



A program of the MAINE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

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## **Summary Report from the Start Up Team Visit to Dover-Foxcroft**

**September 2010**

Presented to Jack Clukey, Town Manager

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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**<sup>®</sup> 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 Four-Point Approach<sup>®</sup> 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.
- **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.

This 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<sup>®</sup> 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 MDC 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 launched the **Maine Downtown Network** in 2009 as 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, for a minimum of two years.
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 MDC. 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 meetings, etc.)
7. Pay an annual participation fee to MDC 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. Join forces 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 2010 a group of enthusiastic downtown supporters representing both the public and private sectors met with the Maine Downtown Center's team. Our discussion focused on past efforts, current activities and future visions. We began with an orientation meeting which was followed by a walking tour which took the group into key businesses and buildings on Main Street. We returned for lunch 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 continue to work in the Main Street model for downtown revitalization, incorporating the four points discussed previously.



*The Start Up visit team! Report photos provided by Roxanne Eflin, Program Manager, Maine Downtown Center*

### **Organization Observations and Suggestions for Dover-Foxcroft**

Effective downtown revitalization efforts require the energy, leadership, vision and passion of an organized, engaged and diverse group of downtown supporters. You are fortunate to have such a group, spearheaded primarily by the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society and your Town Manager, Jack Clukey. His vision and leadership as an advocate for downtown is vitally important to help solidify support from the elected officials and all town employees. They each have a role in the future of your commercial core and it is important that each of them understand how the Main Street approach works. Local government needs to position itself as a partner (and sometimes facilitator and implementer), encouraging the leadership roles to be served by the private sector. A balanced three-way partnership between the merchants/property owners, municipality and the residents is critically important for sustainable success. As MDC Senior Advisor Bill King says "It's all together for success!" We are impressed with the caliber of volunteers leading the Central Theater and the Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society. Their efforts surrounding impressive rescue campaigns for the historic theater and Central Hall set a strong focused "can do" tone for downtown. It is important for other civic leaders who do not yet have a stake in downtown to be persuaded to get involved to help lead the effort. We encourage the delegation of tasks into four highly-functioning committees in order to keep the movement pulsing forward and prevent individual burn-out. As with many of our participating communities, often the Committee Chair or Board President does much of the heavy lifting because they do it so well! We

encourage balance within the leadership to spread both the enthusiasm and work throughout the committees. This balanced leadership ethic will help groom others to smoothly pick up the pace when, and if, your top leaders wish to step back from their respective roles. An inventory of other organizations active in Dover-Foxcroft, including a list of officers, board members, downtown projects and goals, is important to find leadership, new volunteers and supporters. Then develop a communications strategy to connect with them and *ask* for their participation. So often, people simply are not asked.

With a sustainable future in mind for downtown Dover-Foxcroft, we urge you to either become a strong standing committee of the Town or form your own 501(c)3 organization whose mission and purpose align with your work in revitalizing all of downtown. Expand this focused committee or organization to include broad representation of the community with talent in each of the Four Points. For example, Tracy Michaud Stutzman, Executive Director of the Maine Crafts Association would provide a strong connection to the creative economy sector which abounds in your region of Maine.

We also strongly encourage the key individuals involved in the downtown effort to receive training in historic preservation in order to fully understand the *essential role* that historic preservation, and the accompanying incentives, plays in economic development. Currently in Maine, historic Preservation projects are leading the real estate development and housing sectors. Including people within your committee or organization with a background in historic redevelopment is recommended.

In July 2003, the Dover Foxcroft Downtown Revitalization Plan – Phase One was prepared by WBRC Architects and Engineers for the Piscataquis County Economic Development Corporation. This report was impressive, specifically from a design perspective.



Seven years later, does the plan still hold up? How much has been accomplished? Is it still fresh and does it impart an enthusiastic vision, clarify priorities, set deadlines and assign responsibilities appropriate to today? (Note: A current Downtown Revitalization Plan is required in order for your community to be eligible for matching grant funding through the new Community for Maine's Future program, expected to be launched this fall.)

### **Additional Organization Activities to Pursue**

- Web presence is crucial: information about your downtown efforts should easily be discovered on the Town's, Chamber's and Historical Society's websites. You should also consider having a Facebook page to help spread the word across a variety of demographics (easily accomplished for free and a great student volunteer activity!). Include a statement about your Maine Downtown Network status and be sure to link the MDC's website to yours. Please also utilize our Maine Downtown Center logo to indicate our partnership.
- Fundraising is an ongoing challenge and opportunity. We encourage all our participating communities to "think in threes" for income sources: 1/3 from the Town, 1/3 from downtown businesses and property owners and 1/3 from the residents and special events. A balanced fundraising plan is important to help spread the ownership and prevent a setback should any one source be cut or curtailed. You should work in tandem from bottom to top/top to bottom - establish your budget and a funding pyramid. If you have not yet done so, this is the time to inventory your assets and promote these as a selling tool. A number of small gifts are as important as your top gifts when building your base of support. Remember to thank every donor in writing within 48 hours after their gift is received.
- Public relations about your revitalization efforts should be constant – in the press, on public access television and in educational presentations by your members. Your (yet to be developed) downtown brand logo and slogan statement should be widely used by merchants and businesses throughout your downtown to continually reinforce the message and image. Create a PowerPoint presentation for your board members and committee volunteers to take into the schools to educate and inspire teachers and students (K-12) and, subsequently, their entire families.
- We urge your committee to develop a positive presence at Town Council meetings and invite one of them to serve with your group, perhaps as an official liaison. It is useful to rotate the spokesperson role at Council meetings in order to show the many faces of downtown and develop speaker leadership.
- Have some fun times together, preferably after hours, at several different businesses. The Bath Business Barometer is an excellent model, resulting in team building.
- We encourage you to take advantage of the training and networking 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 and well organized

group, comprised of downtown retailers and business owners, local residents, nonprofit organizations and municipal government, has the singular ability to elevate downtown Dover-Foxcroft to the prominence it rightly deserves.

### **Suggestions on Organization from the MDC Start Up Team Advisors:**

#### **Chris Glass**

Good relations between the business community, regional development agency and chamber of commerce look promising and provide a built-in staff for pursuing downtown projects. The Theater is a galvanizing model, with Patrick Myers and his 280 members, 40 regular volunteers and rental to local church for services.

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#### **Bill King**

Important organizations appear to be the Historical Society and the Chamber with good city, county and state support. Leadership has good potential from Chris, Jim, Mary and others of the Historical Society, and Patrick at the Theater, with support from Deb, at the Chamber, and Janet from the county. Partners also must include the residents and all the civic leaders. A critical question is always: is funding for downtown ample and sustainable? Chris has a good start at raising private funds for the Central Hall restoration and it appears the Town has. The public relations/branding message is good but only focused on building restoration/rehabilitation efforts. There is no free standing revitalization organization at this point. Downtown revitalization efforts at this point are being generated by the Theater, the Historical Society and the Town. The business involvement in this effort appears to be non-existent, which is a large concern and needs urgent attention. Chris volunteered to join Deb in trying to organize local business support with the help of Theater Manager Patrick.

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#### **Jayne Palmer**

The historical society and others focused on building restoration along with the Chamber and city work together, but there needs to be an organizational structure to encompass them all into an entity including the business community. There is a core of Chris, Patrick, Deb, Jack, Janet and Jim who have leadership potential, a willingness to work and be trained in the Main Street Four-Point Approach. They have the ability to raise needed funds if they can enlist the business community. They should expand their focus in historic preservation to improving the downtown. The overall public relations message and downtown branding is unknown, and will be critical to their efforts. Who has connections and to what form of media? Who can help with a web site? What will get the press and media to downtown?







Dover-Foxcroft is fortunate to have a number of architecturally and historically significant buildings which help define your unique character. The proposed redevelopment of the historic Moosehead Mill complex has enormous potential for the entire community, and specifically downtown. Saco, Biddeford, South Berwick, North Berwick, Waterville, Portland and Lewiston/Auburn are all benefiting substantially from mill redevelopment.

Infill development that is compatible with the historic fabric creates attractive places for people and art, as part of your creative economy/local crafts niche. You want to be ahead of that development and in control of what new development will look like. It is strongly recommended and a valuable exercise to examine your current local site plan review requirements and any design requirements the town has. Compare these with the suggestions in your downtown plan and incorporate them, if they are missing.



*Core of historic downtown Dover-Foxcroft – opportunities for façade improvements and utility line burial*

Integrated redevelopment that preserves and enhances significant structures (of which there are many) and street character is an essential goal of this program. Structures should not only be compatible with the character of the surroundings, but also be oriented with a store front facing the street with buildings abutting the sidewalk. The design committee should advocate for certain uses to not be allowed in the downtown section of Main Street, such as first floor residential.

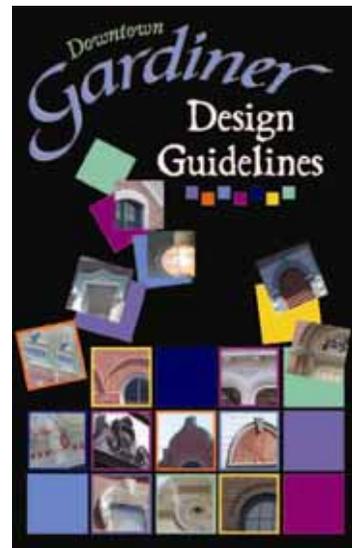
We encourage you to invest the time to survey and analyze each building for its current condition and future potential. If you have not collected and organized all the historic photos you can of your downtown buildings, engage the partnership of your Historical Society, high school history department and anyone interested in helping. This treasure trove of historic data should be utilized to assist property owners, your Design committee and the Town in making façade design decisions. Your leadership in these efforts is imperative.

Most often, changes over time detract from the original design integrity – we see many examples of this erosion in downtowns across Maine, including Dover-Foxcroft. Small changes and improvements can make a significant difference and will begin to build energy and similar interest by building owners up and down the street. *The Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Buildings* offers practical, common sense advice to building owners and contractors. Base your design decisions upon those historic photos you gathered or find clues in the building. You will begin to accomplish two things: 1) restore the authentic appearance of these character-defining buildings and/or 2) rehabilitate buildings with design sensitivity to original design principles and the neighboring context.

The design committee should work with the Planning board to develop design guidelines for downtown integrating redevelopment that preserves and enhances significant structures (of which there are many) and street character. Significant historic buildings, of which there are a number, should - at the very least - have their own binding design standards to appropriately and sympathetically guide new construction and architectural modifications that will occur downtown. We recommend the creation of some form of regulatory framework aimed at accommodating growth while preserving the unique qualities of downtown Dover-Foxcroft. The MDC has numerous examples of how this is accomplished in communities across Maine, which can begin as simply as advisory review of all plans for any building over 50 years old located within your downtown district.

Dover-Foxcroft's success with the preservation methodology could positively influence other communities in the region struggling with similar issues in their commercial cores. As the county seat and leading service center community in the region, your efforts downtown have the potential to be precedent setting. Demolition should always be the absolute last resort as it results in gutting the heart of your community of its heritage and distinct character thereby jeopardizing your strong position in the regional marketplace as a community with heart and heritage. Historic buildings need proper rehabilitation to correct deferred maintenance and/or unsympathetic changes that have occurred over time.

It may be time to adopt some form of local preservation legislation to help protect your historic built environment - your key downtown asset - and to incentivize private investment downtown. Thousands of towns and cities nationwide have adopted historic preservation ordinances, including many in Maine - and in these communities, property values have increased or are at least stable. Some of these ordinances are more advisory in nature, which Dover-Foxcroft may wish to consider at this stage. To learn more, contact either/or the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (287-2132), Maine Preservation (775-3652) or the Maine Downtown Center (622-6345.)



*Owners most often wish to do "the right thing" for their historic buildings.  
Help them by providing information, training and good guidance.*

We encourage you to develop simple design guidelines for downtown buildings. Check out Gardiner Main Street's efforts here – their publication is posted on their website. A fresh coat of paint and some simple maintenance are easy opportunities for volunteers to pitch in to make an immediate difference. Design guidelines serve to inform, educate and encourage good design alterations that are sympathetic and compatible to the downtown context. They also inform good building stewardship practices and should discuss ways to incorporate savvy “Green Downtown” energy efficiency methods while retaining historic building fabric.

There is likely a perception that traffic moves through Main Street faster than it should and it makes it difficult for pedestrians to cross the street. Traffic cones, signs, or decorative barrels could also be used at key crossings to bring attention to pedestrian safety and help slow traffic.

There appears to be of plenty of parking at the moment. Thinking long term, you may consider some angle parking on the east end of Union Square, which would serve to both slow traffic and add more spaces downtown. The Main Street corridor should avoid having auto related uses including drive-through windows and curb cuts that disrupt the feeling, perception and reality of a pedestrian-friendly corridor. Integrated landscape features should also be designed and planted to mitigate development impacts.

### **Suggestions on Design from the MDC Start Up Team Advisors:**

#### **Chris Glass**

Dover-Foxcroft has quite a bit of authentic character, though some smaller buildings have been wrapped in synthetic siding, but the anchors are in good shape – the bank block, True Value, the D-F Historical Society “flat iron” building, Masonic Block and the Theater. Siding covering the third floor Masonic windows is unfortunate: it spoils the proportions of the façade, and the red plastic lettering only draws attention to the problem. These are reversible and would make an immediate and enormous positive difference downtown, signaling good change is on the horizon.

The overall integrity of the historic buildings is remarkable, especially the bank block. While no local preservation protection, design review, National Register district or even demolition delay legislation exists, there is advisory review that extends to private owners as well as government. This was where the challenge of opposition was described as the CAVEs – Citizens Against Virtually Everything. Nationally, statistics demonstrate that in commercial districts and residential neighborhoods where historic preservation legislation exists, property values are higher than in similar unprotected areas.



Streetscape improvements, such as pole flags, banners and pocket parks are very welcome symbols of a downtown cooperating in making itself as a whole attractive to visitors. This attention to the unity and importance of the whole place is what gives a community of individual buildings and businesses a larger identity. This kind of vision should be encouraged.

Storefronts are usually the first level of downtown commercial buildings to be altered. In Dover-Foxcroft, we find that most of the storefronts are generally retrievable. Low building density (one and two story) between Theater and bridge focuses attention on the “square.”



*Opportunities exist to replace, recapture and restore authentic exterior design and materials*

Streetscape (trees, flowers, lighting, benches, trash/recycling barrels and walkways): Present flower boxes lose their impact by being back against the storefronts– should be out by posts or up on posts, which would involve a new lighting scheme. Additional pedestrian-level lighting is needed.

Signage quality varies from very good to pedestrian. Businesses like True Value would benefit by some liveliness in their signage and windows. More directional signs to parking (and river overlooks as the park is developed) are also needed.

Rivers in Maine towns too often are ignored, largely because they were viewed for years only as the source in industrial power. Throughout the state towns are seeing the “rivers that run through it” as places to come together for recreation and celebration. Dover-Foxcroft has a window of opportunity to look at its river in this way and create a resource that would complement and enhance its main street.

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### **Bill King**

There are a few distinctive character-defining buildings. Most of the facades need improvement, and fortunately it appears that most of their authenticity is retrievable. More flowers are needed in bigger barrels. The streetlights need replacing with a more design-appropriate version. Street trees would be nice particularly in front of the Flatiron building

and serve many purposes, including a visual softening of the existing hardscape. This may also be the appropriate place for a community monument. A well-designed pedestrian pass-through to rear parking lots would be useful on the north side of Union Square.

Signs in Dover-Foxcroft generally lack aesthetic appeal with the exceptions pictured here. Signs are an important business climate signal in every downtown. We recommend you tackle signage improvements very soon. This is a big issue that generates big results.



Signs constructed of quality materials, nicely designed and scaled to the building are not only aesthetically appealing but they present a harmonious setting for shopping and doing business. We encourage you to work with business owners to insure they install and display aesthetically appropriate and eye-catching signs. Small matching “seed” grants can help convince a business owner to update and improve the quality of their signage.

Consider interpretive signs/plaques to help tell the story of your downtown (aka Augusta, Biddeford, Farmington and Presque Isle.) These signs, combined with other design amenities, will help create an appealing environment for residents and visitors and need to be produced in sustainable materials for durability and easy maintenance.

Vacant storefronts make downtowns feel “hollow” and unappealing. An option to reducing dark cavernous voids is to install a temporary wall or curtain a few feet behind the storefront and provide lighting (on a timer). Next, introduce rotating displays which could be historic photos of the building and/or town, work by local artists and/or youth, local business display ads, your library or a “what is happening on Main Street” display. Be creative!

Window displays offer opportunities to involve a variety of people from the community - particularly clever and creative volunteers. What about a window display contest? Invite a display professional to give an evening workshop with hot tips on how to make storefront displays sing! Encourage members of the Design and Promotions committee to take pictures during their travels of any and all storefront window displays (and signs) that catch their eye and make them pause. Those are the windows that work. Study the elements and help your downtown merchants improve their greeting-card-behind-glass.



And finally, snow removal: pay attention to how your snow removal process makes crossing the street difficult or not navigable in winter. The snow bank plowed up in the middle is hard to navigate through/over, and difficult to see around, and snow plowed over the sidewalk prevents easy access by shoppers from their cars.

### **Jayne Palmer**

The overall condition of many historic buildings appears to be documented. There is a core of very authentic buildings, but many are not located in the heart of downtown. Numerous storefronts have been altered, requiring an interest from the landlords and tenants to make improvements – which will subsequently improve business. Streetscape improvements are needed - trees, flowers, lighting, benches, trash/recycling barrels, walkways – to bring life and interest to street. The attempt at flowers is a good beginning, but more (larger containers) are needed as are hanging pots on poles. Crosswalks need painting.





*Aesthetically, this important gateway to downtown has significant room for improvement as a welcoming enticement to invite customers to “STOP”, shop and dine downtown.*

Wayfinding and business identification signage also needs improvement. We found it difficult to find downtown Dover-Foxcroft from the southern approach – signs did not lead us or provide a positive welcome to your historic downtown. Overall, the majority of signage is not particularly inviting and connotes the message that “there is nothing here to stop for.” Parking is more than ample but it is not highlighted nor are the spaces clearly painted. A few more pedestrians on the sidewalks and cars on the street would certainly send the message that something is happening downtown.

The island in front of the flatiron building is the “poster child” for improvement. Because it is a high traffic area and often gets abuse from snow plows and trucks, the attempt at landscaping was abandoned. Definition with curbing, appropriate landscaping and perhaps a permanent tree (for lighting at Christmas) and/or a monument will signal change.



*Historic Central Hall is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The current rehabilitation effort is laudable and speaks loudly to Dover-Foxcroft's interest and passion in its community heritage and culture.*

## Promotions Observations and Suggestions for Dover-Foxcroft

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 continue to refine a solid promotion strategy for downtown Dover-Foxcroft. Our goal is to help you increase the "feet on the street!"

We encourage you to develop and adopt a logo or branding image and urge everyone to use this widely – by merchants, partner organizations, the Town, etc. – and everywhere, on websites, banners, shopping bags, marketing materials and public signs including way-finding, directional, entry gateways, facility identification and town entry monuments. (For a PowerPoint on Promotions, Marketing and Branding, presented through the Downtown Institute, visit the MDC website at [mdf.org/SessionVResourceList.php](http://mdf.org/SessionVResourceList.php).)

Remember the importance of retail events which serve triple duty: 1) they bring shoppers to downtown, 2) they get shoppers inside stores spending money, and 3) they can galvanize merchants to your downtown mission, vision and efforts. Many of our participating Main Street Maine and Maine Downtown Network communities have created annual signature retail events that have become extremely successful. If you don't already, you should try an "Early Bird" sale as a retail promotion for the first day of hunting season; details are available through the Maine Downtown Center. These events are easy, fun, successful and are great media photo opportunities! *Please share your success stories with the MDC for posting on our website.*

Promoting "heritage retailing" is becoming increasingly effective for downtown retail districts and celebrates Maine's creative community. According to the National Main Street Center, heritage retailing is "the term for buying local and providing those purchasing opportunities to visitors and community residents alike. Buying local can be implemented on a variety of scales from large to small, and one of its many positive aspects is that any community or individual can participate. Buying goods made locally keeps revenue in your community and, if these products reflect the history or character of your community, they will play an important role in your development of a heritage retailing strategy." Use your collective media buying power to promote your unique position in the regional marketplace.

Sister Cities are another good way to connect merchants and residents to communities with some connection to Dover-Foxcroft. 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.

Take the lead to build pride in your built environment. Find opportunities to work with your schools, historical society, library and private teaching facilities (all ages) to create lesson plans centered on the history and architecture of Dover-Foxcroft. The Design and Promotions Committee might consider working together on projects such as:

- creating an architectural scavenger hunt downtown
- developing a monthly downtown building trivia contest
- printing a coloring book based on historic downtown and residential architecture

## Promotions Suggestions from MDC Advisors

### **Bill King:**

You need to create a Promotion Committee with a good mix of residents, city representatives and business people. Look at what can be done with events that get people to Union Square. I would probably start brain storming what would make Union Square a place that people would like to visit at Christmas-time. You might do a really big Christmas tree on the little unused plot in front of the flatiron building. Then decorate the Two Bank building, the Flat Iron building, and the Hardware store. Put trees or wreaths on the street lights such as they are. Have a contest for decoration on the other buildings with a nice prize, and so forth. Your Downtown group/organization needs to own some promotions while helping other groups with their promotions. The goal is: “Want to do an event? Go to the Main Street Promotions Committee for organizational help.”

Deb talked about helping a church with a yard sale. A City Wide Yard Sale should be considered like Bath’s successful “Mayfair” event. Such a promotion almost runs itself. It is a great draw for out-of-towners. Residents can have yard sales at their homes but your downtown group promotes them. Then set up Union Square with booths for non-profit organizations like the Historical Society. Get the book store, the Theatre, the hardware store and others out on the sidewalk as well. Include light music (preferably live) and food vendors and you have major fall or spring promotion!

### **Jayne Palmer:**

“Signature” events are *vital*ly important. Homecoming is well established, but hopefully is recapped each year for additions and improvements. Deb at the Chamber has worked with others to expand the Christmas celebration from a visit from Santa to other events. It appeared to be well received last year and needs on-going work. This may be the focus of a meeting with the business community to get them on board. Decorating downtown at Christmas is *critical* to making residents and others take notice. There is one other blossoming event – a Main Street church does a huge yard sale in August. This could be expanded to a “community wide” yard sale inviting all organizations and even individuals to hold sales on that day. Decorating empty store windows with children’s art work or other seasonal displays will help downtown feel alive.

I am unclear what events happen at the Theater, but that needs clarification and focus, because it is the highlight of downtown. Because there is no formal downtown organization, they do not “own” any events per se, but should position themselves to become the “go to” clearing house for any event in the community. Deb and Janet are working to bring a Farmer’s Market to the downtown but have some opposition from a local farmer – this needs to be worked through by inviting her to a group meeting and showing ways she can capitalize on a downtown market and the benefits of cross marketing. It will also be important to have the Town agree that this should take place in the downtown. You also need to start budgeting events so you clear some money to seed other events. Where do the proceeds go now?

As for retail events – events that bring people into businesses – you should expand on Christmas and consider a craft fair downtown. We suggest you work with Tracy Michaud Stutzman on this. What is the art display in the Theater about? Is it permanent or

changing? Are there artists who would like to sell art in a fair type event? Norway, Maine might be a resource as they have developed this very well in their downtown.

Since there is little retail in the downtown, this group needs to make events happen in the downtown to give people a reason to come there. The addition of “visible signs of pride” such as flowers, flags, banners, coats of paint, etc. will most definitely help. All of this, naturally, requires ample volunteers – which often bring the pride and enthusiasm into downtown that is catching! Create a buzz, do it well, have fun and feel the increased pride and interest in downtown grow!

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### **ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR DOVER-FOXCROFT**



Also known as Business Development and Recruitment, the Economic Restructuring efforts for any downtown – Dover-Foxcroft’s notwithstanding – takes time, patience, vision and heart. We all agree that the downtown should be a mixed-use pedestrian-friendly place that preserves its historical integrity, is environmentally sustainable, socially diverse, and unique/authentic. But how do we get there?

Dover-Foxcroft’s Main Street has changed over the last several decades. It is not at all like it was even as recent as 15 years ago. Now, the economic health of the downtown is dependent on your ability to regain its niche as the natural gathering place of the community. The historic buildings, unique character and cultural attractions can contribute to the area’s success in attracting “creative class” businesses. Main Street’s group should ensure that the public and private realms of Downtown combine to create a vibrant and livable mixed-use environment that builds on the unique history, landscape and culture of the place. Your commercial core needs to be viewed as a place that supports and expresses the creative and

innovative energy of its human capital, and a place that attracts and welcomes all members of the community.

It's straightforward: people need a reason to come downtown. Reinforcing downtown as the community's gathering place - the cultural, commercial, civic heart of the region is the mission of the Maine Downtown Center and we expect – yours! The Moosehead Mill complex has the potential to help establish a diverse mix of residents living right in downtown and within immediate proximity of amenities and essential services.

Properly designed surveys, of which there are many for downtowns, are vitally important tools to provide a basic understanding of your downtown in the regional marketplace. This is energy well spent, within reason and budget; however, it is important for a variety of reasons to not simply turn this over to paid consultants and students to accomplish. Your committee, perhaps bolstered with students and other volunteers, needs to roll up their sleeves and dive in – after receiving training on how to best approach people for information. This is where professional guidance can channel, champion and help you analyze your efforts. An example worth investigating is the ROMEO (Retired Old Men Eating Out) group in Bath, who enjoy conducting a variety of surveys.

Once your basic surveys are conducted and analyzed, you should consider conducting a residential survey. As you well know, many residents rarely or never come downtown. It will be very beneficial to discover what would change their lack of interest in downtown.

Business openings should be big events with ribbon cuttings, food, press releases, photo-ops, etc. Take any and every opportunity to promote good things happening in the downtown. Think about entities that are successful in pushing an agenda or message. Why are they successful? It's because they have access to a communication source and they know how to spin a message to get the reaction they want.

Most downtowns, to be vibrant and economically successful, need a mix of ground floor retail and services with offices and apartments above.

A good book to read is "Niche Strategies for Downtown Revitalization" by N. David Milder. Check in your local bookstore first or buy it through [www.downtowndevelopment.com](http://www.downtowndevelopment.com). "Niche Strategies" shows readers how downtown areas can grow and prosper by focusing their efforts on specific groups of customers or of goods and services.

Business retention and recruitment requires the work of downtown ambassadors. Package your amenities and assets and go after the businesses you lack to further strengthen downtown Dover-Foxcroft in the regional marketplace.

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.)

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.

### **Economic Restructuring Suggestions from MDC Advisors**

#### **Chris Glass**

In general there is a good spirit for business, and the Theater and the mill revitalization could work to make the town a vibrant destination, which it many ways it already is. More retail and restaurants are needed – the Bear's Den is cheerful, but it draws people away from downtown, except as very loosely conceived. The Bank Block is currently in need of some creative financing for sprinklers and exit work. The owner is enthusiastic but has limited resources.

#### **Bill King**

The buildings around Union Square have many empty store fronts and overall downtown appears to have substantial vacancies. Except for the Theater, a hardware store, book store and a couple of antique stores, the retail and restaurants have moved to other parts of town. You have the advantage of close-in walkable neighborhoods which is an excellent asset – requiring access to a food market, which conveniently exists just over the bridge. Deb and Janet are working on a Farmer's Market on the riverfront near the Chamber Office. This is a great spot. A local farmer is concerned though he need not worry. It will help his business if he takes a booth.

Most importantly, an Economic Restructuring (Business Development) Committee needs to be organized. They can begin by inventorying what space they have in Union Square, what is there, what is empty, and what they might like to have there. This is a good place to start. You need to know who the landlords are and what their plans are. Think about the services that will be needed when the mill has 36 residential units. What can you do to encourage more people living in the upper floors in Union Square?

#### **Jayne Palmer**

From first impression, the only viable businesses in downtown Dover-Foxcroft are the hardware, the Theater and book store, which are also regional destination businesses. I don't know the health of the antique stores and others. And, it was unclear to me how many upper floors are occupied.

The three restaurants are on the fringe of downtown and one clearly is in trouble - changing hands often and shortening hours to "avoid" the Theater crowd that would keep them open later in the evening!! Is there winter snowmobile traffic and how might they make use of that? I could not determine where the service businesses are located, and the Town government recently moved out, but to where?

Activities for children are becoming a focus for the community with the Theater and the YMCA; however, children travel to far away communities such as Bangor to participate in organized sports. Deb is seeking an investor who could help start an indoor sports facility.

We understand Brother's Chevrolet, who has abandoned a large in-town auto dealership, is willing to make lease arrangements for such an effort which sounds worth pursuing and will need a large group effort.

Downtown Dover-Foxcroft is indeed fortunate to be surrounded by very beautiful historic neighborhoods within walking distance – a real benefit other communities wished they had to this degree. One caution: traffic patterns must become friendlier to pedestrians. We encourage the downtown coordinators to include a residential architectural tour in your downtown promotional pieces, to tie in the whole community.

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## **FIRST AND LASTING IMPRESSIONS**

The Start Up Team Advisors were tasked with recording their “first impressions” as well as the key defining “lasting impressions”, which are shared below:



*Gateway image from D-F Downtown Revitalization Plan, WBRC Architects and Engineers, 2003*

### **FIRST IMPRESSIONS:**

#### **Jayne Palmer**

*Getting There/Wayfinding to downtown:* “We relied on Google/GPS – signage is standard (not attention getting), limited, poorly placed and does not connote a “place of interest.”

*Gateway Design –is it inviting and appealing?* “Entering the community is very confusing with five major highways converging in confusing intersections. The first question is where is the “heart” – where is the downtown of Dover-Foxcroft?”

*Sprawl:* “We did not visit outlying areas to view sprawl, but most of the downtown businesses have moved to surrounding areas to capture route traffic. Big boxes do not seem to be in close proximity – residents travel to Bangor for this type of shopping.”

*Other first impressions:* “There is an overwhelming sense of “lack of place” except for the restoration of a few historic buildings.”

#### **Bill King**

*Getting There/Wayfinding to downtown:* “Not too good!”

*Gateway Design –is it inviting and appealing?* There is a plan to make use of attractive river side view. We look forward to seeing this materialize.

*Sprawl:* “This does not appear to be a problem, although various anchor stores and restaurants have moved away from Union Square to be in an area where there is more parking. These are less accessible by foot and are visually outside the downtown core.”

*Other first impressions:* “Union Square being the old downtown core is not very inviting. There were no cars parked on the street at 10am Tuesday morning.”

**Chris Glass**

*Getting There/Wayfinding to downtown:* “Good entrance along river.”

*Gateway Design –is it inviting and appealing?* “The plan for the riverfront development (like Presque Isle’s) looks like a real improvement. When the mill is rehabbed the riverfront will be very appealing.”

*Sprawl:* “Limited due to population density.”



**LASTING IMPRESSIONS:**

**Jayne Palmer**

*Most memorable/positive aspect:* The energy, passion and willingness to work by a small group of dedicated volunteers who love their community and have shown unusual ability to organize, fundraise and show positive results with their restoration of key buildings. This, along with the restoration of the Center Theater, which is a focal point of the downtown and activities for all ages.

*Most in need:* Streetscape improvements, sidewalks, curbing, signage, flowers, flags, banner poles, color, façade improvements and reasons for people to be on the street. Involvement of the business community is critical to revitalization of the downtown.

**Bill King**

*Most memorable/positive aspect.* “Some good building stock; the Historical Society’s flatiron building, the two bank buildings, the Theater and Central Hall.

*Most in need:* “Union Square needs a face lift. It is very dead looking. It could use landscaping, flags, and banners, and more and larger flower barrels. Traffic flow and parking need some study. Vermont has removed most of their downtown stoplights with very good results.”

*Other general lasting impressions:* The revitalization of the Theater shows that the spirit is there. What a great group of volunteers! The residents are there as is the city, but where is the business community?

### **Chris Glass**

*Most memorable/positive aspect:* “The river crossing, dams, mill.”

*Most in need:* “Streetscape amenities in the main block between Monument Square and the bridge. The bridge itself offers great views of the river and its pedestrian experience could be celebrated.”

*Other general lasting impressions:* “Owners willing to improve individual buildings need assistance – the Center Theater should be the model for the Odd Fellows (bank block) and the corner block that houses the True Value – as well as the nice Second Empire block facing the river across South Street. Also the old Grist Mill complex, which we did not visit, looks great from the bridge with its weathered siding and old advertising signs and from the street with its cheerfully old-fashioned signage.”



*Your efforts to rescue and restore Central Hall are exactly in line with the underlying principles of the “Main Street” approach –a preservation-based economic development strategy*

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**We applaud Dover-Foxcroft for your leadership in becoming a  
Maine Downtown Network community.  
We look forward to our continued relationship with you.**