



A program of the MAINE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Summary Report from the Start Up Team Visit MACHIAS

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Presented to Chris Loughlin, Machias Town Manager

Maine Downtown Center team members:

Roxanne Eflin, MDC Program Director

Ruta Dzenis, MDC Advisor, State Planning Office

Shannon Haines, MDC Advisor/Executive Director, Waterville Main Street/

Bill King, MDC Senior Advisor/Bath Main Street volunteer, small business owner

Ken Young, MDC Advisor/Director, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments/

**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 Four-Point 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.
- **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[®] 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 August 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 introductory breakfast gathering followed by an orientation meeting and *thorough* walking tour taking the group into key businesses and buildings. We concluded our tour at the eastern gateway along the river then summarized briefly over lunch, sharing observations and discussing next steps as a Maine Downtown Network community. Our intent with this report is to share 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 MACHIAS

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 in large part by Town Manager, Chris Loughlin.

As you already know, but cannot be stated too often, your leadership as advocates for downtown is vitally important to help solidify support from not just the business community, but municipal staff, elected officials and residents. All of these individuals and groups 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!”

It is important for other civic, faith and education 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 committees organized along the Four Point Approach in order to keep the movement pulsing forward and prevent individual burn-out. As with many of our participating communities, often the Committee Chair, Board President or paid Executive Director 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 and staff. 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 Machias is important to find leadership, new volunteers and supporters. The list should include the officers and board members, downtown projects and goals. Then develop a communications strategy to connect with them and *ask* for their participation. So often, people simply are not asked.

We 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, architecture and design is strongly recommended.

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, expect to be launched this fall. This is the ideal opportunity to make sure your plan is current and supportive of your mission and vision.

Additional Organization Activities to Pursue

Web presence is crucial: it must be easily found via search engines, easy to navigate and comprehensive. Put up a dedicated page on your Town’s website and launch a Facebook page! Ask for student assistance, if necessary. We ask that you state you are a Maine Downtown Network Community and link the MDC’s website to yours. Please also utilize our Maine Downtown Center logo to indicate our partnership.

Public relations about your revitalization efforts should be constant – in the press, on public access television and in educational presentations by your members. A downtown brand logo and slogan statement needs to be developed, based on your five-sense vision statement, and should be widely used by merchants and businesses throughout your downtown to continually reinforce the message and image. If you haven’t done so, you should 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.

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 necessary, partner with a nonprofit organization that can assist as a pass-through funding agent while you are getting organized. This is the time to inventory all your assets and promote these as a fundraising marketing 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.

We urge you to develop a positive presence at Town Council meetings and invite one of them to serve on your Board or a committee, 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. Local cable access channel is an excellent medium to inform the region’s citizens of your downtown revitalization efforts.

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 Machias to the prominence it rightly deserves.



Organization is about developing partnerships: UMaine, Machias Savings and the Burnham Tavern DAR coordinators are three strong potential partners for your downtown efforts.

MDC Advisors comments on Organization – What We Heard

“Revitalization efforts came and went. Nothing happens... just talk... no action.”

Ruta Dzenis:

- There is a folksy humor about life in Machias – Lake Woebegone like – which is a significant asset.
- Jermar Inman needs encouragement to keep up reporting in the Machias Valley News Observer
- Everyone’s not to the table yet. The challenge is how to get them there relies on a person-by-person, peer-to-peer approach. Finding key leaders may not necessarily be those you expect. Partners are key. Tap into the University and the county court system to find additional leaders. Downtown organization is like a spider’s web: it’s all inclusive and everyone is focused on a centered vision downtown. You could easily begin to build enthusiasm by starting with simple “I love Machias”, “Machias Matters”, “Shop Machias” buttons and window cling stickers. At lunchtime it we brainstormed about a simple logo for the Machias Revitalization at work -- an outline with the river or the falls. You could focus all of this around an idea of caring – “quilt-making.”
- We heard there is a general inability to support one another and you need passionate leadership (“...seems everyone is turning inward”) Downtown organization efforts must inspire and encourage people to work together with optimism. You need to motivate each other that something quite powerful and transformative can be done and that you can be a united community. Jermar Inman and Gail Peters made a strong impression in terms of capacity of engaging people and setting direction.
- Make your meeting agendas very clear, transparent and well-promoted in advance. This is especially critical for newcomers who bring fresh, passionate intelligent energy to the community and want to get involved but feel uncomfortable and uninformed.
- Participation from the business community is a top concern. Consider establishing a business barometer program with two types of meetings: one with businesses only (potentially to share monthly figures) and a second which includes the Town Manager and *all* selectmen. The business community wants to know that the Town officials are listening. Reiterate the importance of the agenda (what are your issues this month?), keep it to one hour and limit it to covering four items.
- Securing funding ample enough to accomplish your mission and annual work plans is an ongoing task. This should begin with Machias Savings Bank, who has been supportive of the local historical society efforts in past. As downtown’s most prominent private business and land holder, they have the most at stake at helping downtown Machias thrive. Their annual funding should include a significant contribution to the downtown organizing effort. Tap into all the other banks, savings institutes and credit unions, including Bar Harbor Bank & Trust.

Shannon Haines, MDC Advisor/ Executive Director, Waterville Main Street

- There is FANTASTIC energy in Machias from a core group of passionate, outstanding volunteers. It is crucial that this group be expanded to include local business owners and a contact from the University.

- The Town needs to develop a sense of identity and a brand. Comments like “Machias is the place that isn’t” and “There’s no ‘there’ there” clearly indicate the need for a community visioning session.
- Start by developing a work plan for the next year, and start conservatively. Prioritize goals and pick three or four top ideas – perhaps one in each of the Four Points (Design: hold a “Spruce up the Park” day; Promotion: create a List of Top 10 Things Visitors Should Know About Machias; E.R.: work with the hardware store to strengthen their business and explore the lower floor space; Organization: develop an e-newsletter to communicate with the community). Assign responsibilities and recruit new volunteers based on the goals.
- The Downtown Revitalization Committee needs a more formal structure and volunteer leadership. Someone needs to step up and co-chair the Committee with Chris.
- The Committee also needs to cultivate a list (ideally an email list) of interested parties to send updates, solicitations and invitations. Utilize other lists including the DAR and Chamber, etc.
- Investigate possibilities of creating a web site; possibly work with the Chamber.

Bill King, MDC Senior Advisor

- The Downtown Revitalization Committee appears to be a Town committee with the Town Manager as its Chair. The Revitalization Committee needs to work toward the four committee approach in small incremental steps. Eventually, the group will probably have a goal of becoming an independent Main Street organization, but that is a long way off. There are many non-profit organizations in Machias that need to coalesce around a central vision and mission for their downtown.
- The group’s leadership consists of some strong gals who need to be encouraged to step forward as co-chairs. There are no men in evidence; perhaps they will be found in the small ranks of merchants. They are residents, though generally newer to the community. The life-long residents were not evident during our visit. This Revitalization Committee has been around for a long time. We heard that the older residents used to be involved but for lack of accomplishments they left and may be hard to get back.
- The regional Chamber of Commerce is in the loop but represents a very large area with very limited staffing and resources. They also appear to handle most of the PR for Machias.
- Sustainable and ample funding is always an issue. The Town is the principle funder at present but I would think the eager people from away could easily be encouraged to help with funding.

Ken Young, MDC Advisor/Executive Director, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments

- There appeared to be no formal organizational structure and leadership appeared skimpy; however, there is tremendous energy among those with whom we met. I really liked the many voices. At virtually every step of the tour there was conversation among the participants about what they could do next, who they could

- involve, etc. The enthusiasm is high, as demonstrated at the Burnham Tavern, a National Historic Landmark.
- Broader participation by residents is needed but be prepared to wait. Perhaps most significantly where is UMM - the faculty, staff and students? In Waterville the colleges lead. UMF in Farmington is involved there, and UMA in Augusta just took over a major downtown building and has moved their Art and Architecture Departments downtown. Where are the residents and business community?
 - I liked that they identified a list of issues. Lots of issues = lots of opportunities to make small, inexpensive changes adding up to bigger impressions and eventual larger projects as confidence in the downtown cadre grows. Machias has the potential to be a possible poster child for creeping instrumentalism!
 - Many good ideas around downtown PR and branding were shared during our visit. I envision ample and sustainable funding being a substantial hurdle.
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DESIGN OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR MACHIAS



*A number of significant architectural gems exist in Machias, including residential.
The Burnham Tavern is one of 41 National Historic Landmarks in Maine.*

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 economic development assets. Your good historic building stock is relatively intact, with the exception of a few storefronts that have been significantly modified over time. While many people do, it is important for the entire community to recognize the quality of these irreplaceable buildings, their character-defining value, and their potential to leverage the benefits of incentives such as the federal and state historic tax credits to restore and preserve them well into the future. As we and many others regularly state: historic preservation is a proven economic development tool and will significantly raise the level of revitalization here to the status it deserves.

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 always 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 and compare all the plans, design guidelines and ordinances affecting downtown to ensure compatibility with your vision for the future.

We encourage you to invest the time to inventory 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 local 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/Planning Board in making façade design decisions. Your leadership in these efforts is imperative.



These two buildings serve as the highly visible gateway to historic downtown Machias. Utility undergrounding and building design improvements would greatly enhance the welcome to downtown.

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 the storefront facing the street and 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. The Design Committee and the Economic Restructuring Committee need to actively advocate for a “downtown first!” approach when the community is considering relocating public and civic institutions.

Most often, changes over time detract from the original design integrity – we see many examples of this erosion in downtowns across Maine, including Machias. 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.

You will discover, once you actively begin working the Main Street Four-Point Approach, that downtown Machias will become more appealing to investors. *Be ready.* Soon, you should consider strengthening your local regulations regarding historic preservation with the intent of accommodating growth while preserving the unique historic qualities of downtown Machias. Include minimum maintenance provisions for significant historic resources. 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. Demolition should always be the absolute last resort as it results in gutting the heart of your community of its heritage and distinctive character. This, in turn, may jeopardize your strong position in the regional marketplace as a community with heart and heritage. Historic buildings need proper care and rehabilitation to correct deferred maintenance and/or unsympathetic changes that have occurred over time. Your advocacy and education efforts are essential here.

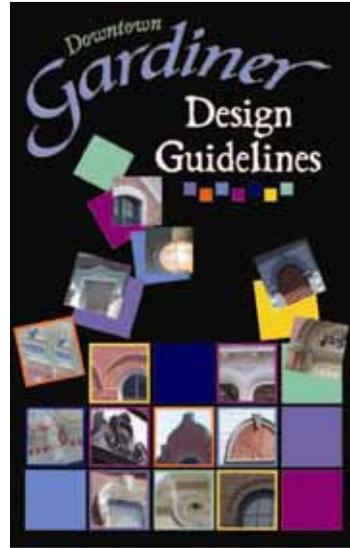


*Historic buildings are the foundation of “Quality of Place” - a statewide economic imperative.
Libraries are increasingly important as the community gathering place.*

It is more important than ever for downtown Machias to pay attention to the role of design in attracting redevelopment. Raising your standards to a higher level to reflect the quality and diversity of your historic architecture will help attract redevelopment. In order to achieve this, effective design guidelines, review and enforcement are critical and will increase property values, pride and activity on many levels. The failure to do this is actually holding back the ability of the downtown district to thrive to its full potential.

Traffic cones, signs, hand-held flags and decorative flower barrels could be used at key crossings to bring attention to pedestrians, and help slow traffic and help soften the





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

If you have not done so already, we encourage you to develop simple design guidelines for downtown buildings. 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.

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.

Design is not about buildings alone. This component of the Four Points addresses everything visible – plantings, street furniture, bike racks, banners and flags, public art, trash and recycling receptacles, lighting, storefront windows – even in-store merchandising. Consider creating a Downtown Garden Club whose task is to plant and maintain flowers and green spaces with an eye toward the aesthetic. A cohesive and quality design appearance – with individual creativity - is what you are aiming for. This will help project a solid sense of business, caring and broad downtown cooperation

Signage is always an essential aspect of good design. Machias has a few good, appealing examples of good signage, yet you have plenty of room for improvement here. If a sign ordinance does not exist, get busy researching others around Maine and craft an ordinance that works for you – and the local enforcer. If you do have a sign ordinance in legislation, you should evaluate it *and* your enforcement policies to see if both are still working for you.



The Bad Little Falls Park and Overlook is a *wonderful* scenic and historic asset at the gateway to downtown.



We recommend that the Falls sign be repositioned perpendicular to Route 1 so drivers can see it, and that public parking is more clearly delineated. There is likely a perception that traffic moves through downtown on Route 1 faster than it should at time, making it for pedestrians to safely cross the street, which is especially true at the bridge.

Our Start Up Visit Team did not review any current parking studies during our time there, though we heard that parking is considered by many to be “a problem.” This often stems from employees parking in the front of businesses, an issue that the employer can and should control and model good parking behavior. A comprehensive parking study is the obvious first step, to analyze all parking opportunities and flex-time parking alternatives. Finally, as in all “Main Street” corridors, avoid having auto related uses including drive-through windows and curb cuts that disrupt the feeling, perception and reality of a pedestrian-friendly corridor.



Suggestion: vacant windows are ideal opportunities for art displays and/or cross-marketing other businesses and events and/or signs that say “This Space Isn’t Vacant – It’s Full of Opportunity!”



*Flowers and the dog watering dish are a nice touch at this business entrance!
Rehabilitation of the historic train station at the north gateway waits funding and an action plan.*

Design comments and suggestions from MDC Start Up Team members:

Ruta Dzenis, MDC Advisor/State Planning Office

- Wayfinding to downtown is needed beginning by adding directions from the Sunrise Trail kiosk.
- There is great potential at the southern gateway to downtown at Bad Little Falls Bridge. A nice sketch-up was presented in the Machias Downtown and Riverfront Plan.
- The Machias Master Plan (2006) recommends zoning for the Town, which should help address the impacts of sprawl on either side of downtown.

Shannon Haines, MDC Advisor/Executive Director, Waterville Main Street

- Some very low cost efforts could go a long way – basic clean-up efforts, a few more plantings here and there, washing windows in empty storefronts.
- Is there an opportunity to work with the Beehive Collective to create interesting public art and/or to install displays in empty storefronts?
- There is also a serious need for some improvements that will be costly – sidewalk repair, way-finding signage (which should incorporate the new brand), and gateway signage.
- The southern gateway to Downtown is not clearly marked and would benefit from some landscaping and signage.
- The Bad Little Falls overlook park is a tremendous asset and should be embraced as such. One easy way to raise awareness of the park is to rotate the sign 90 degrees so that it is perpendicular to the road. Signage should also be implemented to indicate that there is free municipal parking just over the bridge.
- The blue building that houses the natural foods store should be examined from the perspective that its back wall is actually the first thing that visitors see when they arrive from the south. The sign is not very effective because there is so much text. Consider some new plantings to enhance the gateway.

Bill King, MDC Senior Advisor

- Downtown has lots of empty stores though it appears most of the evolving storefront alterations are retrievable. One side of Main Street has been taken over by banks and their parking lots which has done serious damage to the draw of downtown. There are some wonderful buildings that are being well cared for in the residential area. The Congregational church with its new elevator addition is grand which tells me that there is great potential in Machias.
- Sidewalks are nice as are the street lamps but overall the streetscape is shoddy. Flower boxes or barrels should be considered. Banners and flags would help to show activity downtown. Maybe there is room for murals depicting a historic scene. Signage needs a great deal of improving. A simple relocation of the Bad Little Falls sign perpendicular to Route 1 would call attention to your #1 natural asset.
- At present there is more than enough parking everywhere.

Ken Young, MDC Advisor/ Director, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments

- Wayfinding to downtown required you follow your nose, although one might think at first that the UMM was where the downtown district should begin. The gap in between is significant enough – though relatively small enough – that the campus and the bridge entrance to downtown could certainly be better integrated. The long sterile bridge approach acts as a visual and likely physical barrier.
- The immediate downtown gateway design presents itself as the backs of two historically significant buildings, but WOW - a bit disconcerting. Why are the backs of those building what I see first when I might be happier appreciating the river and the falls first? Perhaps a sympathetic design treatment to the back of these buildings would enhance their historic character while serving as a welcoming, inviting draw over the bridge and into historic downtown Machias. Improving the visual impact of their backsides should be a priority.
- Where there is historic character, it is authentic. No historic protection or design guidelines are apparent.
- Some storefronts had typical false fronts; many are seemingly retrievable.
- Signage is not a strong feature, either for business or way-finding.
- Parking is hit or miss but nice access from river side. I think some of my impressions reflect the traffic detour on the main drag during our visit. I'd have to see "usual" traffic to be more helpful.



Gateway design sets an immediate tone about your sense of place.

PROMOTIONS OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR MACHIAS

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 Machias. Our goal is to help you increase the "feet on the street!"



"Signature" events are *vital*ly important. The Maine Wild Blueberry Festival is tremendous! More events, seasonally at a minimum, will help continue the buzz. Promotions require a high level of volunteer commitment, leadership and energy to be effective; however, we encourage you to start small. Though the Down East Music Fest barely broke even, promotions like this accomplish a variety of goals.

Remember, also, the importance of retail events. These 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. We did not see a Downtown Map & Guide or business directory, though perhaps one exists. 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.

Recall the earlier mention about downtown branding. The promotional component of the Four Points is where we encourage you to develop and share your branding image and urge everyone to use this widely – 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, visit the MDC website at mdf.org/SessionVResourceList.php.)

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

Take the lead through events 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 substantial history and significant historic architecture of Machias. 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

Remember: Promotions need to attract people; good design will hold them. Work with the Design Committee to ensure that the surroundings – the sense of place, the quality of place – will bring them back again, perhaps even longer.

Other Promotions Observations from the MDC Start Up Team Advisors:

Shannon Haines, MDC Advisor/Executive Director, Waterville Main Street

- Create a list of the Top 10 Places Visitors Must See.
- Branding, branding, branding!
- Signature events are Blueberry Festival in August and Margareta Festival in June. Efforts should be made to market these events statewide. Make sure they are listed on the Maine Office of Tourism website! Find ways to work with Downtown businesses to get them involved in the events and make those cash registers ring.

Bill King, MDC Senior Advisor

- The Blueberry Festival on the weekend of August 19th put on by the Center Street Congregational Church is BIG. This is a hugely popular event. There are other events put on by other groups like the DAR and the Historical Society on Sept 21st. There appear to be no retail events. Proceeds for existing events appear to go to sustaining the participating non-profits.
- There is lots of potential for involving volunteers.
- It would be very beneficial and helpful to have a Main Street Promotions Committee centralize all downtown promotional events.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

FOR MACHIAS

Also known as Business Development and Recruitment, the Economic Restructuring efforts for any downtown – Machias’ 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?



The Whole Life Natural Market and the Phish Net are superb destination businesses

Strengthening your downtown’s position in the marketplace is a never-ending challenge. 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 historic buildings, unique character and cultural attractions contribute to the area’s success in attracting “creative class” businesses. Your committee in partnership with the Town needs to ensure that the public and private sectors of downtown continue to create a vibrant and livable mixed-use environment that builds on your sense of 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. “Quality of Place” is featured in the recently published *Making Maine Work* report as one of the top investment imperatives in our state. And the MDC’s goal for downtowns across Maine, Machias included, is to be ahead of the curve in understanding and supporting downtown’s role as the signature economic engine in Quality of Place.

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. A thorough understanding of every historic building (over 50 years old) is necessary to effectively market preservation-based incentive tools to potential developers. For more information on this, visit the MDC online Resource Library (www.mdf.org) on this, contact Mike Johnson at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (287-2132) or Greg Paxton at Maine Preservation (775-3652.)

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 Machias in the regional marketplace. A good book to read and share is "Niche Strategies for Downtown Revitalization" by N. David Milder. Check first in your local bookstore or buy it through 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.

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 ER committee, perhaps bolstered with students and other volunteers, needs to roll up its 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. Visit our website site to access links and recent presentations in PowerPoint of innovative market analysis for downtowns today. These are very powerful tools.

If you have already conducted some market analysis, consider reviewing the results of that analysis and convene a meeting of as many of the business owners on the street as will participate (along with the owners/leasing agents of the vacant space). Test with them the recommendations coming out of the existing data. Is it valid? Will these types of businesses support or deter from the existing business mix? What types of businesses are missing from the list? Use this discussion to identify the two or three types of business that would best enhance what is currently present. Within each of the types explore (1) if there is anyone in town who might develop such a business; (2) if there are similar businesses elsewhere in Maine or New England who might consider an additional location.

If you move to option (2) above, be very specific. Name the business. Research the business: owner's name(s), size of store, population served, how long in business, etc. Using what you know about these businesses, and data about Machias demographics, traffic patterns, and the available space, compile an information package to leave with the

prospective business owner(s). Call ahead and set up a time to meet. Send someone who represents the assets of Machias well and who understands why this would be a good fit. Talk through the materials and leave copies with them. Send a thank you letter being sure to include contact information. Follow up in a couple of days. Follow up in a week. Send a summary of the key advantages to a Machias location. Follow up in two weeks. Add them (with permission) to your database for e-news that goes out. Follow up every two-three weeks for as long as there is space available and they haven't told you to "go away". If the space rents, let them know and tell them that you hope there will be another opportunity, because you truly believe they would be such a good fit.

To address this issue, and enhance engagement of more business owners in the downtown, efforts should be made to strengthen the relationship between businesses, promoting an atmosphere of teamwork and cooperative spirit. You should hold regular meetings of all downtown businesses. Every meeting should have an agenda and the topic should be announced well in advance (as well as posted on your website and Facebook page). Some meetings might be a combination of presentation and roundtable discussion, but every meeting should include sufficient time for a roundtable to encourage dialog among the businesses. Agenda topics can be decided by the group, but might include topics such as:

- Effective window displays
- Whether and how to utilize "social media" such as Facebook or Twitter
- Working with the Town to improve parking, street cleaning or other issues of concern
- Sources of financing
- Hours of operation
- Upcoming events and promotions

By distributing and collecting an evaluation of every meeting, a space can be provided on the evaluation form asking for suggestions for future meeting topics. This would allow a business owner to ask for a sensitive topic to be addressed without having to reveal that the issue is of unique concern to them.

Business openings and expansions should be big events with ribbon cuttings, food, press releases, photo-ops, etc. Take any and every opportunity to promote good things happening downtown! Think about entities that are successful in pushing an agenda or message. They are successful because they have access to a communication source and they know how to craft a public relations message (or spin) to help obtain the reaction they want. To achieve the most sizzle, the ER and Organization committee will want to join forces.

Most downtowns, to be vibrant and economically successful, need a mix of ground floor retail and services with offices and apartments above. You had a few vacancies at the storefront level. We were less clear whether your upper floors are occupied, and how many people actually live right downtown. The retail/restaurant/office/arts/civic mix needs strengthening. Think clustering: Keep your eyes open to complimentary businesses and their locations.

Utilize your new connections to the Maine Downtown Center's resources (staff, Advisory Council, Senior Advisors, website, annual conference, Downtown Institute and the 21 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.

Other ER Observations from MDC Start Up Visit team members:

Ruta Dzenis, MDC Advisor/State Planning Office

- The University of Maine at Machias is an enormous untapped resource for your downtown. They have a community service requirement which could potentially tap into 750-800 non-traditional students. This may be why downtown Machias there isn't the college town kind of feel to it – bookstores, outfitters, coffee shops, etc. The University also has a food service requirement that does not allow students to go off campus to eat. Make arrangements to provide students with food vouchers that can be used downtown, like some other campuses. Your ER committee may wish to survey students on what they need and want from a downtown Machias experience – then work with students to come up with events that they wish to see. A good example is Waterville Main Street, who provides tours of downtown for freshman each year to make them feel welcome and comfortable.

Shannon Haines, MDC Advisor/Executive Director, Waterville Main Street

- The Committee should undertake a “Business Barometer” type gathering to bring business owners into the fold and learn about their issues, get their input, etc.
- Work with the University to survey consumers about downtown (e.g., what kinds of products are missing, what do they feel are the strongest assets, what kinds of events are they interested in attending?) Consider a survey that targets university staff, faculty and students.
- Create a business directory online and in print. Make people aware of the products that are available in town.

Bill King, MDC Senior Advisor

- In my opinion, the downtown was hurt badly by banks taking over the retail space, tearing it down and replacing with parking lots and unfriendly buildings that for the most part should not have been put on Main Street.
- Machias is fairly walkable. There is not much for downtown residential space.
- Destination businesses/restaurants? There are two destination restaurants but they are on the north edge of town. These restaurants are drawing large numbers of people which says that there is a market for the right stores in downtown. There is a well-loved hardware store in the middle of town which people like but its product line is slipping to cookware and exotic local packaged food stuffs. This store needs help in display and marketing and probably in product mix.
- There are farmers and crafts people on the dike almost every day, though the farmers market itself does not appear well organized, marketed or cross promoted downtown.
- Most importantly, the merchants must be organized so they have a forum to talk about their problems and develop a group approach to promoting business in downtown Machias. I think the Town Manager is the best person to get them

together first, perhaps with cooperation from the Chamber director. Someone like Dave Whitney who runs the tool rental store should/could serve as representative of the merchants on the Revitalization Committee board as well as within one or more of the four subcommittees.

- Most of the services have moved to either side of downtown. There is a small mall on the left as you enter from the south with Rite-Aid, McDonald's and Family Dollar. Rite-Aid built a larger building next to their first building which now sits empty and is for sale.

Ken Young, MDC Advisor/ Director, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments

- There were a number of vacancies at storefront level and upper floors. There are very limited choices and variety of retail. The hardware store, natural foods store and the banks appear to be the only destination businesses, downtown.
- I really liked the residential neighborhoods, which were walkable.



We applaud the Town of Machias and the downtown community for your leadership in becoming a Maine Downtown Network community. We look forward to our continued relationship with you.