

THE MAINE DOWNTOWN CENTER PROSPECTUS OF PAST AND FUTURE ACTIVITY

A program of the Maine Development Foundation
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Introduction

Established in 1999, the Maine Downtown Center has expanded from an economic development program servicing four communities to one servicing 30 communities statewide in all 16 counties. This program has documented success in supporting the creation of new businesses and new jobs, rehabilitating historic buildings, planning and executing a variety of capital projects, and leveraging considerable public and private monies for those Maine communities. The following makes the case for operations support of the Maine Downtown Center to continue this work, to increase the number of participating communities, and to greatly expand the service offering to all communities.

Background

The Maine Downtown Center (MDC) was established in 1999 in statute¹ as a part of the non-profit Maine Development Foundation to “encourage downtown revitalization in the State.” Since that time, MDC has significantly increased the scope and reach of its programs across the State of Maine thanks in part to the support of a 24-member volunteer Advisory Council. Today, MDC administers several programs which directly serve 30 communities (Figure 1) and their 239,345 residents as well as a number of other community and economic development leaders from across the state. MDC delivers organized communities with a vision and bold leadership plus proven abilities to accomplish projects with ingenuity and attitude. This is achieved by building a tested organizational structure, by employing best practice economic development strategies, by building their technical and financial capacity, and by connecting them to the state and national network of downtown organizations.

Figure 1. Maine Downtown Center Communities



¹ Maine State Law 5 MRSA§3307-F

Program Offerings

MDC administers several programs and offers a variety of leadership training opportunities for economic and community leaders across Maine. The following are summaries of those efforts and their achievements.

Maine Street Maine

Main Street was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980 and is utilized in over 2,200 communities nationwide. Structured through the Main Street Four-Point Approach®, it is the nation's most successful place-based economic development program. MDC serves as the State Coordinator in Maine for the National Main Street Center, providing designation, training, coaching, annual assessment, and accreditation services to local downtown organizations that in turn leverage local assets to revitalize their historic commercial districts and build their local economies. The Four Points of the Main Street approach work together to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort, as follows:

1. **Organization** involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a Main Street revitalization program.
2. **Design** means getting Main Street into top physical shape and conveys a positive visual message about the commercial district and what it has to offer.
3. **Promotion** sells a positive image of the commercial district and encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play and invest in the Main Street district.
4. **Economic Restructuring** strengthens a community's existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base.

Maine has 10 communities with national Main Street accreditation:

- Bath
- Belfast
- Biddeford
- Brunswick
- Gardiner
- Rockland
- Saco
- Skowhegan
- Sanford
- Waterville

Each community collects investment data on a quarterly basis. Since 2001 they have generated the following aggregated return on investment:

- Total reinvestment in physical improvements/public and private sources: \$169.7 million
- Net gain in businesses: 269
- Net gain in part-time jobs: 271
- Net gain in full-time jobs: 1,020
- Buildings rehabilitated: 622
- Volunteer hours: 220,099

Together these returns reflect approximately \$25 of total direct and indirect activity for every \$1 of administration invested in MDC designated Main Street programs.

Main Street Maine organizations raise a local annual operation budget that by design is approximately 2/3 private funds and 1/3 municipal funds by share. In 2012, the 10 Main Street communities raised a combined \$1,137 million for general operations in their own downtowns (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Main Street Community Budgets 2012

Community	Total Budget
Bath	\$225,000
Biddeford	\$89,000
Gardiner	\$62,000
Rockland	\$75,000
Saco	\$67,000
Sanford	\$74,000
Skowhegan	\$70,000
Belfast	\$75,000
Waterville	\$125,000
Brunswick	\$275,000
TOTAL	\$1,137,000

Maine Downtown Network

The Maine Downtown Network was launched in 2009 as a second-tier program to Main Street Maine using the same Four Points approach but at a lighter, less rigorous pace. The program is designed for communities in the early stages of downtown revitalization as well as for those communities working toward achieving national Main Street designation. Training focuses on building an appropriate organizational and funding base for a comprehensive downtown economic revitalization program. There are 20 communities currently designated in the Downtown Network program:

- Augusta
- Bar Harbor
- Bucksport
- Calais
- Camden
- Castine
- Damariscotta
- Dover-Foxcroft
- Eastport
- Farmington
- Houlton
- Kennebunk
- Lisbon
- Machias
- Madawaska
- Millinocket
- Norway
- Presque Isle
- Stonington
- Van Buren

On average, Downtown Network communities have 12 engaged volunteers working with modest budgets ranging from \$5,000-\$50,000 to accomplish improvement projects and to execute a variety promotional programs to grow their local economies.

Green Downtowns

The Green Downtowns program was launched in 2009 with three years of grant funding totaling \$225,000 from the Environmental Funder's Network. This unique program has two primary goals:

- Strengthen the link between the natural and built environment in Maine's historic downtowns
- Strengthen Maine's downtowns by building local leadership and community capacity to support sustainable green initiatives. A statewide marketing campaign, *My Green Downtown*, is in the works.

To date, Green Downtown projects have accomplished the following:

- \$83,500 in eight 2:1 matching grants for Main Street downtown improvements
- \$35,000 in three 2:1 matching grants for trail links and trailheads to downtowns
- \$47,000 in downtown streetscape design help for 13 Downtown Network communities
- \$27,000 in preservation technical services to historic building owners
- \$25,000 in 2:1 matching grants with Project Canopy to plant street trees in five downtowns
- \$12,000 to fund a branding and public awareness campaign with branding graphics, educational posters, website and social media, and film with supplemental public service announcements
- 140 people have attended Green Downtown training workshops and trainings

Healthy Maine Streets

The result of our work over 13 years to create a solid network of organized, engaged communities with vision and leadership has led to our most recent grant award of \$1.6 million to launch the Healthy Maine Streets program. This new innovative program, funded through September 2014 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control, is designed to support health and wellness for small businesses in 20 of our downtowns statewide. Our partner is MCD Public Health, who will manage the public health training and outreach component of this two year program.

Leadership and Training Opportunities

Maine Downtown Institute

Launched in 2009, the Maine Downtown Institute provides essential training five times a year in all topics of downtown revitalization. These popular half-day sessions are presented by skilled professionals within and outside Maine. To date, 486 people have participated representing 111 different communities across Maine, plus states in New England and Canada.

Annual Downtown Conference

Hosted in a different community each year, this high-energy gathering of downtown leaders is regarded as *the* seminal networking event of the year. The 2012 annual event attracted over 300 people to downtown Farmington. Nationally renowned speakers join with Maine's top thought leaders to inform and inspire in the Four Points as well as future trends. The annual Downtown Achievement Awards celebrate success and exhibits provide resources and "how to" examples.

Annual Main Street Managers Retreat

Main Street Managers are the single greatest asset to the success of their local programs. Working as team members with their Board of Directors, these managers serve an essential role to maintain momentum within and outside their nonprofit organization. These leaders receive continual care, coaching and professional training from the MDC who organizes and funds a three-day professional development retreat at summer's end. These retreats include skills building, team teaching, advanced "drill-down" training and leadership development as well as critically needed networking time, site visits and fun competition. A summary of our Managers Retreat was featured in the national publication, *MainStreet Now*.

National Main Streets Conference

Maine has sent an increasing number of attendees to the National Conference each spring, and in a variety of capacities. In 2012, Bath Main Street received one of five Great American Main Street Awards. Bill King (an Advisory Council member) has received a National Main Street Hero Award, the MDC Senior Program Director and three Main Street Managers have presented in national conference sessions and numerous projects have received national accolades.

The Future

Livable, walkable, vibrant downtowns comprised of authentic historic buildings are attracting new investment and newly engaged people across Maine. These are the hearts of our communities with the highest value per acre, producing tax revenues for our communities and a wide variety of jobs of Maine people. These are the places tourists want to experience and where people want to meet, eat, gather and shop. The economic and social health of downtowns across Maine IS the mission of the Maine Downtown Center. Looking to the future, MDC has two broad strategic priorities:

Maintain investment and organizational structure in existing communities

Maintenance activities include:

- Plan, develop, and deliver the Annual Maine Downtown Conference and the Maine Downtown Institute annually
- Provide training services, design assistance and specialized consulting statewide
- Compile, analyze and report Main Street reinvestment statistics and conduct Annual Assessments of all Main Street communities for national accreditation
- Promote *My Green Downtown* program for environmental sustainability and healthy living

Increase community base and expand service offerings

Expansion activities include:

- Designate one new Main Street Maine community each year
- Designate up to three new Downtown Networks each year
- Manage and expand *Healthy Maine Streets* throughout the initial 20 selected downtowns
- Explore and develop new service offerings in entrepreneurial and small business development for communities
- Provide professional façade design services to downtown building owners