members are appointed by the Town Council and report directly to the Council on issues of economic development as well as other issues as assigned. The 15 member committee is made up of volunteers who are business owners and residents from downtown Bucksport as well as representative of the entire community. Both the Bucksport Bay Area Chamber of Commerce and the school system have a representative serving on the BEDC.

As stated in Bucksport's Letter of Interest to become a Maine Downtown Network community "...the intent of the town would be to develop a separate sub-committee specifically for the Downtown Network to include representatives of business, residential and non-profit groups who have a stake in the success of Downtown Bucksport." We agree with your goal for this focused effort and encourage the Downtown Committee to take advantage of the training and network opportunities made available by the Maine Downtown Center, including the Downtown Institute – six sessions held throughout the year in Augusta on a variety of topics specific to the Main Street Four Point Approach®. We strongly believe that an informed group, comprised of downtown retailers and business owners, local residents, nonprofit organizations and municipal government, has the singular ability to elevate downtown Bucksport to the prominence it rightly deserves. We feel this should be the #1 priority for downtown Bucksport; this is the group that will begin to find more diverse funding sources for downtown activities and lead the charge.

We were impressed with the caliber of volunteers and the depth of civic leadership, which we urge you to continue engaging. The Town's commitment is clear, but other civic leaders who do not yet have a stake in downtown must be persuaded by influential leaders to come on a board to help lead the effort. As the downtown committee gains momentum and potentially establishes itself as a separate nonprofit organization, Town government should step back from the leadership and become facilitators and implementers. Our experience shows us that when local government provides all the answers, few others are motivated to get involved. So, engage everyone! Downtown is the heart of your community and it is essential to have broad based support.



*Downtown business and property owners, residents, and representatives from nonprofits and municipal government are all needed in an organized effort for revitalization.*

Determining the boundary of your "downtown" should help focus your efforts. While the "bridge-to-mill" stretch of Main Street seems the most expedient, we urge you to compress the geography during this initial start-up year to the more traditional downtown core. This area should also include the residential transition zone between the bridge and the intersection flanked by the Buck Memorial Library, which is physically where the commercial core begins. It is this gateway neighborhood – a long two block stretch of mostly historic, smaller scale residential buildings - that begins to set the tone and character for downtown and signals to visitors and residents alike that the traditional commercial shopping, dining and business district is just ahead.

A revitalization plan for downtown is essential to help guide your efforts. This plan, to be effective, must be kept fresh and impart an enthusiastic vision, clarify priorities, set deadlines and assign responsibilities. Organizing such a plan into the Four Points is recommended.

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### **DESIGN OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR BUCKSPORT**

The overarching slogan for the Main Street program is “economic development within the context of historic preservation.” Historic buildings provide the distinctive setting for downtown revitalization and, when combined with a beautiful natural setting, are a community’s greatest development assets. Bucksport is fortunate to have a number of architecturally and historically significant buildings which help define your character.



Embrace those historic buildings! Combined with your incomparable natural setting, Bucksport has enormous potential as a Main Street community. Find a way to work with area schools and teachers to create lessons based around the history and architecture of Bucksport. Maybe it would be a good activity for a local summer camp; definitely an idea to

partner with the Friends of Fort Knox, the Historical Society, library and others. Bucksport should consider other ways to build pride in its buildings – consider holding a scavenger hunt, creating a monthly downtown building trivia contest or developing a coloring book based on the downtown architecture. Be creative!

The Town's use of Community Development Block Grant funds to design and develop the gateway park just over the US Route 1 bridge from which sprouts the paved pedestrian walkway along the harbor won for Bucksport a coveted annual award this year from the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. Indeed, Bucksport has done a superb job developing a pedestrian experience to capture views of the water, the Penobscot Narrows Bridge and Fort Knox State Park – a heritage tourism anchor that attracts between 80,000-100,000 visitors each year.



Explore as many other physical connections as possible to link Main Street to the waterfront trail and design these links to be easily identified, safe, and convenient – perhaps have the trail end in a café! Coffee along the trail, music, interpretive signs – all will attract users.

Your new street signs with plant hangers and a sailing vessel are charming and effective, as are your unique trash receptacles with flowers on top – a Bucksport original! The restoration of your historic fountain will also stimulate downtown pride, volunteers to help with fund raising and media coverage.



Make buildings attractive that face the river. Many see Bucksport only from the bridges and the backs of your buildings may be all they see or know. Consider design improvements to the waterfront side/backs of your buildings within the context of how these are viewed from locations other than Main Street.



We encourage you to investigate some form of a preservation legislation to help protect your historic built environment – your key downtown asset – and to incentivize private investment downtown. Design guidelines for downtown should also be established. These serve to inform, educate and encourage good stewardship practices and savvy energy efficiency methods while retaining historic building fabric. We noticed a number of buildings that needed a fresh coat of paint and some simple maintenance. These are easy opportunities for volunteers to pitch in to make an immediate difference.



*Look for opportunities to install color, greenery and places to rest (and WiFi) – flowers, street trees, awnings and benches all make downtowns more pedestrian friendly.*



*Vegetative buffers soften impervious surfaces, such as parking lots, making them more inviting and environmentally friendly.*

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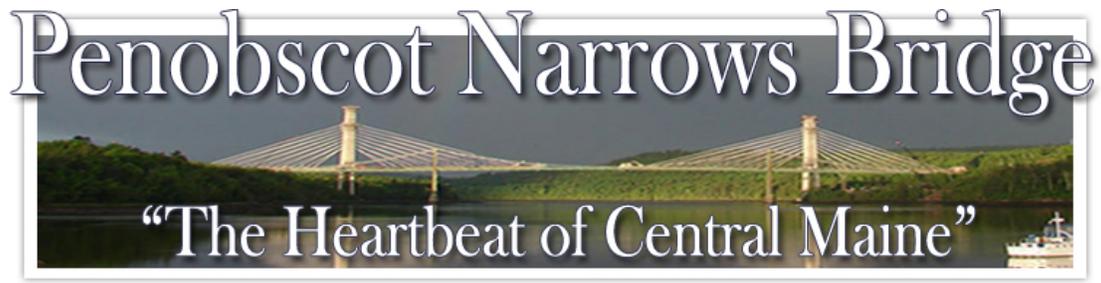
## **PROMOTIONS OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR BUCKSPORT**

*The Center of the Known Universe!*

Branding downtown Bucksport is vitally important to instill a sense of place and local pride while highlighting the character-defining aspects that make your downtown uniquely distinctive. The logo brand representative of the City's history and culture should be used everywhere, especially on public signs including way-finding, directional, entry gateways, facility identification and city entry monuments. These signs, combined with other design amenities, will help create an appealing environment for residents and visitors and are produced in sustainable materials for durability and easy maintenance

A previous campaign to promote Bucksport as “The Center of the Known Universe” attracted attention and won a statewide honor award from the Maine Downtown Center for promotional creativity. This may be a good time to investigate the development of a downtown-specific logo for broad use (see [mdf.org/downtown](http://mdf.org/downtown) for a PowerPoint on Community Branding, presented through the Downtown Institute.)

Both the Bucksport Bay Festival (June) and Ghostport (October) are becoming signature events focused on bringing people to downtown, building pride in the waterfront, the businesses and buildings, and creating a sense of community. We urge you to continue working with Fort Knox State Park (Friends of Fort Knox) and the Penobscot Narrows Bridge (State of Maine) to market both sides of the river's heritage and play up your new riverfront trail of history. This is an excellent opportunity to engage volunteers of all ages and interests in downtown, and help build the base of support Bucksport needs to move forward in a Main Street model of downtown revitalization.



The c.1798 Jed Prouty Tavern is a prominent historic local landmark and namesake, connected with author Daniel Robinson, who also has connection to Haverhill, Massachusetts. Although the building is currently vacant, efforts are ongoing to find a new owner or developer. To help spur this effort along, you may wish to investigate how other Maine communities with ties to famous authors have used these connections to promote their community : Portland with Longfellow, Hollis with Kate Douglas Wiggin, Gardiner with Edward Arlington Robinson, and Bangor with Steven King, to name just a few. What about Old Jed Prouty play re-enactments, Jed Prouty theater events, Jed Prouty day or week or “crown” your own Honorary Jed Prouty?

Sister Cities are another good way to connect merchants and residents to communities with some connection to Bucksport - you don't have to have just one. Not only does this encourage tourism and school connections, but it provides good publicity and good will between communities.

Remember, also, the importance of retail events which serve triple duty: they bring shoppers to downtown, get them inside stores spending money, and befriend merchants to your downtown efforts. Many of our participating Main Street Maine and Maine Downtown Network communities have created annual signature retail events that have become extremely successful.

Through your association with the Maine Downtown Center, you have (truly vast) resources available to you through the National Main Street Center's members-only section online. You will find a substantial amount of practical advice, innovative ideas and guidance to help you develop a solid promotion strategy for downtown Bucksport. The October 23, 2009 Downtown Institute session focused on Branding, Marketing and Promotions and the presentations are posted to our website at [mdf.org/downtown](http://mdf.org/downtown). We encourage you to take advantage of our low-cost Downtown Institute sessions offered six times a year.

## ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR BUCKSPORT



*BookStacks offers free WiFi inside their store. Rosen's is a regional customer draw.*

Bucksport's downtown is loaded with amenities other communities *wish* they had. Business retention and recruitment requires the work of downtown ambassadors. Package your amenities – just a few are listed below – and go after the businesses you lack to secure downtown Bucksport's place in the regional market.

- Distinctive heritage setting with significant and attractive historic buildings
- Highly walkable – with nice tree-lined neighborhoods just one block off Main Street
- Proximity to U.S. Route 1 with some 21,000 vehicles per day (in high season)
- Waterfront Park with fishing pier and kayak/canoe launch access
- Marina and visiting cruise ships
- Lil Toot Penobscot River cruise (seasonal)
- Engaging one-mile waterfront walkway with well-designed landscaping and interpretive plaques
- Public parking
- New and very accessible public restrooms
- The historic Alamo Theater and Northeast Historic Film with international participation in their annual Seminar
- The Bucksport Bay Area Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Center
- Bucksport Historical Society and Museum, in the historic depot off Main Street
- The Buck Memorial Library, listed in the National Register of Historic Places
- The (former) Jed Prouty Tavern and Inn, listed in the National Register of Historic Places – currently vacant and ripe for redevelopment using federal and state historic tax credits
- A variety of local landmark businesses, including BookStacks (with free WiFi), Rosen's clothing store, Community Pharmacy and many more
- Built in work force/shopping force at the mill – and mill tours
- Close proximity to Silver Lake - approximately one mile from downtown, and an excellent opportunity to partner with the Great Pond Conservation Trust
- Plus, a seasonal walk-up window for ice cream!

## **Economic Restructuring Opportunities**

Dave Milan reports that downtown Bucksport's storefronts are only 60% occupied. This provides great opportunities to study your market needs and invite the businesses you desire to locate in Bucksport. Your recent market survey should have revealed a number of opportunities for community services and consumer needs.



*The former Bucksport library building next to the former Jed Prouty Tavern and Inn are powerful historic and aesthetic assets ready for adaptive use - both are individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places.*

Marketing the historic tax credits is another strategy to stimulate downtown development - by contacting real estate-oriented new owners, encouraging residential development, getting a few smaller projects started at the same time and marketing downtown as a whole during the process. For more information on this, contact Mike Johnson at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (287-2132) or Greg Paxton at Maine Preservation (775-3652.)

Farmers Markets are wonderful additions to downtowns. You have the space and the potential to attract multitudes while promoting locally grown food and healthy living. This seasonal amenity should be widely promoted to residents and your mill worker base - and cross-marketed with downtown businesses.

Expand free WiFi throughout downtown! Include this on the gateway sign at the bridge, and watch your pedestrian traffic grow!

Establishing a demographic mix of residents – living right in downtown and within immediate proximity - is essential to keep downtowns thriving. Potentially missing from downtown Bucksport are artists, students and young singles - three groups who will pioneer and endure hardship and unfinished spaces. Their engagement helps build the reputation of the place as “on the way up.” This approach would provide an automatic market for businesses, with the proviso that residents spend three to five times as much as a worker in

downtown. Mill workers are a captive market though lunch may be about all the time they have. Consider a “lunch and learn” series that could help start to build a buzz.

Utilize your new connections to the Maine Downtown Center’s resources (staff, Advisory Council, Senior Advisors, website, annual conference, Downtown Institute and the 16 other participating Main Street Maine and Maine Downtown Center communities.) Also, take advantage of your membership with the National Trust Main Street Center and tap into their vast online resources and listserv.

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**We applaud Bucksport for becoming a  
Maine Downtown Network community  
and look forward to working with you in the future.**